

Tightbeam 360

September 2024



Flash and Sam Meet the
Rapper by Jose Sanchez

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What is Tightbeam? We are the N3F literary fanzine, not the novel and anthology fanzine, but the fanzine that tries to cover all tastes in fandom, such as anime, comics, cosplay, films, novels, biographies, poetry, music, short stories, food, ...

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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.

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Obituary ...from Garth Spencer

Taral Wayne MacDonald (October 12, 1951 – July 31, 2024)

On July 31, 2024, Taral's friend Stephen Baldassarra and Taral's building superintendent found Taral unconscious and unresponsive in his apartment. Paramedics attempted to resuscitate him, but it was too late.

Taral became involved in SF fandom in 1971, when he joined the Ontario SF Club in Toronto, and he produced well-known fanzines such as OSFiC's newsletter, his own fanzine DNQ, and other titles. He co-founded Ditto with Catherine Crockett (an alternative fanzine convention to Corflu). He is mainly known in fandom as a talented fanartist, whose illustrations – often influenced by furry/ anthropomorphics comics – appeared in Torque, The Maple Leaf Rag, and many other fanzines.

Wikipedia mentions that “The pen name ‘Taral’ originated from a fictional synthetic language, Siroihin, that he described in one of his early science fiction fanzines.” Taral created at least one, and probably several story universes, either involving a slightly alternative history of North America, or settings for semi-furry characters such as Kjolas, house gamins, or his frequent character from another humanoid species, Saara Mar.

Taral was also a fanhistorian, contributing several articles about fanhistory in Toronto and other Canadian communities to New Canadian Fandom and other fanzines. Eventually he collected his articles in one volume, The Great White Zine.

Taral was nominated eleven times for the Best Fan Artist Hugo Award, between 1987 and 2012, and he received the annual Rotsler Award in October 2008. He was a Canadian Unity Fan Fund delegate to KeyCon/Canvention in 1988, and was Fan Guest of Honour at Anticipation, the 2009 Worldcon.

In the 1980s Taral graduated to professional illustration outside the SF field. In the 1990s he focused on comic book work, notably Tales of Beatrix Farmer, in collaboration with Steve Gallacci. If there were any justice in the world, he would have become a famous and popular comic artist; but due to falling sales at the time in the comics field, the Beatrix series was dropped after a few issues. Taral produced occasional work for other comics in the following years.

In early 2017 Taral suffered a stroke. He also suffered from myasthenia gravis, and by the 2020s his mobility was confined to a powered wheelchair.

Stephen Baldassarra wrote in his email/Facebook post:

“I knew Taral for just over 30 years. And while some people may have known Taral for being curmudgeonly, stubborn, fractious, and condescending, I also got to know the man who was also genuinely warm, gentle, impish, thoughtful and even vulnerable.

“Taral had a ferocious intellect and was an exceptionally talented graphic artist; I could see how hurt he was for not getting his chance in the sun in becoming a financial success with his graph-

ic work and illustration. But despite all that, Taral did what he had loved, and was contented living by the beat of his own drum.” (Stephen Baldassarra, R. Graeme Cameron, Wikipedia, Fancyclopedia 3) [Editors: And he was a Public Member of the N3F.]

Anime

Violet Evergarden Review by Jessi Silver



A certain point in time, in the continent of Telesis. The great war which divided the continent into North and South has ended after four years, and the people are welcoming a new generation. Violet Evergarden, a young girl formerly known as “the weapon”, has left the battlefield to start a new life at CH Postal Service. There, she is deeply moved by the work of “Auto Memories Dolls”, who carry people’s thoughts and convert them into words.

Violet begins her journey as an Auto Memories Doll, and comes face to face with various people’s emotions and differing shapes of love. There are words Violet heard on the battlefield, which she cannot forget. These words were given to her by someone she holds dear, more than anyone else. She does not yet know their meaning but she searches to find it.

I don’t like to get too hyped-up about upcoming anime because it’s so exhausting to be disappointed when the final production doesn’t live up to what was promised. I like to let anime happen on its own terms rather than measured against my often incorrect expectations. But I ask you, as one anime fan to another, what am I to do when Kyoto Animation releases a teaser trailer that’s such an incredible fever dream of flawless animation and the interplay of light and color? There was no possible way for me to ignore what I had seen and start with a completely



blank slate once the series was finally posted to Netflix. Rather than try to fool myself into believing that it was possible for me to be impartial, I decided to embrace impartiality and read other reviews of the show, both episodic ones and those focused on the series as a whole. I prepared myself for possible disappointment by arming myself with information.

Was this the right tactic? I’m not entirely certain, but what I can say is that going into the experience expecting to be frustrated by certain aspects of the story left me feeling pleasantly surprised by how the series was not nearly as flawed as I had been led to believe. This sounds like faint praise, but I really did enjoy the show more than I had expected to and I’m left wondering why others were more disappointed.

The series is comprised of two concurrent story arcs – one about a country at war which has at this point reached an un-

steady truce, and one about Violet Evergarden, the titular character, who comes from a place of darkness and must reacquaint herself with the subtlety and full range of human emotion. The former story is the weaker one of the two; it works well as a backdrop and helps to establish who Violet is and where she's come from, but when it comes further into focus as part of the primary conflict it feels forced and uninteresting (one might even describe it as kind of "tryhard" if one wanted to be a little snarky). The latter is where the more meaningful and satisfying developments happen, and while Violet's story occasionally gets a bit melodramatic, viewers like me who have a tendency to get emotionally-invested will likely eat this right up.

It does take a few episodes for Violet's story to get moving, and as I commented to some friends after I'd watched the first three or so episodes I was concerned that the series felt overly manipulative in its storytelling. Several of the early episodes feel like one-offs that serve to build the setting and put Violet where she needs to be, but don't quite achieve the emotional highs they try to wring from the viewer using beautiful music and imagery. As a veteran of war remembered both for her youth and her emotionless brutality, Violet is clearly out of her element as an Auto Memory Doll. The Dolls are women who compose eloquent letters for paying clients by interpreting those clients' feelings into written language. Violet, as an orphan who has seen (and committed) countless horrors as a child soldier, is more adept at reporting facts and taking people's words at pure, functional face value. She may have emotions, but they've been so blunted by her tragic experiences that it creates a wall between her and others. Likewise, the first few episodes of the show where Violet stumbles through an ill-fitting civilian existence, feel like attempts at forced emotionality that are unsubtle and unnerving. I can't say whether this was intentional or not, but looking back it's interesting to me how much the structure and feel of the show mirrors Violet's evolution.

