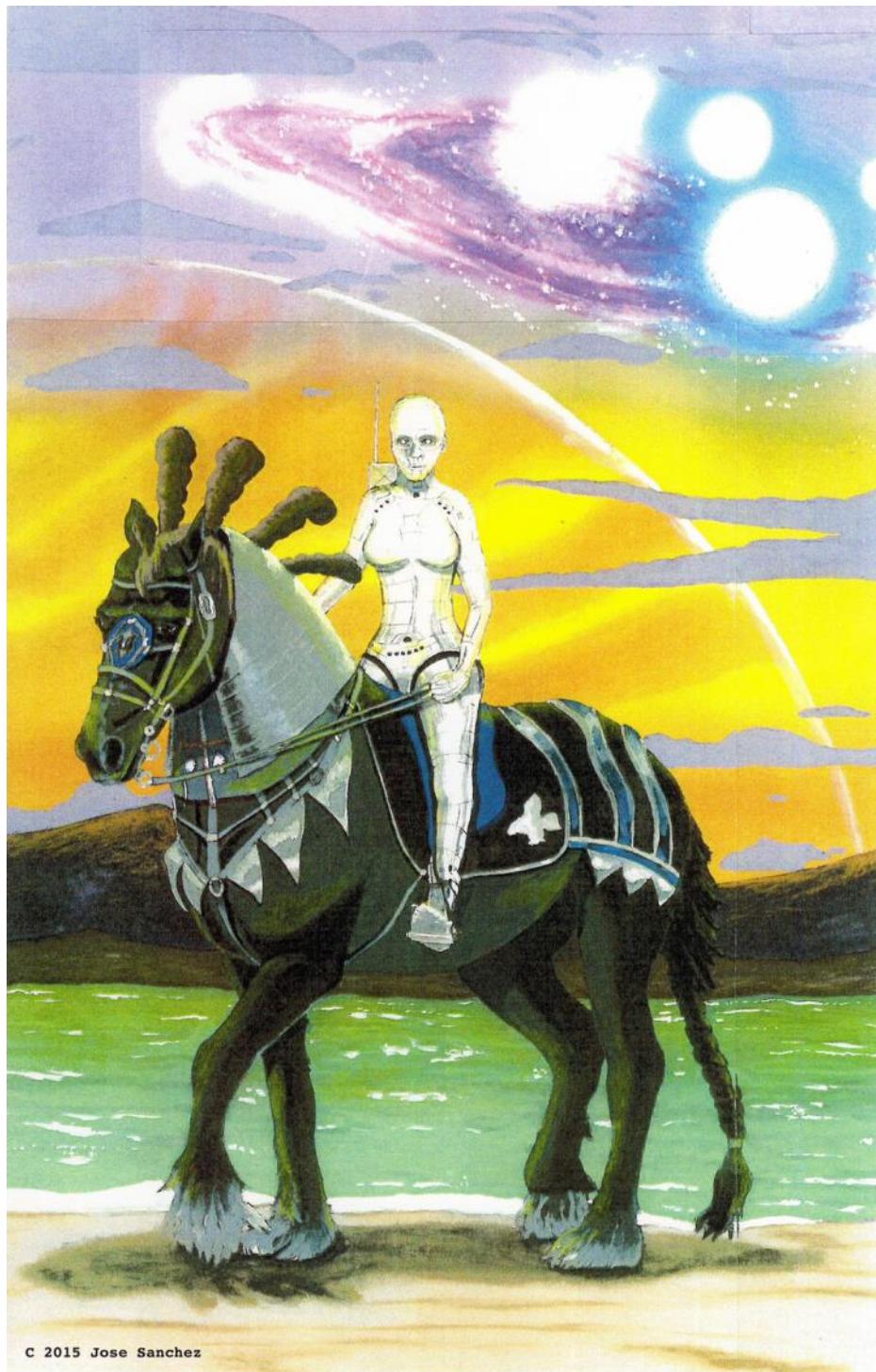


Tightbeam 325

Special Tamara Wilhite Memorial Issue



C 2015 Jose Sanchez

Robot Rider by Jose Sanchez
October 2021

Tightbeam 325

October 2021

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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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To join or renew, use the membership form at <http://n3f.org/join/membership-form/> to provide your name and whichever address you use to receive zines. Memberships with The National Fantasy Fan (TNFF) via paper mail are \$18; memberships with TNFF via email are \$6. Zines other than TNFF are email only. Additional memberships at the address of a current dues-paying member are \$4. **Public memberships are free.** Send payments to Kevin Trainor, PO Box 143, Tonopah NV 89049 . Pay online at N3F.org. PayPal contact is treasurer@n3f.org.

Editorial Note

Regular contributor Tamara Wilhite passed away unexpectedly. We honor her memory.

Editor Jon Swartz has asked that we shorten Tightbeam. This change has now been made. To finish clarifying the difference between our zines, all book reviews will now appear in The N3F Review of Books Incorporating Prose Bono.

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Special Tamara Wilhite Issue

With great sadness we note the passing of long-time contributor Tamara Wilhite, whose sparkling interviews brightened every issue of this magazine. As an eternal memorial, we feature in this issue her final interview, with Marissa Meyer, as well as interviews with famous Singaporean SF writer Cheah Kit “Benjamin” Sun and alternate history author Stanley Wheeler.

Tamara Wilhite’s Final Interview An Interview with Marissa Meyer

Marissa Meyer is the best-selling author of “The Lunar Chronicles”, the Instant Karma series, and the Renegades series. Her new YA fantasy “Gilded” goes on sale November 2, 2021. And I had the honor of opportunity to interview her for the National Fantasy Fan Federation.

Tamara Wilhite: I must admit that my daughter has a book shelf full of your books, namely, the Lunar Chronicles series. She loves them. When you started writing that series, who was your target demographic?

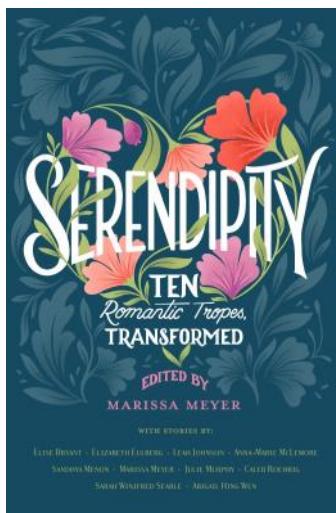
Marissa Meyer: On a practical level, I knew that the series would fall into the young adult genre, so I suppose I was writing mostly for teenagers, although I don’t know how conscience I was about that. With all my books, I consider myself to be the first reader, and I’m aiming to write books that excite me, stories that I want to spend the next year or years of my life exploring. I’ve been thrilled to meet so many readers of the years that don’t fit what we think of as the typical “young adult” reader—from nine-year-old boys to 90-year-old women and everything in between. So I guess I was mostly just writing for readers like me, who love science fiction and fairy tales and wanted to get swept away on an epic adventure for a little while.

