

ALEXIAD

(ΑΛΕΞΙΑΣ)

\$2.00

I found myself reflecting on how different my world today is so different from the way it was when I married Joe. In that world non digital technology was not yet antique. I was still using film cameras and would continue to do so several years into our marriage. Today I have a smartphone capable of telling me that it is a balmy 82 degrees in Singapore and which can play music for me if I have an app. This is quite tempting. I would enjoy this. However the Verizon technician warned me against having too many apps. That warning has kept me from downloading several I would like to have. I have the weather channel app because happenings in Mayfield and Rolling Fork, Mississippi have convinced me my life could depend on knowing if a dangerous storm is in the offing.

— Lisa

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The 149th Running of the Kentucky Derby will be **May 6, 2023**.
 The 148th Running of the Preakness Stakes will be **May 20, 2023**.
 The 154th Running of the Belmont Stakes will be **June 10, 2023**.

Printed on April 25, 2023
 Deadline is **June 10, 2023**

Reviewer’s Notes

I tried to read *Iron John: A Book About Men* by Robert Bly (1990). It got immensely boring, as Bly would quote a paragraph from the story and then derive half a dozen or more special secret meanings and expound on how they showed influence on the process of a boy becoming a man.

For a time I thought Bly had written the original story, but it is a real Grimms’ Fairy Tale (#136; German title *Eisenhans*). To spare you having to drag yourself through Bly’s tedious exposition, a prince has many adventures with the magic Iron John and then among the commonality, and becomes a better man for it.

People must have been desperate for some guide to becoming mature. This kicked off a huge movement of various books and groups. Perhaps the most insulting of them were Indian Clans, where men wanting to mature would go off into the woods, dress in breechclouts, and cry as they beat drums. (If they were abducted by another clan, which tortured them to allow them to valiantly sing their death-song it would be too much.)

Eventually this particular silliness died out. Newer and bluer sillinesses sprang up in their place. I wonder what real Native Americans (my late cousin George Gray Major, a Kiowa, for example) thought of it. That’s the sort of behavior that deserves the term “cultural appropriation”.

I have been listening to Coast to Coast and Ground Zero, radio talk shows with a paranormal trend. Those hosts seem to believe everything.

Which shows the efforts of skeptics as ineffectual. The various paranormalists who appear on those shows are confident they are right, and don’t need to prove it. That would seem less crucial were it not that the skeptics seem to have adopted the same attitude. This makes such matters not a quest for truth but a divergence of feelings. But the paranormalists seem more confident about it.

When CSICOP, the predecessor of CSI, was founded, it had scientists, journalists, and a few conjurers. Now CSI seems to consist of professional skeptics, some of them conjurers.

The Baker Street Irregulars began as a group of literary types. Now it consists of Sherlock Holmes specialists and fans. Such a pulling-in seems to have been on the skeptical program.

— Joe

RANDOM JOTTINGS

by Joe



Buy my books. (All available on Amazon.com for quite reasonable prices, except the Hugo-nominated *Heinlein's Children*, which can be bought from Advent Publishers, or from ReAnimus Press in electronic format.)

<https://www.AdventPub.com/1531>

Advent Publishers
P.O. Box 16143
Golden, CO 80402-6003

<https://reanimus.com/store>

— Advt.

On April 5 of this year I learn we can expect bad storms. That news ties my stomach in knots. I remember only too well the devastation in Mayfield, Kentucky and even more recently Rolling Fork Mississippi. The information I have is that we can expect them to last until late at night. My plans involve lots of hot caffeine. It is later in the day I learn we will only have a few hours of risk in late afternoon. This news does not really untie the knots in my stomach. A tornado only needs a few minutes to wreak all too much havoc in neighborhoods. Fortunately for us the worst of the storm passes through places other than where we were.

—Lisa

The Week had in an April 23 posting reports on the progress of *The Winds of Winter*, the next volume of Westeros. George R. R. Martin has been within a year of bringing it out ever since 2012.

“L.D.V./R.I.P.” (*The Patchin Review* #3), anyone?