As Violet becomes more accustomed to her work and begins to allow herself to feel and empathize with others, the show capitalizes on this to tell some of its most memorable stories. My two favorites were one in which Violet helped facilitate more genuine communication between a couple of soon-to-be-wed nobles (ignoring the squicky age difference between the two), and one in which she composed a large volume of letters from a mother to her daughter. Though both stories are still what I would qualify as one-offs, they also provided great snap-shots into Violet's progression towards not only understanding others, but also understanding herself and the relationships that she values.

I'm what I would call an empathetic viewer and I generally pay less attention to plot and continuity than many others, since I find little value in picking that stuff apart. I find more value in thinking about broad themes and considering how I was made to feel. This is the perfect example of a series that I think was made for that mode of viewing, since I recognize that there are some issues with the structure of the show and feel like it could have benefited from some re-shuffling of priorities. As I mentioned earlier, possibly the weakest aspect of the show is its subplot revolving around the tenuous peace between its setting's warring factions. Violet herself obtains a kind of personal emotional climax a few episodes from the end of the series, and much of the remainder of the show is devoted to a sort of shoehorned-in plot about a rebellion hell-bent on mucking up the signing of the peace treaty. The last two or three episodes of the series feature some great action pieces – an attempted bridge bombing, Violet parachuting into a war zone, a fist fight atop a moving train... all things that are cool to look at, but which feel as though they come from a completely different series (though they also provide a poignant resolution to the loss of Violet's father figure that plagues her throughout the series, so it's not all



fluff). They're ostensibly there to prove that Violet is no longer a cold-hearted killing machine (as she eschews using her strength and speed to actually murder anyone despite the fact that it would more easily resolve the situation), but we've already been shown so much evidence of her evolution that the reminder is unnecessary. The series as a whole easily made it into my good graces on its other merits and I could look at these last couple of episodes as mostly-extraneous,

but I can see how many people would find this much more irritating.

The way in which Violet reaches a resolution in her troubled relationship with the Bougainvillea family is one of the high points of last few, weaker episodes.

As emotionally moving as many episodes are, they're matched or exceeded by Kyoto Animation's cinematic visuals and animation. If I'm being truthful, being able to watch characters move in front of gorgeous backgrounds is one of the bonuses of watching almost any Kyoto Animation series (and the main reason why I've pushed on through more episodes than I'd like of shows like Miss Kobayashi's Dragon Maid and Amagi Brilliant Park) and this series is perhaps their most striking, detailed effort to date. It was the original commercial for the show that captured my attention, and while the series doesn't quite sustain that exact look throughout, it still maintains a visual lushness that's so far above and beyond what I'm used to as a TV anime viewer that I can't rightly complain. I can only really fangirl in a basic way over how the show looks, but if you're interested in some more educated commentary, check out Sakuga Blog's series of production notes on the series.

I'm not a huge fan of Netflix's delays when it comes to streaming anime series that I'm really anticipating, but I do appreciate the fact that I can watch an entire show (or hour, at least) in one or two sittings, so I suppose it's kind of a wash in that sense. In this case, I got a chance to listen to lucky folks in other regions post their reactions, and despite the fact that my expectations were high they were also tempered and honed by what I was hearing. As someone with an (apparently) offbeat point of view on how stories are told it seems like I didn't have much to worry about, as a lot of the complaints aren't necessarily my complaints, and I truly enjoyed the show as a whole for its primary focus on feelings and human interactions and not as much on its weaker political plot. It's gorgeous testament to KyoAni's draftsmanship skills, as well as Netflix's apparently pretty decent skills at picking anime series to partner with. It also gets a "5" on the Jessi Silver Cry Scale (TM) (I cried/held back tears at least 5 times while watching). If you're someone who's more into emotional through-lines in your entertainment, you might have a very good time with this series.

Pros: Visually beautiful. The feel of the story seems to mirror its protagonist's development in many ways.

Cons: Political plot feels unnecessary. The real character climax arrives around episode 9 and parts of the last couple of episodes don't fit in with those themes very well.

Grade: B+

Fan History

The FanHistory Zoom Series message from Edie Stern

As presented by FANAC.org. They've been doing 6 sessions per year, and so far three are scheduled, with the first one coming up in a few weeks. For information on receiving the needed links, send a note to fanac@fanac.org to be added.

September 22, 2024 - The Secret Origins of Plokta, with Steve Davies, Sue Mason, Alison Scott, and Mike Scott, Time: 2PM EDT, 1PM CDT, 11AM PDT, 7PM London (BST) & too early in Melbourne This fannish group burst on the scene in May 1996 with the fanzine Plokta, which went on to receive two Best Fanzine Hugos, 2 Nova Awards for Best Fanzine, and Hugo nominations each year from 1999 to 2008. They are energetic, quirky and very, very funny. They are writers, artists, con runners, Worldcon bidders and fan fund winners. Join us and learn more about their secret origins, fannish impact and what they are doing now.

October 26, 2024, October 27 in Melbourne - Robin Johnson interview, with Robin Johnson, Perry Middlemiss and Leigh Edmonds, time 7PM EDT, 4PM PDT, Midnight London (sorry), and 10am AEDT Sunday, Oct 27 Melbourne Worldcon chair, worldcon Guest of Honor, Big Heart Award winner, and witness-to and maker-of Australian fan history for almost 60 years, Robin Johnson has been amongst the best known Australian fans. In this Zoom session, two other makers of Australian fan history, Perry Middlemiss and Leigh Edmonds, talk to him about his life, his travels and his fannish experiences.