Tamara Wilhite: What led you to write these updated versions of classic fairytales like “Cinder”/Cinderella?

Marissa Meyer: I’ve loved fairy tales and fairy tale retellings since I was a kid, and when I was sixteen or so I started playing with the idea of wanting to write my own novels. A lot of my earliest ideas were fairy tale-inspired, but I also remember looking at the market of books and seeing just how many retellings already existed for popular stories like “Cinderella.” I remember

consciously telling myself that I would probably never write a Cinderella retelling, because I didn’t think I would be able to come up with a take on it that was unique enough to stand out from the crowd. Fast forward a decade later, and one night I had a dream about Cinderella, only instead of losing a glass slipper, her whole foot fell off. I woke up thinking that she was a cyborg with a mechanical leg, and after that the story started to grow really fast in my imagination. I remember thinking—this is it. This is my unique spin on the tale. I really, really want to write this.

Tamara Wilhite: Do you think that your books maintain or change the “moral of the story”? And what lessons do you think readers should gain from them?



Marissa Meyer: Yes, and no. A lot of the same themes that we see in fairy tales come across in my books as well. Good conquers evil, hard work and perseverance are rewarded, etc. But there are also themes that emerge out of real-world concerns that interest me. I don't go into a book thinking, "I'm going to shine a light on intolerance and prejudice," or, "I hope readers will come away from this encouraged to stand up for what they believe in." But those themes end up cropping up naturally from the stories that I'm driven to tell, and I think they often end up standing out more than the typical themes we get from the fairy tales themselves.

Tamara Wilhite: Which of your books or series did you most enjoy writing?

Marissa Meyer: Probably Instant Karma. It was one of those gifts of a book that felt like it practically wrote itself. Which isn't to say that it didn't have some challenges, but compared to my other novels, it just came together much easier. Prudence's voice was really strong from the beginning and I had so much fun coming up with the hate-to-love romance and also including a bit of environmentalism work, which really resonates with me. Plus, it's my only contemporary so far, so there wasn't any intense world-building, which was a nice change of pace!

Tamara Wilhite: You've written at least fifteen books, and you're still going. Can you give a little sneak peek into your upcoming novel "Gilded"?

Marissa Meyer: Gilded is a return to retellings for me, in which I'm tackling the story of Rumplestiltskin. It's more of a typical fairy tale retelling than The Lunar Chronicles, in that it is set in a fantasy world, with magic and mythical creatures, but I've also taken a lot of liberties with the story. In it, the miller's daughter has been cursed by the god of lies, which has had the effect of turning her into something of a talented storyteller. This gets her in trouble when she crosses paths with the Erlking, who leads the Wild Hunt, and she tells him that she can spin straw into gold. Soon after, she is whisked away to the Erlking's haunted castle and ordered to do just that—which she of course can't do. However, a mischievous (and handsome) poltergeist shows up to help her... for a price.

Tamara Wilhite: What else are you working on?



Marissa Meyer: I currently have lots of irons in the fire! Coming soonest is Serendipity, a collection of romantic short stories I had the pleasure of editing, out this January, followed by the sequel and finale to Gilded next fall. I'm also working on a very special gift to readers in celebration of Cinder's ten-year-anniversary in 2022, as well as a companion novel to Instant Karma.

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

Marissa Meyer: In addition to writing, I also host a podcast called The Happy Writer, in which every week I interview a fellow author to talk craft, publishing, and how we can maintain our sense of joy in this strange career we've chosen. I would love for readers and writers alike to check it out!

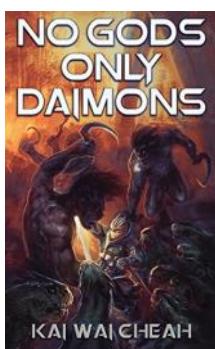
Tamara Wilhite: Thank you for speaking with me.

Marissa Meyer: Thank you for having me!

An Interview with Cheah Kit Sun by Tamara Wilhite

Cheah Kit Sun or “Benjamin” is Singapore’s first Hugo and Dragon Award nominated author. His book “No Gods, Only Daimons” was nominated for the Dragon Awards in 2017. His short story “Flashpoint: Titan” in “There Will Be War: Volume X” was a 2016 Hugo Award nominee. And I had the opportunity to talk to him.

Tamara Wilhite: You’re the first Hugo winner I’ve spoken with, and you’re the first person I know of who has won a Dragon award as well as a Hugo. How would you compare the two?



Cheah Kit Sun: I have not won those awards. I was only nominated for them. The Dragon Awards is open to anyone. Any fan can vote, any author or creator with an eligible work can participate. With no barriers to entry, it reflects the fandom’s choice of the year. 2020 saw over 8000 ballots.

The Hugo Awards is a dumpster fire. Once it was the most prestigious award in science fiction and fantasy. Then it became dominated by authors better known for their politics and messaging than the strength of their prose. The Sad and Rabid Puppies campaigns demonstrated that the Hugo Award participants would rather burn down the award than grant it to anyone not on the Left. It’s no wonder that participation has been steadily dropping over the years, with just 1249 ballots in 2020. The Hugo Awards is what happens when social justice warriors converge on an award.

Tamara Wilhite: The last time we spoke, you had just started your cyberpunk dystopian series “Singularity Sunrise” with the release of “Edenet”. You’re now up to five books. Can you tell readers what that is about?

Cheah Kit Sun: Singularity Sunrise places humanity at the brink of the Technological Singularity: a point in time at which technological growth leads to unfathomable changes in human civilization. The trigger is the creation of a super-intelligent Artificial General Intelligence, an AI that can learn and understand anything a human can—but better and faster. The AGI’s existence threatens to obsolete humanity.

A Polish megacorporation has developed the world’s first AGI. And China has abducted a key scientist responsible for its creation. This sparks a shadow conflict spanning Europe, North America, Africa and Asia, as governments and corporations struggle to decide the future of humanity. It is also a personal story between James Morgan, a psychic mercenary, and the AGI. In a world of full-body cyborgs and augmentations, Morgan has rejected almost all cybernetics, believing that implants would diminish his powers. Throughout the series, he must teach the AGI what it means to be human—and keep it from crossing the line.

Tamara Wilhite: You mentioned in a social media post that you’d finished your stint in the Singapore military. What was that like?