MONARCHICAL NEWS

Under the *ley de memoria democratia* (Law of Democratic Memory), the Franco-era noble titles have been abolished as of October 2022. These include the Dukedom of Franco, awarded to the Caudillo's daughter Carmen

Polo, and the Señorate of Meirás, used by her son Francisco Franco.

Meanwhile, under the grant for the descent of the title, Prince Edward is now Duke of Edinburgh. His children by Sophie Rhys-Jones, Louise and James, are styled as children of a duke, not as princes.

YOU'RE SO VAIN

by Joe

There was a hybrid eclipse of the sun on **April 20, 2023**. This is an exceedingly rare kind of eclipse, being annular near the beginning and end, and total for the middle of its path. It was visible on the North West Cape of Australia, on Barrow Island, East Timor, and Damar Island and Paupa Province in Indonesia, with the maximum totality being 76 seconds at 9° 36' S 125° 48' E off the south coast of Timor. The eclipse is part of Saros 129, which began on October 3, 1103 and will end February 21, 2528. R-Lauraine Tutihasi and Mike Weasner took a cruise to see it.

The next solar eclipse will be an annular eclipse on **October 14, 2023**, visible in Oregon, California, Nevada, Arizona, Utah, New Mexico (including Roswell), and Texas. It will then pass over Yucatan in Mexico, Belize, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, Colombia, and Brazil. The longest period of annularity will be 5 minutes 17 seconds at 11° N 83° 6' W off the coast of Panama. The eclipse is part of Saros 134, which began June 22, 1248 and will end August 6, 2510.

NASA Eclipse website:
<https://eclipse.gsfc.nasa.gov/eclipse.html>

Other useful eclipse websites:

<http://www.hermit.org/Eclipse>

<http://www.eclipse.org.uk/>

MASQUERADE

Commentary by Joseph T Major

“. . . Yes, there was Edgar, whom I starved and hunted until I was tired of it: then I chased him up a back alley one night, and knocked out those annoying brains of his. . . .”

— James Branch Cabell, *Jurgen, a Comedy of Justice*

Edgar Allen Poe died too soon to investigate the Beale Cipher. You ask, “What is the Beale Cipher?”

The Beale Cipher is three separate messages, left by a Virginia adventurer who went west and disappeared. After some effort, the second of the three messages was decrypted. The message is enciphered in a book cipher, using the Declaration of Independence as its key. Book ciphers were not uncommon. The encipherer writes out the message, then replaces each letter

with the number of a word in the key that begins with this letter. “Porlock” in *The Valley of Fear* used a similar system, but with entire words from the key, forcing him to leave the key words, the name and location of the target, in the clear.

The message that had been decrypted sounds thrilling enough. A party of adventurers went out West in pursuit of profit, mined a substantial amount of gold and silver, and not trusting banks returned to Virginia to conceal it. One of the other messagers gives the location of the treasure cache, the other lists the next of kin of the adventurers.

At the same time it seems peculiar. The information given is a “teaser” — enough information to get the finder interested, but not enough to be useful. Attempts to decrypt the other two messages, some of which have involved massive computer analysis, have not produced anything.

Imagine the man who challenged people to send him code messages (monoalphabetic substitutions, but the art was not then that developed) for decryption, and who wrote “Maelzel's Chess Player”, uncovering a fraudulent “automaton chess player” falling eagerly upon this cryptogram.

This has not stopped people from digging up bits of Bedford County Virginia.

This seems to be a practical joke aimed at making money. The original book with the texts, which came out in 1885, cost 50¢, which was good money in those days. Later treasure hunt works were for real, but more cryptic.

The first notorious one was *Masquerade* (1979) by Kit Williams. In an elaborate and intricately illustrated way, Williams tells the story of Jack Hare, who was charged with carrying a gift from the Moon to the Sun, lost it, and had to go find it. The scenes are exotic and richly portrayed.

And if a reader uncovered the directions hidden in the drawings, he could find a figure of a golden hare, buried at a location cryptically indicated in those drawings. The quest for the treasure became notorious, with excavations all over England. In March of 1982 a man calling himself Ken Thomas wrote Williams to inform him of the results. Thomas had decrypted the clues and followed them to the location where the hare had been concealed.