November-December 2024 TBD

January 11, 2025 (January 12 in Melbourne) - Out of the Ghetto and into the University: Science Fiction Fandom University Collections, with Phoenix Alexander (University of California, Riverside), Peter Balestrieri (University of Iowa), and Susan Graham (University of Maryland, Baltimore County) - Time 2PM EST, 11 AM PST, 7PM GMT London, and 6AM AEDT (sorry) Sunday, Jan 12 Melbourne. Somewhere along the way, science fiction graduated from being perceived as uninteresting escapist literature to being worthy of appreciation. Inevitably, academia followed. Today, a number of universities have science fiction archives with collections of fanzines, photos and artifacts. How did these collections get started and what do they contain? Are they open for public access? Are they continuing to grow? What are they collecting? What are the new challenges that they face?

Films

Warner Brothers's The Matrix Resurrections Review by Jim McCoy

First off, the disclaimer: I am not, in general, a fan of the current practice of reboots, remakes and sequels that should have been made years or decades ago. (Although I will make an exception for the Battlestar Galactica reboot.) Not only do I see it as insulting (usually) to the original material, but it stifles new intellectual properties. By and large, I think we'd all be better off with new things to read or watch instead of rehashing old stuff. This is basically the result of



cowards in Hollywood who don't have the guts to take a chance on something new instead of retelling old stories that have paid before. It makes sense in a way but, bottom line, The Matrix was a new concept that worked. When it premiered nineteen seventy-seven Star Wars was a new property. The dead mule has been kicked far too many times. My toes hurt.

That having been said, I really did enjoy The Matrix Resurrections. I will grant you that this is now an older franchise and that it's been sitting around for awhile. I'll grant you that the film's two biggest stars, Keanu Reeves and Carrie-Anne Moss don't look like they did when they made the movie. (Much love to both, but they're not as young as they were twenty years ago when the last movie was made. Sucks to be them. I'm at least six months younger than I was in 2003.) I'll even grant you that I wasn't excited to see it when it first came out.

None of that matters though. Matrix Resurrections was a good movie. It may not have been the masterpiece (and don't get me started about how I just misused that term. Everyone else does it, too.) that The Matrix was, but it was a well written movie with an actual plot and characters I actually cared about. The way it was done made sense out of the missed time (Resurrections is set sixty years after Reloaded) but moved things along nicely. And, let's face it, they managed to avoid my worst fears for the movie.

I was seriously concerned that Resurrections was going to make the original trilogy irrelevant. It doesn't. I was afraid the movie would suck without Lawrence Fishburne, but it's actually really good. (And I've been a fan of Lawrence Fishburne since he was "Larry Fishburne" and starred in Hoodlum.) I was afraid that if they didn't destroy the first trilogy, they'd go all The Force Awakens with it and rip off the first flick to the point that it felt like I was watching a remake, but they didn't. I was worrying over nothing, but let's face it: Hollywood hasn't done much to make me trust them lately.

That's not to say that there weren't call backs to the first three flicks. Resurrections actually re-uses some of the original footage and we get to see a new scene that strongly echoes an old one, but it works in context, because the plot was not the same as the original. There was no "Hey guys, let's go blow up ANOTHER FREAKING DEATH STAR" moment. The fight, as always, was against the machines, but it wasn't the same fight.

I loved seeing Neo as a mental patient, medicated to the gills. I remember seeing a lot of books at the bookstore (remember those?) about the psychological aspects of the movies. I read a few snippets here and there (I never bought one. I KNOW but, I mean, there was all this cool Science Fiction and Fantasy to read, who had time for non-fiction books about how crazy I was?) and the way Neo's mind was twisted was glorious to behold. The way they portrayed his fight for sanity as a fight against insanity was cleverly conceived and executed. If it left me scared to look in a mirror then so be it. If I've been reading a ton of articles about how the universe might just be a computer simulation, so what? Good art effects people and my brain is a haven for weirdness anyway.

A lot of the old characters are here, sort of. They've been redone. With Resurrections taking place sixty years after the original trilogy, it is assumed (I guess) that most of them are probably dead. The new characters make things look and feel different but using the first cast as archetypes provides a connection that works well. And don't worry. Agent Smith is still creepy.

Oops I didn't say that. That would be a spoiler and I have a strict no-spoiler policy that I actually follow sometimes.

Of course, it wouldn't be The Matrix without some hair curling action scenes and Resurrections delivers. Bullet time makes a comeback and fights between Neo and friends and their agent enemies abound. That made me happy. You can't do this without the occasional gunfight or karate kick. It just wouldn't work. The subject of all of the Matrix films has always been a war. I'm glad to say that they're still fighting.

The special effects for Resurrections are, as expected, freaking phenomenal. I would have been shocked if they weren't. The Matrix invented bullet time. The Matrix Reloaded was delayed while they figured out how to revolutionize visual effects to make one scene work. I can't think of anything innovative from The Matrix Revolutions but it looked awesome. Resurrections actually looks better, but that's probably because we've had twenty years of technological progression since Revolutions.

I'll be watching Resurrections again, and I'm surprised to hear myself say that. I only watched it because I was bored and needed something that I hadn't seen a million times. I went into this with a negative attitude and it managed to make me love it anyway. Either that's an impressive feat or I'm a gullible rube. I'd like to think of myself as being somewhat jaded by this point in my life (I'm forty-seven) and my mind was changed once I allowed myself to become immersed.

Bottom Line: 4.5 out of 5 Red Pills

Games

Weird Giraffe Games Stellar Leap Review by Jim McCoy

So, something I thoroughly enjoy but don't bring to the page enough is tabletop gaming. I've been known to spend hours with the crew at the gaming shop (Guild of Blades in Clawson, Michigan if you're familiar) performing goofball tasks trying to win cool points by schooling my friends in the exacting art of science of asswhoopery. So, just a couple of weeks ago, I reported to GOB before anyone else, knowing we were going to play a new game and prepared to unleash hell on some people who had to have known what was coming. Tommy, after all, is always complaining that I always win. The reason why is simple: I figure out what I need to do to win the game and then I do it.

And Stellar Leap is a game with a fairly shallow learning curve. You need victory points to win. There are various ways to get them. There are "Events" in the game that are triggered by an individual but effect everyone playing. After a certain number of Events, I want to say it's six, you total up the victory points and whoever has the most wins.

Of course, if you bring your daughter and she's as intelligent and ruthless as her father, she can ruin all your plans of winning. I've been crying daily because of the totally unearned beating I received at her hands. I'm pretty sure she's going to tattoo "I beat my dad" on her forehead as well. Live is so unfair.