Cheah Kit Sun: In a word: boring. All eligible Singaporean males must serve 2 years of full-time national service. Having passed the physical fitness tests in junior college, I could shave off 2 months from that period. I was assigned to the 46th Battalion, Singapore Armoured Regiment. My time as a conscript was absolutely unremarkable. I just did all the menial and tedious

work nobody else wanted or could do. However, I had the honour of serving alongside some of the finest soldiers and commanders in the Army. Shortly after I completed my full-time National Service, 46 SAR was disbanded. After full-time National Service, men must continue to serve Operationally Ready National Service. This lasts for about 10 years, comprising of annual reservist training and mobilization periods. Once again I did pretty much everything what I did back as a full-time conscript, only much less of it. Now that I've completed my ORNS period, I just need to hold on to my gear until I reach the statutory age, at which point I am released from all reservist obligations.

Tamara Wilhite: Did that influence your short story collection "Babylon Blues"? That's described as a cyberpunk military horror collection.

Cheah Kit Sun: Not at all. My military experience was nowhere near as exciting as the events of Babylon Blues. Babylon Blues is what happens when you cross the FBI, HRT and Brazilian BOPE, place them in a high-tech world filled with demons and monsters, and charge them with protecting what few innocents are left. Babylon Blues was conceived well after I completed my full-time National Service period. There are some Singaporean influences if you know what to look for, but no influences specific to military service.

Tamara Wilhite: What prompted you to write "Sane in a Crazy World"?

Cheah Kit Sun: We live in a crazy world. A world of outrage, identity politics, emotional manipulation and lies. I wanted to write a quick guide for readers to develop mindfulness under such pressures, and to achieve emotional freedom. It is a collection of three simple exercises that work on the physical, emotional and mental levels. It's a crash course, it is not a complete guide to enlightenment, but it will help you cut through the nonsense of this crazy world, and point you to other avenues for development.

Tamara Wilhite: Will you be publishing anything else in the "Covenant Chronicles" series?

Cheah Kit Sun: I hope to, but for now, my focus is on other projects.

Tamara Wilhite: What are you currently working on?

Cheah Kit Sun: I am presently putting the finishing touches on "Babylon Red", the sequel to "Babylon Blues". In "Babylon Red", the team is scattered, the Special Tasks Section disbanded, and the New Gods are back on the warpath. To survive, and to continue the mission of protecting the innocent, they must become urban guerillas. My current work in progress is called "Saga of the Swordbreaker". It is a science fantasy cultivation series, with significant Chinese cultural influences. It is the story of Li Ming, a bodyguard and beast hunter for hire, who dreams of being a youxia, a wandering hero. Armed with the titular swordbreaker, his journey will pit him against ruthless bandits, bloodthirsty beasts, and a secret society that threatens to overturn Heaven and Earth.

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

Cheah Kit Sun: Thanks for reading, and please keep an eye out for Babylon Red and Saga of the Swordbreaker when they drop. In the meantime, you can check out Babylon Blues and Edenet on Amazon. You can also check out my web pages (benjamincheah.com) .

An Interview with Stanley Wheeler by Tamara Wilhite

Stanley Wheeler is the author of the “*Tomahawks and Dragon Fire*” series. This alternate history “flintlock fantasy” series is set in an American Revolutionary War where dragons have come back after a century. He’s also written a number of books in other genres, but more on that in the interview itself.

Tamara Wilhite: What led you to write the “*Tomahawks and Dragon Fire*” series?

Stanley Wheeler: A few years ago I started writing a story set in pre-Columbian North America that involved dragons. Although that story has some good things to tell, and I’ll probably return to it eventually as part of the backstory in this same universe, I finally decided that I wanted to start my story during the revolutionary war. I enjoy the study of history, and I like the challenge of meshing fantasy with historical events. Also, I love the story of the creation of the United States, the founding fathers, the struggle for independence, and all that. There’s a certain freedom in writing fantasy, and it’s also fun to read. I simply put together two things I love. I would love to see more people interested in the inspiring story of our nation’s founding.



Tamara Wilhite: You’re up to four books. Do you think there will be a fifth?

Stanley Wheeler: Certainly. It took three books to get my characters through 1775. It may take nine books, or more, in total to complete the series. The problem is that cool new ideas, which were not in the original outline, rise up and commandeer the narrative. In fact, book five will tell the rest of the story that book four was supposed to tell but didn’t because a couple intriguing developments promised to inject even more awesome into the story. These unexpected elements aren’t merely side trips. They figure into and are integral to the plot and character development.

Tamara Wilhite: Most science fiction / fantasy authors only write that genre. You’re the first I’ve seen write noir detective novels. Can you explain what that genre is? And how does it differ from conventional mystery novels?

Stanley Wheeler: I think of a conventional mystery as something like Agatha Christie’s Miss Marple or Hercule Poirot books where there is a mystery that a detective solves by discovering clues and putting them together like puzzle pieces. A noir has the mystery solving component but is more like *The Maltese Falcon* or *The Big Sleep* with elements that might include a cynical or hard-bitten detective, intriguing women, interesting lighting, some deadpan description, an interesting turn of phrase, and jargon from the era, all seasoned with a generous dose of fisticuffs and gunplay. Think Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, or Mickey Spillane. I have to admit that my novel is on the lighter side of noir with a little humor here and there.

Tamara Wilhite: And what is your detective novel “*Smoke*” about?

Stanley Wheeler: Without giving away the first rather minor spoiler, *Smoke* is a novel about a reluctant detective who has returned from the horrors of WWII. He is pulled into a mystery by a beautiful dame who wants him to find her husband. Rival restauranteurs, organized

crime, and suspicious cops complicate his investigation. However, his client provides the most serious distraction, and he begins to wonder if he is in love with a murderer. The story is told mostly in the first person, but there is a running side story told in the third person that involves the protagonist's secretary. I had a terrific time researching and writing this novel. I can pick it up and read a couple paragraphs and find myself sucked back into the story. Several of my family and friends are pestering me to write another novel featuring this detective and his secretary.

Tamara Wilhite: How did you end up writing a Western novel series?

Stanley Wheeler: *Justice in Season* is actually the first book I wrote and published. It all began with a newspaper article. I read the article and thought, "This should be a book, or at least part of one." I researched the matter, about the vigilantes and outlaws in the gold fields of the Idaho Territory, and married my fictional story to some of the historical events that I found interesting. I have since written the sequel, *Justice Resurgent*, and I may eventually write a third book which features the same protagonist.

Tamara Wilhite: How does the writing and marketing of each of these genres differ?

Stanley Wheeler: The great thing about writing is getting into the skin of the characters that I create. Writing in different genres allows me to inhabit not merely a new character, but a different era as well. Each genre has its unique flavor or atmosphere. I think writing in any genre is all about finding that atmosphere and wrapping the story within it. As for the marketing of each genre, you'll have to ask someone else. I'm still learning about marketing.

Tamara Wilhite: What are you currently working on?

Stanley Wheeler: Before I complete book five in the *Tomahawks and Dragon Fire* fantasy series, I have another book that I have to write while certain elements of the story remain speculation rather than reality. I've set aside the completed portion of book five to write this standalone novel. In this dystopian thriller, Don Morgan is a hardworking man struggling to get by in a world encumbered by rules, regulations and intense government intrusion. He labors under the additional burden of not meeting any of the intersectional criteria deemed necessary to receive many basic services. When a girl is seized by mysterious creatures, Morgan may be the only hope she has. Will he be able to save her from a horrible fate when he must struggle against the government and its many agents, as well as the strange creatures who have taken her? I hope to finish and publish this book before the end of the year. Book five in the fantasy series will follow.

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

Stanley Wheeler: A major theme of my writing can be summed with this quote I copied from one of my blog entries: "The cause of America is in great measure the cause of all mankind," wrote Thomas Paine. "The sun never shined on a cause of greater worth."

Here's a link to sign up for my monthly newsletter: sendfox.com/flintlockfantasyStanley Here's a link to my books and brief descriptions on my website where a click on the book image will take one to the book's Amazon page: stanleywheeler.com/books/

Tamara Wilhite: Thanks for speaking with me.

Letters of Comment

Dear Editor,

Thank you for Tightbeam #324. It provided a good hour of diversion.

One of the few misgivings I had about rejoining N3F is that I don't seem to have many SF and Fantasy interests in common with the rest of the membership. This has caused me to skip over much of Tightbeam in the past, and no doubt miss out on much good material. So I was determined to read this issue from cover to cover.

And I was greatly rewarded. I am not much of an anime fan, so up to now have not read Jessi Silver's reviews. I see now that I was missing out on some wonderful writing, and I will make a point of going back of catching up. I doubt that I will watch any of the series that Jessi reviews, but that doesn't me appreciate the writing any the less.

"One bad day, one shitty take, and the force of the internet's collective ire is knocking at your door." Yup.

I love Jose Sanchez's cover art, which I see dates back to 2000. Had it in your back pocket for a while, eh?

I was glad to see Chris Nuttall's review of Heinlein. The first Heinlein book I read was Stranger In a Strange Land, and I found it both irritatingly preachy and tedious. But on the other hand I loved Podkayne of Mars when I finally read it. Chris, if I am reading him right, seems to share my ambivalence and appreciation both.

Will Mayo's review of Nightfall shoulda been longer.

Tom Simmons review of the first three Micronauts comics was a delight. As far as I am concerned, it doesn't get much better than 70s Marvel and DC,

Thanks again for this issue, and thanks to the contributors for some fine reading matter.

All the best,
Mick Taylor

George,

Thank you for passing that along. It makes writing feel more worthwhile when I receive kind comments like that.
:) Jessi Silver

Dear George and Jon:

Thanks for issue 324 of Tightbeam. I hope I'm not too late to contribute a little something for issue 325.



Dragon Star

by Angela K Scott

My letter for issues 322 and 323...I see there is now, finally, the attempt to make a mini-series out of Asimov's Foundation trilogy. I probably won't see it for some time, seeing we don't subscribe to any of the available streaming services, but I hope someone will watch it, and report back on it. If someone is willing to write it up, I will probably learn something from it. Also, from lifting COVID-19 restrictions too early, that happened in the province of Alberta, and as a result, the emergency departments are flooded with COVID cases, and people are needlessly dying. So many politicians have been so short-sighted, and they have blood on their hands.

I have a lot of Heinlein on my shelf, but he's been far from my favourite SF writer. Some of his writing was simply too military for me, and some of his characters too military as well, even some of the civilian characters. That was a time when there was little empathy in some stories, and not much empathy coming from some characters.

Thanks to Jon for his bio on Mark Clifton. I think most readers would be hard-pressed to remember his name, but I do have *They'd Rather Be Right* on my shelf, and that novel won the very first Best Novel Hugo. Unjust obscurity is right, but we all peer through the mists of time, and some bright lights aren't always seen.

That may be all I have this time...325 should be here shortly, and I might have more then.

Yours, Lloyd Penney.

Anime

Autumn 2021 First Impressions – The Heike Story Review By Jessi Silver



Episode Summary: Biwa witnesses the murder of her blind father at the hand of the powerful Heike clan, thus leaving her an orphan. Yet it's a member of the Heike, the subdued, practical Shigemori, who apologizes for the crimes of his brethren and identifies a similarity between himself and Biwa. Both possess a heterochromic eye which has granted them psychic powers. Shigemori is cursed to see the spirits of the dead all around him, but Biwa's eye allows her to see the future.

Shigemori chooses to adopt Biwa and raise her alongside his own sons; Biwa's father had disguised her as a boy to help her survive, and she has no interest in living as a girl, so this arrangement is helpful. Yet, despite his kind overtures, Biwa refuses to tell Shigemori the one thing he'd truly love to know – what will finally bring downfall to the Heike clan, and can he help prevent it? As the clan begins to grow bloated with its overwhelming power and corruption creeps in, can either Shigemori or Biwa truly do anything to stop the Heike's fall?

Impressions: I'm tempted to comment on the recent tendency for new anime seasons to begin earlier and earlier, but as much as I still marvel at how strange it feels to be getting new anime at unexpected times, I'd rather spend the bulk of this review marveling at this episode, which manages to say a lot while also revealing very little. For a very old story, there are bits and pieces of it that feel almost eerily timely.

Shigemori is accused multiple times of being boring by a family who's riding high on its own expanding, ridiculous power, and yet it's his level-headedness that allows him to remain sober and see through the façade. Shigemori is someone in the position of having to apologize for the



thoughtlessness-by-association of his extended family, and there's a sort of sadness in experiencing things through the eyes of a character who can sense something terrible on the horizon and who would love to change the progression of fate, but who doesn't have the personality nor the tools to do so. I suspect that even psychic powers might not be enough to hold back the steadily rising tide of hubris.

And yet, despite this sort of melancholy state of affairs, I found this episode to have a definite hopeful streak. I feel that genuine apologies can be a rare find in some areas of fiction. Anime is filled to the brim with "gomens" and prostrations, but I find that, contextually, they're weighted more toward "please forgive me" than "I'm sorry for what I did." And honestly, this is human nature; expressing humility for one's actions and attempting to make amends with no guarantee of a good outcome is a scary prospect for most of us. Shigemori seems genuinely upset by the way in which his family's agents dispatched Biwa's father as though he were nothing. And yet... I can't help but wonder if his motivations for adopting Biwa are actually so pure. She has something he could use – a vision of his family's future and perhaps insight on how to save it – and all it may take is some kindness to massage it out of her. I don't know if this is a reflection of the story itself, or a reflection on me, but I will say that trustworthiness is earned rather than taken.