It's totally not my fault though. Gameplay flows so easily and is quickly paced enough that her young age was obviously an unfair advantage. Before the rest of us could even figure out what was going on and how to score points, Riley was off and running, completing missions and racking up points. When we were picking up specialized cards to tailor out gameplay with scoring systems particular to each individual player, she somehow managed to ferret out the best one without having played the game before. Hmm...

I guess I'll be watching her.

The game focuses on resource gathering and exploration/discovering new planets and asteroids. There are victory points awarded based on the number of discoveries made by each player. I focused my strategy on discovery and the points I could gather that way. There are also victory points awarded for things like how many resources that you have at the end of the game (and how many resources per victory point depends on the card you draw individually and can vary from player to player.) There are only four resources, but they're used for everything from traveling, to mining, to gathering, to well...

Basically anything you do in the game.

Some of resource gathering is intentional. Resources can be mined from asteroids and gathered from planets. There is a phase of your turn where you can do so and you are limited to so much mining and gathering per turn. Some of it is random. At the beginning of every players turn they roll two dice (that's 2D6 for you roleplayers out there) and, depending on where the planets are (You can't live on an asteroid. You can only mine it and return.) what kind of resources are available on a given planet and what's rolled, resources are distributed immediately. This makes things interesting, because an apparently defeated opponent can go from nearly out of resources to having a surfeit of them, all without doing a thing themselves to cause it.

Oh, and the one universal part of the experience is that everyone starts off resource poor, but we all had oodles and bunches of resources at the end. Stellar Leap feels like a Ferengi game at times, because it is all about Acquisition. Acquiring planets, acquiring resources, acquiring victory points, but sadly not acquiring properly trained kids who let their father win. I'll have to work on that one.

Population is a big thing, not just because you get victory points based on how many meeple you have at the end of the game, but because exploiting the planets and asteroids that get discovered is an exercise dependent upon having a population there to do so.

Probably one of my favorite parts of the game was the ease of setup. Setting up Stellar Leap is not the time soaking, day wasting exercise that a game like Axis and Allies is. It took us about five to ten minutes the day we played it and none of us knew what we were doing. If I had it to do again actually knowing what went where and how things were supposed to look I could probably cut that time in half now. Clean up took a bit longer but was still a lot easier than most of the games I've played. Seriously, I've seen Monopoly take longer to clean up than Stellar

Leap did. And believe me, both me and the stinkin' meanie I brought with me were hungry after gaming and in a hurry to go get some grub. I'd have noticed if it had taken a long time.

Seriously, I'd recommend Stellar Leap to anyone who likes tabletop gaming and doesn't necessarily feel the need to overcomplicate things. Don't get me wrong. I've played some extremely rule-intensive games with millions of pieces (and if you haven't played Nemesis you're doing it wrong. Just the minis that came with that game nearly made me lose my mind in an excess of pure joy) but it's nice to have a somewhat more relaxed experience where I can just play the game without all the drama.

Oh, and the factions are easy to understand. They're not overcomplicated and, really, the difference between factions come more from the cards you draw at the beginning (and I still can't remember what they're called) than choice. This is really the one time you can pick your team based on your favorite color and not look like a goofball. That part is cool, too.

Movies

Push (2009): A Review When push comes to shove.... Caroline Furlong Courtesy of Upstream Reviews

Push (2009) is a worthwhile character film. The action and suspense are servants to the study of the protagonists that the film performs and both help the movie flow very well. Starring Chris Evans as the lead, Push focuses on people with various powers known by a variety of monikers. These talented people were originally subject to Nazi experimentation but, since the end of World War II, several other countries have set out to capture and try to increase these individuals' powers in order to make them their personal operatives. In a word, they want their own Captain Americas (or Homelanders – as long as they are controllable, the governments in question are not particularly picky).

One group performing experiments on these empowered individuals is the Division. Ten years before the film starts, Nick Gant watches his father murdered by Division agent Henry Carver (Djimon Hounsou), someone with the psychic ability to “push” others to do whatever he wants them to do. But before his father dies, the senior Gant tells Nick that someday a girl is going to give him a flower and that he must help her.

Ten years later, Nick (Chris Evans) is existing as a street gambler in Hong Kong to avoid the Division. A “Mover” – that is, someone with telekinesis – Nick has not used the power he inherited from his father for very much. He just influences the betting games to win cash, which does not require a lot of work, though even this does not always help him earn his money. This is how he remains relatively anonymous, but it makes eating and keeping a roof over his head difficult.

Meanwhile, the Division finally manages to create a power-enhancing drug that does not kill the patient, something that no government has yet accomplished. The person who receives this successful drug is a “Pusher” named Kira Hudson (Camilla Belle); she wakes after receiving

the agent and escapes with the aid of a “Watcher” or clairvoyant, grabbing the only other syringe with the successful drug in it before she leaves the Division hospital. Carver orders her hunted down and captured, giving high priority to the finding of the drug as well.

Kira and Nick have a past, so it isn't long before a couple of Division “Sniffers” – psychometrics who can read a person's recent history by touching and/or sniffing something they have held – arrive at Nick's place in Hong Kong looking for her. No sooner do they leave than thirteen-year-old Cassie Holmes (Dakota Fanning) arrives to tell Nick he needs to help her find Kira and the syringe. Naturally, Nick is not gung-ho for this plan, not even when Cassie reveals she is a Watcher and that her mother is in the hands of the Division. The Division keeps Mrs. Holmes own extraordinarily potent foretelling abilities in check with powerful drugs.

It takes a little more convincing, during which time Nick is injured and has to receive treatment from a “Stitcher” – someone who heals using psychic powers – but he finally realizes existing is no longer an option for him. Then Cassie gives him a flower. Nick finally puts two and two together to realize that she is the girl his father told him to help, leading him to team up with her to find the syringe and Kira.

Evans does a very good job acting alongside Fanning, and their interactions make the movie more than the plot ever could. While *Push* is pretty much a B movie and is not an excellent one in terms of story (government agency hunts down people with powers, where have we heard that one before?), the characterization and the acting from the two main leads are stellar. If there was nothing else to recommend the film, their performances would be enough.