In any case, this is a striking opening episode for a series that I've been looking forward to. I enjoy (at least in theory) whenever artists decide to provide a fresh interpretation and perspective on a classic story



Pros: This episode is artful in a way that most anime series don't have the luxury to be. The glowing fireflies and torches, the delicate flowers, and the softly falling snow are all portrayed with a delicacy and visual flair that feels extremely intentional. To be honest, this collaboration between Naoko Yamada (Sound! Euphonium season 1, Liz and the Blue Bird) and animation studio Science Saru

is sort of a dream for me, joining two artistic thought processes in their primes that I personally admire.

The character animation is similarly notable, with rough-hewn linework and unique designs. Aside from *Ranking of Kings*, which I'm also looking forward to this season, I feel like this series will at the very least distinguish itself from its seasonal brethren through its character designs.

Cons: This isn't necessarily a personal critique, but like a lot of modern interpretations of older material I feel like this runs the risk of feeling somewhat impenetrable to folks who aren't at least interested in classic Japanese literature. Its storytelling style combines (what I believe to be) actual poetic lines from the story, old-style linguistic dialog (I'd probably equate it to Shakespearean English in that it uses language forms that are understandable but which aren't commonly used, though my knowledge of classical Japanese is only extremely basic), and



Dragon Dreams

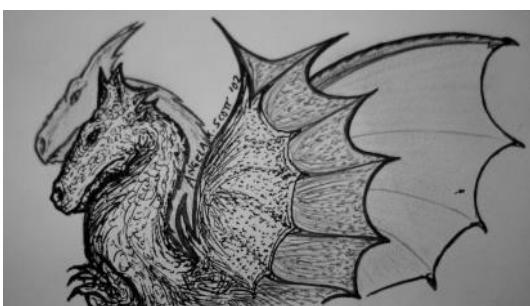
by Angela K Scott

scenes which often feel more like glimpses here and there rather than complete thoughts. Context is very minimal at some points. Parts of the plot revolve around military battles that won't have a lot of inherent meaning to outsiders (that includes myself). So in spite of Funimation's advertisement of the series and the early drop I kind of wonder who the intended audience for this is. This isn't really to discourage anyone from watching it, because sometimes worthwhile art is worth a little bit of work, but it's good to be aware of the potential challenge.

I'm also experiencing a broader uneasiness here related to the general anime production process and how it relates to this particular series. As much as I love Science Saru as a studio, it's become clear that they're not immune to the same sort of production crunch that's plagued almost every anime studio for years and only gotten worse due to Covid-19. It's difficult to wrangle with the fact that something you love is so problematic, and it's gotten to the point where I'm unable to simply bury my head in the sand about it. It's

frustrating, I believe, because it's a problem where there's not a single course of action I can personally take to "solve" it. If I go for the nuclear option and decide to just stop watching all anime, well, I'm one person who's barely going to register on anyone's radar, let alone anyone in the anime industry with any power to make changes. But if I continue watching without commenting, then I feel complicit. So this is me reminding myself and anyone else reading that this is still an issue that exists, and something which even some of the best-of-the-best are struggling with.

One other thing I wanted to make note of, and I'm sure the degree to which this is a negative issue will be very individualistic, is that Biwa's gender is somewhat under question within the narrative. I've used "she/her" to refer to the character here, because that's how Biwa is referred to by other characters and in the dialog. However, she's spent her life disguised as a boy for safety and has come to identify as male and dresses as a male child after joining Shigemori's family. In certain scenes which I believe to take place following the story, Biwa seems to take on a female presentation. So I will leave it to viewers to interpret the situation. I will be interested to see if this comes up more throughout the narrative.



Dragon Duo

By Angela K Scott

Content Warnings: Violence (sword violence with blood splatters). Murder. Classism. Misgendering. Brief discussion of gender roles, including the limited options afforded women at the time in which the story takes place.

Would I Watch More? – The appearance of this series on the Autumn release calendar was a bit of a surprise, but in spite of that it's jumped up pretty high on my list. I'm interested to see what this "golden combo" of Naoko Yamada and Science Saru can do, in spite of any misgivings I may have about the industry in general.

Western Comics

On the New Marvel Unlimited App By Stephanie Souders

This past month, Marvel updated – and aggressively marketed – its Marvel Unlimited app, adding exclusive digital “infinity” comics that are optimized for phone screens. As a long-time subscriber to Marvel Unlimited, I did in fact download the update — and I have some thoughts.

First, beware: the new app is **not** compatible with all devices. While I had no trouble downloading it onto my phone, I’m now unable to use Marvel Unlimited on my Samsung 4. This is a bit of an inconvenience to me because, being an older lady, I now have trouble reading on itty-bitty screens. Keep in mind: according to the company’s website, the updated app will only work for Apple OS 11.0+ or Android 5+.

On my phone, the app loads well even on my rural internet — though there **are** a few bugs I’ve encountered. One, if you’re an established subscriber, it takes a few days for your existing library to be transferred. Two, brand new comics (particularly the infinity comics) don’t always load without errors, especially on their first day of advertised availability. Third, the library is now sorting by series instead of by issue, which, based on the Twitter chatter, has annoyed quite a few long-time users. And lastly, I’m not a big fan of the navigation set-up. The end pop-up for each comic does not include a direct link to “Library” or “Home,” which forces you to back-arrow several times to get back to the main menus. Maybe this won’t bother you at all, but I personally find it a little aggravating.

Now about the content: I don’t recommend you sign up for the new Marvel Unlimited just to get access to the “exclusive” infinity comics. I’ve read all of them, and they’re just not worth the extra expense if you don’t already have an account. Said comics are either completely safe and substance-free **or** they reach heights of moral inversion so horrifying that I, at least, wondered what the hell the creators were thinking when they were putting them together.

Take, for example, the most egregious offender of the bunch: “X-Men: Green,” issues #5 and #6 of the X-Men infinity comic. In this story, Nature Girl decides to avenge the death of a sea turtle – and environmental degradation in general – by stabbing a random grocery store manager in the neck with a pair of scissors. Yes, you read that right: Nature Girl doesn’t investigate the **real** reasons why plastic pollution in the ocean is a problem. Instead, she opts for ecoterrorism — and targets some working-class schlub who probably has little to do with his grocery chain’s bagging decisions. “Is this a villain origin story?” you may ask. And yes, I wondered that too. Unfortunately, everyone else in the story (including Xavier and Wolverine) starts treating this little psychopath like she’s either a poor, misguided soul **or** – even more shockingly – a **hero** worth emulating. What the actual hell? These are **not** Chris Claremont’s X-Men. (Though, in fairness, those X-Men have been missing and presumed dead for quite some time.)

I could also spill quite a few words on the lazy and sinister Captain America infinity comic, but I think I’ll hold off for the sake of saving space (and avoiding incendiary political discussions). Suffice it to say that these infinity comics **do not** represent Marvel’s best. To find those, you should hit the app’s extensive back catalogue — i.e., the reason **I** signed up for Marvel Unlim-

ited in the first place. At \$9.99/month, this subscription *is* a bargain-basement way to catch up on comics from decades ago. And if you're willing to wait for three months, you'll eventually have access to the new comics too.

Movies

Will Mayo Reviews An American Werewolf In London

There have been many versions of the werewolf myth in movies over the years, from the Lon Chaney version of the 1930s to I Was A Teenage Werewolf of the 1950s to modern times, but my favorite has got to be An American Werewolf In London that came out around forty years ago when I was a young man. I thrilled in my seat in the cinema in the long ago days to see that naked young man transform into a wolf to the sound of Creedence Clearwater Rival's "Bad Moon Rising." When he later lost his life in a hail of bullets for his love I was saddened. But something about the movie as a whole, from the script to the casting to the special effects, thrilled me to no end. To this day, I hold it in my fondest memories.

Marvel's Avengers: Infinity War Review by Jim McCoy

Nope. Not bitter. Not me. Never. I don't get bitter. Not even if my cousin promises to go see Avengers: Infinity War with me. Not even if he does it twice. Not even when I get spoiled because his tall ass didn't go see it with me. I could never be bitter. I'm Sweet of the Sweet and Innocent Twins. (Inside joke. There are two people on the entire planet who get that and I'm pretty sure that the other one doesn't read my blog. You should be laughing though. Trust me.) So, my not bitter self went and took in the movie by myself. And believe me, Avengers: Infinity War delivered.

I'm going to try not to spoil much, but it's not going to be easy. There is a lot to this movie and it's an emotional roller coaster. I usually talk about my emotional reactions here but A:IW jerked me in a few different directions. It's weird. One of my friends did a Facebook post complaining that her anxiety ramped steadily upward throughout the whole movie. She was right. Things go from bad to worse to worst.

I'm going to start my review by mentioning the end of the movie. If I were capable of being bitter, I just might be a bit bitter about this ending. This movie is the culmination of an eighteen movie storyline. It is the movie equivalent of a crossover event in comics. I won't say exactly how the flick ends, but I will say this: This plays like a three act play, but it ends at the conclusion of the second act. Things can't get any worse. This isn't even a cliffhanger ending. It's like a fall off of a cliff, only it's going to last for a year until the next movie comes. I don't like cliffhangers but this is worse. It's crazy.

Other than the ending (and the strong desire I developed to slap both Dr. Strange and Starlord) though, Avengers: Infinity War was epic. This thing moved. There was always something going on. It was crazy. I've heard others complain that there was too much crammed in but I disagree. I mean, if you're into boring cry-fest chick flicks then okay, there is probably too much going on here. Go feel some angst and bite your fingernails off while watching two teens make eyes at

each other over the tops of overpriced milkshakes. If you're a fan of good SF/F and you like movies that take hold of your attention and refuse to let go, watch this movie.

I find myself liking Thanos as a villain. Something that most authors forget is that we're all the hero of our own story. Thanos is out to murder half of all intelligent life in the universe. He's an evil piece of trash. In his own mind though, he's doing the survivors a favor. Fewer people means less draw on resources and therefore more for everyone. Basically, he displays a knowledge of economics matched by a third grader with conservative parents or your average adult Marxist. (Hint: Economic growth requires population growth and a modern economy suddenly deprived of half its people would be a complete disaster that would most likely cause the deaths of many more when production and distribution of necessities went to shit.) Thomas Robert Malthus would be proud of Thanos, even while he wondered how the human population was still so high and had the lowest percentage of starving and illiterate people in the history of humanity. That much being said, committed Communists really do believe that they have the best system.

I will always and forever be a fan of any movie where Robert Downey, Jr. plays Tony Stark. *Avengers: Infinity War* is no exception. RDJ doesn't just play Tony Stark. RDJ is Tony Stark. He's lived the high society, womanizing, heavy drinking lifestyle. You can see it in his portrayal. He knocks it out of the park every time. I seriously wrote this dude off at one point and now I feel like a turd. His comeback has been remarkable and I applaud him. Keep making movies, guy. I'll keep watching.

Tom Holland also makes an awesome Spider-Man. You can feel the teen-aged desire to do big person things in him. He's a believer in his mission and he seriously wants to fit in. He's a boy in a man's world but he wants to be a man. He's working to prove his manhood and assert his independence. I like this kid. I love the fact that he won't give up. I love the fact that he won't listen to anybody. I love the fact that he's still there when common sense would have told him to give up. And I love the fact that Tom Holland makes me believe it all. He's got the wild-eyed look to make this character work.

Zoe Saldana as Gamora is impressive as well. She grew up raised by a maniac and she knows it. She hates him. She hates what he did to her people. She fights against it with everything she has. When Gamora looks at Thanos, we can feel her disgust along with her. When she gets taken, we can feel her fear. When Thanos (spoilers!) throws her off the cliff to gain the Soul Stone, we all want to kick his ass. It's because Zoe Saldana makes her character live and breathe. Kudos to her.

Some of the actions the heroes perform don't make sense. Starlord, in particular, deserves to have his nose broke in seventeen different places. Dr. Strange may have an adequate excuse for his stupidity. He saw the future and can tell what comes next. So maybe he gets a pass. Possibly. I'll get back with you next movie. The good part about the stupidity though, is that human beings frequently do stupid stuff. Starlord reacts out of emotion when logic is needed. Guess what? He's a (half) human being. Humans do stupid things out of emotion constantly. Our irrationality is part of what makes us human. Tony Stark was stupid to try to get rid of Peter Parker. He didn't want to see the kid get hurt. Stark didn't want to risk the kid's life even though, logically, he needed the help. This is known as good writing.

All in all, I loved this movie. I'm going to own it someday. I've seen some hate for this movie, but you won't find it here. Marvel put on a clinic here. They built this thing over years and did an awesome job with the first half of their movie. I can't wait to see the conclusion of it next summer.

Bottom Line
4.75 out of 5 Infinity Stones

Sercon

Katherine MacLean Bio-Bibliography
by
Jon D. Swartz, Ph.D.
N3F Historian



Katherine Anne (Kate) MacLean was born in Glen Ridge, New Jersey, on January 22, 1925; in 1950, she took a BA from Barnard College, New York. She later did postgraduate study in psychology, and then she worked as a college lecturer on creative writing and literature.

Much of her writing consisted of short stories; her first, "Defense Mechanism," was an early Astounding "psi-boom contribution" (October, 1949).

Pseudonyms/Collaborations

She generally wrote under her own name, although some early stories, like "Syndrome Johnny" (June, 1951 Galaxy), were as by Charles Dye (Charles Dye was her husband during 1950 – 1953); and one appeared as by G. A. Morris. She was later married to David Mason, and then to Carl West.