Fortunately, the rest of the cast brings their A-game to the movie as well. Whether it is Hounsou's terrifyingly urbane yet cold Carver, Belle's air of confusion and desperate longing for at least some love and a firm place to stand, Ming-na Wen's irritated “leave me out of this” even as she helps Nick and Cassie, or Neil Jackson's frightening performance as Hounsou's right-hand killer, the actors and actresses make sure to put their all into their parts. No matter how cliché the tropes, the performers hold the audience's attention and make them care about the characters rushing through the tale.

The rest of the film is up to the challenge as well. Boilerplate though the plot may be, it has some interesting concepts of how various powers would work: there's no super strength or flight, but you have a variety of people with specific capabilities that make for some seriously entertaining fight scenes. Nick finally gaining enough facility with his “Mover” abilities to go toe-to-toe with Carver's pet killer, another “Mover” with more practice, is perhaps THE best fight scene in the entire film. Rather than simply show things being moved, the film adds rainbow flares every time a telekinetic uses their powers at full strength. So when Nick learns to block punches and we see Neil Jackson block bullets, the scenes of them using their powers in combat get really fun VERY fast.

Likewise for the rest of the powers in the film, which are shown reasonably and with enough general subtlety that it's possible to see how people in the film's world might mistake psychic powers for something else. “Bleeders” are able to scream so loud and so long that they can wreck the surrounding area or even kill a target with a prolonged shriek. Their eyes become vertical slits as they use their power, to which they are naturally immune, but no one can get close enough to them not to be killed and could easily mistake the screams for some kind of sonic weapon. “Watchers” have the power with the least flare as they see something in a series

of visions, and Cassie tends to draw hers in order to make some sense of them or at least to get them out of her head, meaning most people would think her crazy.

“Sniffers” also see visions but the more skill they have, the better they can sort through them to find what they seek, allowing them to play the role of psychic in plain sight. “Pushers” prove to be the most terrifying and easiest to hide of all, not for how their powers show (their pupils expand to fill their irises or even to cover the whites of their eyes), but for their ability to convince anyone to do anything – including commit suicide. Hence the title of the film: Push.

If you want a popcorn movie with good characterization, just enough special effects to be entertaining without being overwhelming, and worldbuilding that is more subtle than usual, Push will suit your needs. The movie takes time to get going, but when it increases speed, it moves fast. It never got the sequel it deserved, but it is still entertaining to watch the heroes engage in a deadly game of cat-and-mouse with some truly scary people.

Push gives viewers an idea of what powers would look like in the real world without either over or underselling the premise. It’s less “superpowers and superheroes” and more “thriller with psychics” or even a psychic thriller. So if that sounds interesting enough to be worth the purchase price, consider picking up Push while you can. This is one film that does not deserve to be lost!

Novels

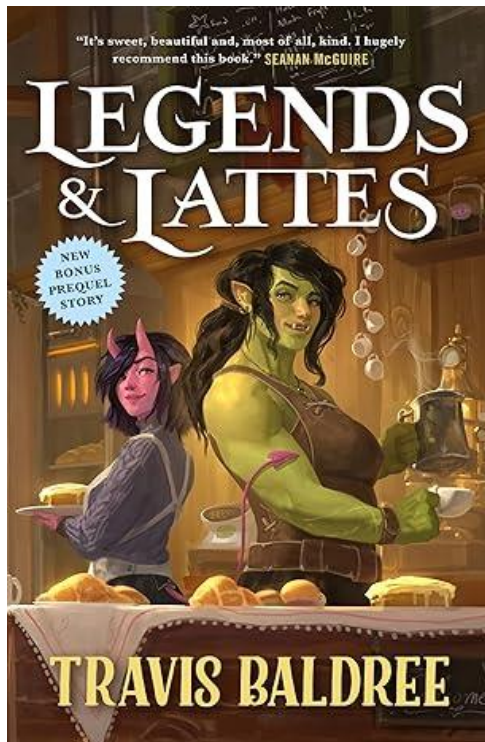
Travis Baldree's Legends and Lattes Review by Jim McCoy

I was contacted, somewhat recently-ish, by my friend Tom. He's the same guy who introduced me to a series I have reviewed here. He told me that there was a new book I needed to check out. I obediently rushed off to Amazon for a copy of Travis Baldree's Legends and Lattes. I'm glad I did.

Legends and Lattes is a work of "cozy fantasy" and it's my first time reading in the genre. I have to admit that I enjoyed it. I was kind of surprised that I did, but I was surprised the first time I read Nathan Lowell's work, too. This is an awesome book, but it's kind of a strange departure for me.

The first work of fantasy I read was The Hobbit, followed by Lord of the Rings. After that, it was immediately on to the Dragonlance Chronicles, then the Dragonlance Legends. One right after another with no pause in between, since my buddy Jeff introduced me to the idea that a fantasy genre even existed. Prior to that my reading had been confined to Science Fiction, Non-Fiction and the occasional detective story. My point in mentioning all of those is that they were all heavily action based, high stakes stories with intense battle scenes and a sense of impending doom should the heroes fail. Legends and Lattes has almost nothing in common with those stories outside of having a fantasy setting but I loved it.

Our heroine, Viv, is a female orc and a former adventurer with a significant savings of her ill-gotten gains and a passionate love of coffee in a part of the world where coffee is an unknown commodity. Viv is alright with that though. She brought some beans and an industrial sized cof-



fee pot, complete with steamer. She can make her own coffee and sell it to the people in her new town. I mean, maybe. Maybe even probably. Viv is lucky in that there is no local Starbucks. She is unlucky in the fact that she's selling coffee to people who don't even know what coffee is. But she can make the coffee, and if she can find someone to buy it...

The other thing Viv is really good at making is friends. She finds people to help her build and run her new coffee shop on the bare bones of an old stable. There are enough technical details included to keep a yahoo like me, who can somewhat swing a hammer and has hung a bit of siding and done some household projects, satisfied with their accuracy. Whether a master carpenter would agree is, of course, a question for a master carpenter, but if you lack that degree of knowledge and experience, it should be enough to keep you from wanting to knock the author out.