MacLean was in the vanguard of those science fiction (SF) writers who attempted "to apply to the soft sciences the machinery of the hard sciences in a generally optimistic reading of the potentials of that application." Her competence in dealing with technological matters may reflect the wide range of occupations she held in her mundane life.

She collaborated with Mary Kornbluth, widow of SF author Cyril Kornbluth, on the short story, "Chicken Soup," (Winter, 1973 Weird Tales).

Collected Fiction

Some of her stories were collected in *The Diploids and Other Flights of Fancy* (1962), and then later in *The Trouble with You Earth People* (1980).

In addition, many of MacLean's early stories have been anthologized. Perhaps the best-known are "Pictures Don't Lie" (August, 1951 Galaxy), which tells of the arrival of an alien spaceship

which seems normal according to advance radio signals, but turns out to be little more than microscopic; "The Snowball Effect" (September, 1952 Galaxy), a satire on social engineering in which a ladies' knitting circle expands to become the strongest political pressure group in the USA and potentially the world; and "Unhuman Sacrifice" (November, 1958 Astounding), an important piece of anthropological SF in which a visiting exploration/contact team on another planet misreads an initiation ceremony as needless when its purpose is to prevent a damaging biological change.

SF Series

Notable is her "Hills of Space" series, dealing with the settling of the asteroids by refugees, fugitives, and the poor; it includes the following stories: "Incommunicado" (June, 1950 Astounding/Ace Books, 1962), "The Man Who Staked the Stars" (July, 1952 Planet Stories, as by Charles Dye), "Collision Orbit" (May, 1954 Science Fiction Adventures), "The Gambling Hell and the Sinful Girl" (January, 1975 Analog), and a novel provisionally titled "The Hills of Space."

SF Themes in Stories

MacLean's first novel, *Cosmic Checkmate* (March, 1958 Astounding), with Charles de Vet, combines space opera with speculations on a society whose hierarchy is built around skill at a particular board game.

Missing Man (1975), which contains her 1971 Nebula - winning story "The Missing Man" (March, 1971 Analog), deals with the exploits of an esper whose telepathy is a kind of sonar device enabling him to trace people emitting emotional distress signals; he cooperates with New York's Rescue Squad and goes to their aid.

Dark Wing (1979), with her third husband, Carl West, is a juvenile and presents a world in which medicine is forbidden; a teenager learns to become an outlaw surgeon by studying a medical kit, a remnant of times past.

Noteworthy Publications

Cosmic Checkmate (NY: Ace Books, 1962) [with Charles V. de Vet]

Second Game (NY: DAW Books, 1981) [with Charles V. de Vet]

The Man in the Bird Cage (NY: Ace Books, 1971)

Missing Man (NY: Putnam's Sons, 1975)

Dark Wing (NY: Atheneum, 1979) [with Carl West]

Web of the Worlds (Medford, OR: Armchair Fiction, 2012) [with Harry Harrison]

The Diploids and Other Flights of Fancy (NY: Avon Books, 1962)

The Trouble with you Earth People (Norfolk, VA: The Donning Company/Starblaze, 1980)

Trouble with Treaties (Tacoma, WA: Lanthorne Press, 1975) [with Tom Condit]

The Man Who Staked the Stars (Project Gutenberg, 2010) [as by Charles Dye]

Awards/Honors

MacLean received a Nebula Award in 1971 for her novella “The Missing Man” (Analog, March, 1971), and she was a Professional Guest of Honor at the first WisCon in 1977.

She was honored in 2003 by the SFWA as an Author Emeritus. In addition, she received the Cordwainer Smith Rediscovery Award in 2011.

Some Critical Comments

Genre author/critic Damon Knight wrote, “As a science fiction writer she has few peers; her work is not only technically brilliant but has a rare human warmth and richness.” Fellow author Brian Aldiss noted that she could “do the hard stuff magnificently,” while Theodore Sturgeon observed that she “generally starts from a base of hard science, or rationalizes psi phenomena with beautifully finished logic.”

Conclusions

Her career was usually intermittent, and it seemed she had finally retired around 1980; but from about 1994 on, she published occasionally in collaboration with Carl West, her third husband. Famous SF actifan Dave Kyle once wrote: “Kate MacLean was an unabashed advocate of ‘free love’ and took some explicit photos with Charlie Dye.”

She died September 1, 2009, age 94. She was survived by her son, Christopher Mason.

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

Short Stories

Isaac Asimov's Finest Short Story Review by Will Mayo

I've read a great many short stories in my time and certainly a great many science fiction short stories. But one of my favorites, one by Isaac Asimov, dates back from years ago and is, I believe, simply titled, "The Question." In this short story, elegantly written, a great many people in both humanity's history and future ask a question of a computer, in different stages of development. In some stories, the computer is simply made and replies, "I need further development to work on that." In others, the computer is more advanced and the answer is the same. At last, at the universe's end when darkness closes all around, the computer, at last, has the answer to the question. And what is the question? Well, that I can't tell you. For that, you'll have to read the short story itself. But the answer is no less than, "Let there be light!"

Videos

Will Mayo Reviews Night Gallery

Late on nights like this, I think of Rod Serling, a distant figure from an even more distant childhood. By the time I came across him as a boy, Mr. Serling was long done with the Twilight Zone show of the 1950s and was apparently embittered by the lawsuits regarding authorship that followed that show's end. So the show I watched him host on that little TV set at the farmhouse in the early '70s was a much darker show with more overtones of horror than fantasy.

This was his Night Gallery, and despite the mixed reviews the critics gave it when comparing it to his earlier show, I myself loved to stay up to what was then later at night to watch it. One episode that caught my attention particularly concerned a man with a fear of spiders who is caught off-guard by a spider he encounters on his nightly trip to the bathroom. He immediately flushes the spider down the drain of his sink and subsequently goes back to bed, saying, "I hate spiders!" Following trips to the john in the night would have him see what is apparently the same spider coming out of the sink, only bigger...and then bigger...Until, at last, an enormous monster of a spider crawls its way out of the bathroom and into the gentleman's bedroom, all 3 feet high and 6 feet across. The screen goes blank. I was up a while under the covers afterwards thinking of that one. Say what you will about Mr. Serling but he could make a boy think.

Batman: The Long Halloween Two Is a Second Departure Review by Jason P. Hunt

Batman: The Long Halloween Part Two (2021)
Based on the Graphic Novel by Jeph Loeb and Tim Sale
Rated R, 1hr 27min

In my review of Part One, I opined a suspicion that Part Two was going to go where it should-



n't. I wasn't exactly correct, but I wasn't entirely wrong, either. Because this second part deviates from the source material just as much as the first part, and that's annoying.