Speaking of accuracy, your friendly neighborhood blogger has a history degree and finds himself wondering if

Baldree's depiction of starting a new business is historically accurate to Renaissance Europe, which would be approximately the right period for *Legends and Lattes*. Your friendly neighborhood blogger is also a goofball and doesn't know for sure, but it feels right. I was satisfied with the way things went in the book.

I may have overstated the lack of violence in the book slightly. While there is very little actual fighting, there are a few threats of physical force. The strange part is that it only rarely happens and never really boils over. Viv actually hangs up her sword on the wall. But still, organized crime has its place in many fantasy settings and if Thune doesn't have the deep history of a city like Waterdeep, well, this is only the first book.

Thune is actually a well developed city, complete with everything from docks to trash dumps with a sprinkling of homes and businesses in between. Thune lives and breathes and is as much a character in the story as Viv herself and I like that. When I went to see *Dungeons & Dragons: Honor Among Thieves* one of the coolest parts of watching it was seeing some of the iconic locations of the *Forgotten Realms*. Icewind Dale, Neverwinter, and Baldur's Gate (along with other places) all feature prominently in the movie. Thune is too new and Baldree too relatively unknown to have that kind of drawing power, but it has the potential to make it that far. He just needs more fans and a few decades to get there. This makes sense because, according to his author bio, Baldree used to work in the video game industry. He has obviously learned something from his experience.

My only complaint about *Legends and Lattes*, and I may very well be nitpicking here, is that there should have been a map of Thune included somewhere in the book. I get a decent picture of what the city looks like, but it would be better if I had been handed one. Maps are something lots of fantasy fans absolutely love and this feels like a fairly easy problem to fix. Maybe Baldree has a friend in the video game industry who could help him. For all I know, Baldree may have drawn some video game maps himself.



Unicorns by Artist Fish

has called *Legends and Lattes* her new comfort read, and I think that fits. This is definitely an enjoyable fantasy read that you can dig into right before bed time and drift off peacefully to sleep afterward.

Legends and Lattes
Travis Baldree
Tor Books, 2023

You may, if you choose to do so, use that paragraph as an excuse to buy and read the book, thus looking forward to the next one as much as I am (And it's not out yet. I think I'll go cry.) and becoming a fan. I'm pretty excited because there aren't many authors that I have honestly followed since their first book, but this is my chance to get in on the ground floor.

The sequel, *Bookshops and Bonedust* is already available for pre-order and I can't wait to get my grubby little mitts on a copy. I haven't been this excited about a new series in a loooooong time. I haven't been this excited about a new subgenre in a long time. Fantasy author Genevieve Gornichec

SerCon

Don't Destroy My Favorite Franchises Opinion by Jim McCoy

Listen folks, We've reviewed a few movies and TV shows here at Jimbo's, and something we've seen a lot of lately is movies that don't live up to what came before them in their franchises or sometimes even in print, and I'm not just talking about the whole "The Book is Always Better" thing. The fact of the matter is that, in far too many cases, movie studios have made movies where they've placed the emphasis on effects and not story.

Don't get it twisted. I love a beautiful movie. I've had many conversations with all kinds of people regarding older stuff that I love that just doesn't look right anymore because the effects are so dated. I grew up on *Star Trek: The Original Series*, but if I watch it now, the only part that still looks futuristic is when the crew uses the transporter. I love watching *Babylon 5*, but it's gotten to a point where I almost have to watch the space battles with my eyes closed. Watch *Robocop* at some point and tell me the Point of View shots don't look stupid and old. I get the importance of special effects, especially in the Science Fiction and Fantasy that I love so much, but that's not all there is to a flick or series.

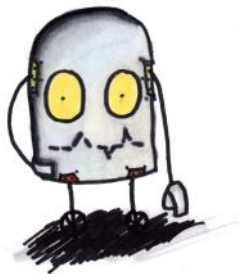
Seriously, I watched Game of Thrones later than everyone else (life sucks when you don't have HBO) but I get why everyone was upset about the last episode. There was no reason to have Cersei burn all of King's Landing down. The latest iteration of The Flash had amazing effects but the script was amateurish. Don't get me started on the Star Wars prequels that were entertaining individually, but went together like oil and water. Seriously, I could have conceived a better story arc than they did. As a matter of fact, I did "write" my own outline of how the next two would go in my head. It was better than what they came out with, and it didn't even include Emperor Palpatine.

Seriously Hollywood, explosions, camera flare and ripping off The Matrix Reloaded aren't the keys to making lots of money.

And, before you criticize me for thinking I know more about how to make money with a movie than a Hollywood executive, you may want to realize that movies like Matrix Resurrections, Green Lantern, The Flash, Fantastic Beasts: The Crimes of Grindewald and Star Trek: Nemesis all lost money. The reason wasn't bad special effects. My reviews of The Crimes of Grindewald and The Flash both indicate how impressed I was with the way they looked. The reason all of those movies failed is simple: They were poorly written.

Yes, movies and TV are visual mediums, but at the end of the day, they're stories. Story telling is something humans have been doing literally (and I mean literally literally, not literally figuratively) since time immemorial. The Epic of Gilgamesh is the oldest known written story in history. It was written almost four thousand years ago. I can guarantee you that it wasn't presented with visual effects by Industrial Light and Magic and didn't come in THX sound. It still exists because it was a good story.

Think about it: Other than simply being authors, what do the writers of Gilgamesh, Homer of Iliad and Odyssey fame, William Shakespeare, Miguel de Cervantes, Mark Twain, Jules Verne, Mary Shelley and Charles Dickens have in common? They all lived, worked and wrote in an era with no special effects and their stories will all be remembered by generations who won't even know that Wonder Woman 1984 ever existed.



Robot by Artist Fish

Frankenstein has been put on film a bunch of times, but when it was written, there was no such thing as a video recording device. Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea was eventually adapted into a movie version, but not until decades after it was written. Romeo and Juliet was written before the founding of the United States. So was Don Quixote. The reason that you can still buy a copy of A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court a hundred and thirty-four years after it was written and couldn't get a ticket to The Flash a month after it was released in the theater is because ACYIKAC is a good story and The Flash reads like it was written by an amateur. A good story lasts. A pretty movie with no story behind it doesn't.

If these movie and television studios want people to spend money on their product, they're going to need to come up with some better stories. That's the key here, folks. It's not making your movie

look fancy. It's not substituting demographics for story. Marketing helps, but it's not the end all be all either.

Unless you're James Cameron. I don't get the success of the Avatar movies. They're not good and they succeeded. I'm wondering if perhaps Mr. Cameron hasn't sold his soul to Satan or something, because those movies are drek and they sold massive quantities of tickets. I freely admit that that guy is the exception to the rule.

That's not to say that there are no good new stories. Ghostbusters: Afterlife was amazing. Black Panther was even better. I loved all of the Harry Potter movies even if they weren't as good as the books. Game of Thrones, The Walking Dead, House of the Dragon, The Last of Us, and even The Big Bang Theory (admittedly more SF/F related than true SF/F) were all well written and entertaining.

And there are more ideas out there. There have been plenty of works reviewed by yours truly right here at Jimbo's that would make excellent movies.

Why yes, I am trying to get some truly talented authors paid exorbitant amounts of money. That's so they'll keep writing. I mean, honestly, the best way to encourage your favorite author to keep writing is flat out bribery. Give them money to write and they'll keep freaking writing. And, let's face it, Hollywood's ability to pay my favorite authors is far greater than mine.

Seriously Hollywood, do the right thing. Get some writers that are good at their craft. At the end of the day, they're every bit as important as your on screen talent. Your livelihood and my entertainment depend on it.

George C. Johnson Bio-Bibliography

by

Jon D. Swartz, Ph.D.

N3F Historian

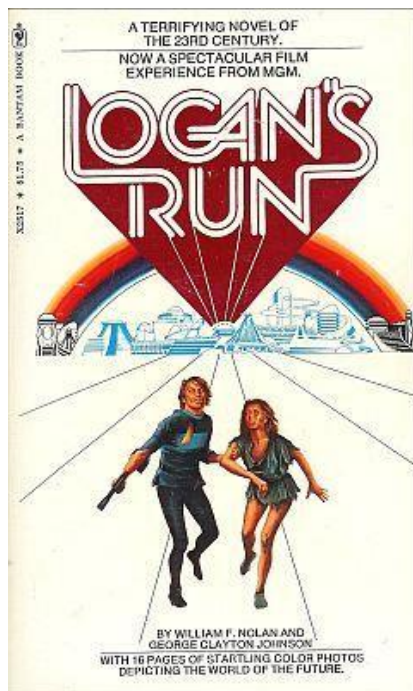


George Clayton Johnson (1929 – 2015) was a science fiction (SF) author, most famous for co-writing the novel Logan's Run with his friend and fellow author, William F. Nolan. Johnson is also remembered by many today for his work in television, writing screenplays for such popular genre series as The Twilight Zone and Star Trek.

In addition, he wrote the story on which the 1960 and 2001 films Ocean's Eleven were based (with Jack Golden Russell). Moreover, his stories have appeared in numerous anthologies (see below).

Personal Life

Johnson was born in a barn in Cheyenne, Wyoming, was forced to repeat the sixth grade, and dropped out of school entirely in the eighth grade.



He briefly served as a telegraph operator and draftsman in the United States Army, then enrolled in the Alabama Polytechnic Institute under the G. I. Bill. He quit school to return to his travels around the country, before finally settling down and becoming a full-time writer.

Johnson married Lola Brownstein on October 10, 1952, in Los Angeles, and they had two children together, Paul and Judy.

Johnson was a vocal advocate for the legalization of marijuana. In addition, he was a vegetarian.

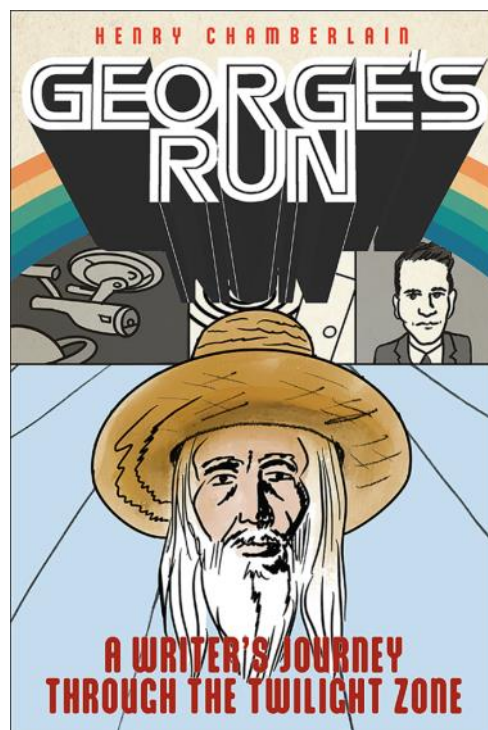
Along with his writing output, Johnson was instrumental in the early development of the San Diego Comic Con.

The Group

Johnson was a member of what Nolan called “The Group.” In addition to Nolan and Johnson, The Group included genre writers Ray Bradbury, Richard Matheson, Chuck Beaumont, Chad Oliver, John Tomerlin, and Jerry Sohl, among others.

At various times, genre critics have called The Group the Southern California Group of Writers, The Green Hand, and the California Sorcerers. The short fiction collection, *California Sorcery* (1999), co-edited by Nolan, contains a story by Johnson, “The Man Who Was Slugger Malone,” as well as stories by several other members of The Group: Nolan, Matheson, Oliver, Beaumont, Tomerlin, Sohl, and Bradbury.

Other Publications

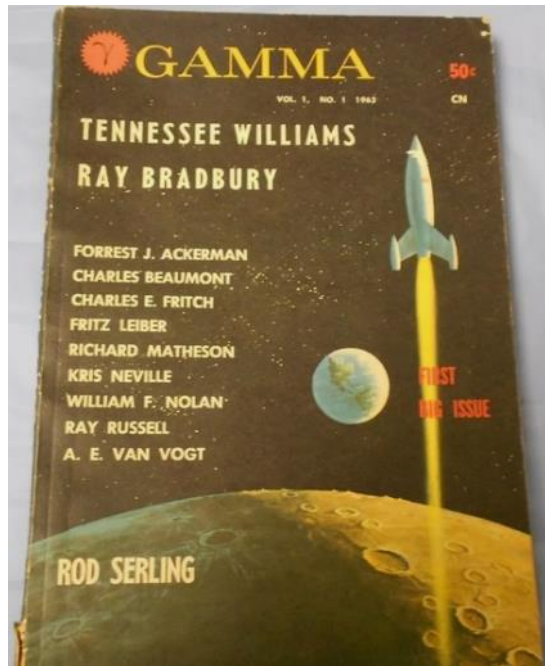


Along with other members of The Group, Johnson wrote stories for the genre magazine *Gamma* in the early 1960s. Nolan was the short-lived (1963 – 1965) prozine’s first editor.