Owing to the constraints of time, likely, we skip right over the murders for Valentine's Day and St. Patrick's Day and move into an extended period of time where Bruce Wayne (Jensen Ackles) is under

the influence of Poison Ivy (Katee Sackhoff). Now, the battle between Ivy and Catwoman (Naya Rivera) is a fairly accurate rendition of what we have in the book, but its position in the story's chronology is slightly off, as bits and pieces are shuffled around and put into a different order. Not sure why that would be necessary. It doesn't seem to have made any improvement in the plot.



Of course, we have the requisite Crime Alley Moment™ — is there some sort of contractual obligation to put this scene in every bit of Batman filmed media?

I still don't like that Selina knows Bruce's secret identity. That takes away from the book, where Bruce couldn't figure out why she was helping him. Sometimes. When she felt like it. Now, with a relationship where they know each other's alter-ego, it takes away some of the layers of mystery for Bruce to figure out. And the reveal of why Selina is so interested in Carmine Falcone, the Roman (Titus Welliver), is so ham-fisted and lazy that I couldn't even work up the energy to roll my eyes.



Speaking of Falcone, there's a scene in the film that's not in the book: a discussion between young Bruce Wayne (Zach Callison) and Carmine Falcone. While Falcone is on the Wayne Manor dining table after having been saved by Dr. Thomas Wayne (Robin Atkin Downes, also playing Scarecrow). Now, keep in mind that Falcone has been shot multiple times and had just undergone rudimentary field surgery on a dining table nowhere near a hospital.

Yet he's able to have an absolutely clear, lucid conversation with a teenager, conveniently slipping in the old canard about criminals being superstitious. It's a completely unnecessary extension of the "save my boy" scene in the book.



Another new addition is the attack on Harvey at the docks. Didn't happen in the book, and it feels like it's a piece of the story that's in there to get us from one point to another in Harvey's arc with fewer scenes.

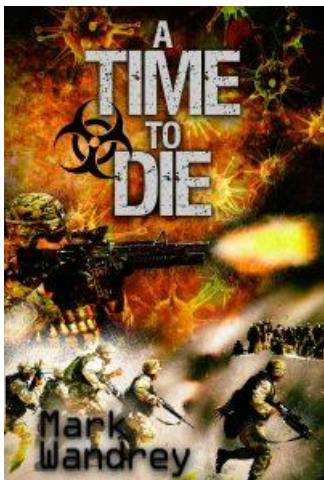
Now, before it starts to appear that I totally hated

this thing (I didn't), let me add one positive: it was good to see Montoya and Allen, brief though it was.

I guess in the end, what annoys me is that I should like this more than I do. It's a good Batman story. It has all the hallmarks of a story that will hold up on multiple viewings. And the performances are very good, too. There's not a sloppy voice anywhere to be found. But I can't get past the fact that too much has been changed, and those changes seem relatively arbitrary. As a writer, I can see some utility in some of the new material, but the overall changes in the plot leave me wanting to see an actual adaptation of the original book by Jeph Loeb and Tim Sale.

Food of Famous Authors

Mark Wandrey's Grilled Cheese with Tomato by Cedar Sanderson



You know, usually with an ETWYRT meal it's fun. I enjoy the process of cooking, and photographing. Preparing, staging, and shooting Mark's meal made me giggle like a madwoman, much to the amusement of the First Reader, although once he realized what Mark had given me, and what I planned to do, he was making suggestions and chortling himself.

You see, Mark Wandrey's latest book is a tale of the zombie apocalypse. *A Time to Die* is one of many ZA books, but rather than trying to convince you why you should read this one, I'll let Mark's words speak for themselves. He didn't just send me a recipe, he sent me on a quest.

For a good zombie apocalypse, food choice is everything. You need a good combination of something that can be foraged, easily produced in the desired environment, and manageable.

My choice for this situation is to head for comfort food. I mean, when you are running and gunning through a ZA, you are having a lot of fun, and you don't want your dining choices to cause you to realize you just did a double tap on George next door who'd been over for dinner last week!

What says comfort food more than a good grilled cheese sandwich?



When you have a few minutes and no zeds are in view, head for the best place to find some good scrounge. The local dollar store will do. Hopefully it's only been a few days, so you can grab a loaf of sour dough (the writers preferred), but if that fails screw it, go full on Wonderbread. That stuff was basically designed to survive the end of the world. When future archeologists are digging up the remains of our society, they'll fine excellent examples of Twinkies, and Wonderbread. Both

likely still edible.

Okay, you got the bread. Next is of course cheese. You're thinking, the power went out 2 days (or 2 weeks) ago, no way the cheese survived. But you're not thinking end of the world, dude. Head to the cooking isle of that dollar store, and nab a cylinder of Velveeta! Booha, that stuff will be on the museum display in 5 millennia, right next to that Twinkie and the half eaten loaf of Wonderbread. Add a jar of mayo to the mix, and a can of tomatoes (sliced preferably, but we can go with diced in a pinch).

Finally, head over to the liquor isle. All the good stuff and cheap beer are long gone, but we don't want either for this delectable number we're working on. We want an average, good to sip red wine. Grab the first bottle you find, or even better, one of the 'wine in a can' varieties you see from time to time!

We're half way there. Onto camping, nab a cheap little propane camp stove or an cylinder of propane. They'll also have a Teflon coated frying pan. Now just a quick trip to the nearest fast food place. Oh sure, that's been thoroughly looted. Something about an apocalypse just makes people want to clean out the nearest KFC. Go figure. While they've taken all the little bucket deserts and frozen chicken, what they didn't take was the packets of butter. Don't worry, they're fine. They aren't really butter anyway. Kind of like that Twinkie and Wonderbread. Grab a couple mayo packets (see the butter) in case that had been looted out of the dollar store, and you're ready to roll.

All this scavenging has probably drawn a few zeds, so give them the slip or pop a few brains, it'll help work up an appetite. After you're all clear, get a safe spot and fire up that grill. Butter the bread on one side and get it toasting. Add mayo on the upside. Slice the Velveeta thin (or thick, it's a ZA so go for it) and put a piece on each side. Now get those tomatoes and put them on one side.

Grab your ka-bar (make sure no zombie blood, that could be bad) and check under it. Once it's starting to brown flip the side without the tomatoes onto the other side. Watch it warm, flip a couple times as it does until the cheese melts thoroughly. While you're doing that fill your canteen with that red wine.

Bingo, you're done! You have a tasty portable meal ready to run and gun your way to your stronghold, or just to have a fun dance with the zeds. Remember, go easy on the wine unless you're in safe territory!



We skipped the wine, as this was lunch, and not being the ZA, I have some proprieties to observe! As you can see, we were ready for anything that might pop out of the bushes while we chomped down some grub.

Just don't let the melty cheese distract you...



Jose Sanchez
The Mandalorian — The Armourer