All of Us Are Dying and Other Stories (Subterranean Press, 1999) is a collection of Johnson’s short fiction.

Twilight Zone Teleplays

“The Four of Us Are Dying” (1960)
 “Execution” (1960)
 “A Penny For Your Thoughts” (1961)
 “A Game of Pool” (1961)
 “Nothing in the Dark” (1962)
 “Kick the Can” (1962) [also featured in the 1983 movie *The Twilight Zone: The Movie*]
 “Ninety Years Without Slumbering” (1963) [as by Johnson Smith]



In 1960, Johnson submitted a story to The Twilight Zone called “Sea Change” which wasn't used on the program, but was later adapted for Johnson's 1994 comic book series Deepest Dimension Terror Anthology.

Scripts & Stories Written for the Twilight Zone by Johnson was published in 1997, and contained the following: All of Us Are Dying, Execution, A Penny for Your Thoughts, A Penny for Your Thoughts (teleplay), The Prime Mover, Nothing in the Dark, Nothing in the Dark (teleplay), A Game of Pool (teleplay), Kick-the-Can, Kick-the-Can (teleplay), and Ninety Years Without Slumbering.

Star Trek Story by Johnson

“The Man Trap” (1966) [the first aired episode of the Star Trek series].

Pseudonym

He occasionally used the pseudonym of Johnson Smith.

Some Concluding Comments

A biographical book about Johnson, *George's Run: A Writer's Journey Through the Twilight Zone* by Henry Chamberlain, was published in May, 2023.

Johnson was born on July 10, 1929, and died on December 25, 2015. According to his son, Paul, his father died of cancer at a veteran's hospital in North Hills, California.

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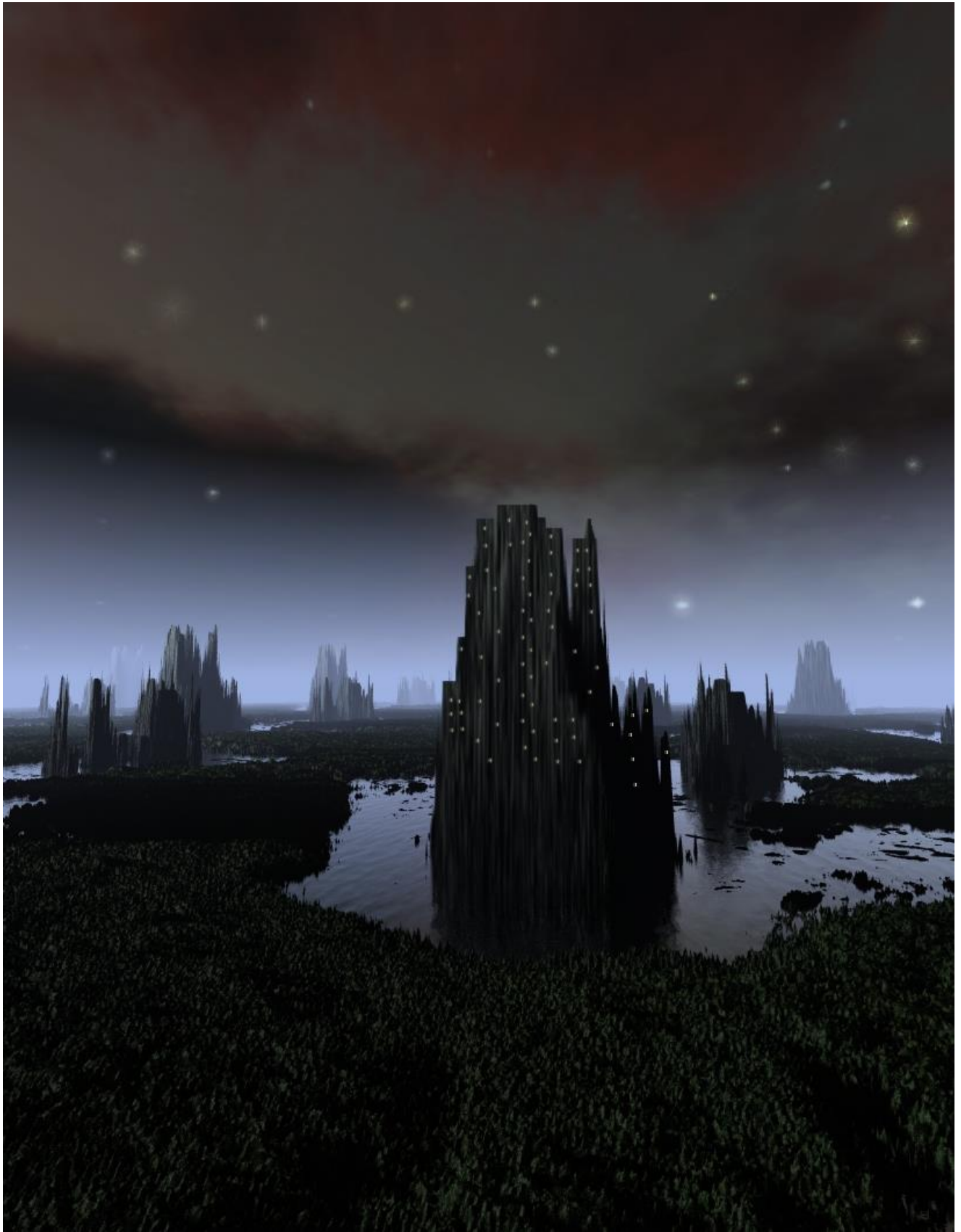
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Castles by Tiffany Gray