The popularity of the quest for the golden hare provoked other such treasure hunts. In the year the golden hare was found, Byron Preiss had published *The Secret*. This was a book with twelve poems and twelve illustrations. They could be put together to find directions to where treasure boxes were buried. Each finder of a box would receive a jewel.

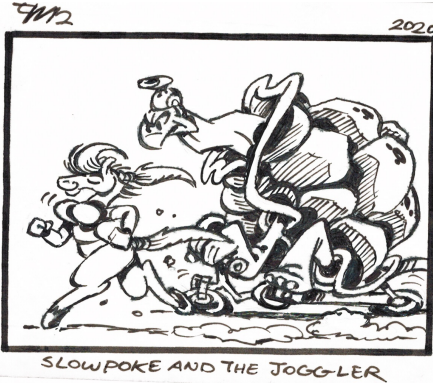
Three of the twelve treasure boxes have been found. But . . .

Preiss died in 2005, without leaving any listing of where the boxes could be found. If he had told his publishers, the information was lost in reorganization. Given the ways of

urbanization, the boxes might be destroyed or irretrievably buried.

Such a quest can have issues. In 2010, Vietnam veteran Forrest Fenn buried a chest with gold and jewels. He then published a book, *The Thrill of the Chase: A Memoir* which contained poems that had clues to the location of the chest.

The subsequent treasure hunt had problems. Five people died during the search. Several others were arrested for digging in protected locations, using metal detectors on federal property, and the like. In 2020, after Fenn's death, journalist and medical student Jack Stuef revealed that he had found the chest and sold part of the hoard for \$1.3 million. (He refused to reveal where the chest was, out of privacy concerns.)



What is obvious to one may be incomprehensible to another. Such clues are influenced by the background of the compiler; a place may have some special meaning because of an association with a obscure coincidence or lifetime event.

And things change. Watching Josh Gates (and his heroic unsung camera crew) follow a treasure hunter as he explains and demonstrates his solution to a clue from *The Secret* is a reminder of how much the urban landscape changes. As Rocky used to say to Bullwinkle, "That trick never works," as yet another solution failed. At least Josh has a job.

And then, in December 1988, it turned out that the "discovery" of the golden hare had been a hoax. A woman who had been Kit Williams's girlfriend had left him and passed on the location of the hare to her new boyfriend. After exploring the area and not finding it, he sent a drawing of the area to Williams, who awarded him the prize. Which turned out to have been dug up and ignored by two other treasure hunters.

DRAGONS AND MOTHS

Review by Joseph T Major of
THE JACK VANCE TREASURY
(2013; Subterranean Press (Kindle); \$4.99)
Edited by Terry Dowling and
Jonathan Strahan

John Holbrook "Jack" Vance had an interesting life, but more than that he was an interesting author. He was remarkably skilled at creating strange and exotic worlds, and a good enough writer to tell different stories set in those exotic places.

This collection has been meticulously prepared. Each story is accompanied by a short essay by Vance describing his writing of the story.

In addition, there is an appreciative introduction by George R. R. Martin, giving his admiration of Vance. This is followed by a foreword by the editors, describing Vance's skills and mentioning the unfinished, or even merely conceived, works that were found among his papers after his death. The preparation for a fourth Alastor novel that was never written tantalizes the soul.

The stories include his Hugo-winning "The Dragon Masters" (*Galaxy*, August 1962), about a last surviving outpost of humanity dealing with the galactic conquerors, and "The Last Castle" (*Galaxy*, April 1966), a story of the fall of a civilization.

Of his series, there is "Liane the Wayfarer", recounting the strange encounter of a rogue who is out-rogued, and "Guyal of Sferre", an adventurer who finds knowledge and love, from *The Dying Earth* (1950). Cugel the Clever, another rogue whose plans often don't work out, is represented by "The Overworld" from *Eyes of the Overworld* (1966). Magnus Ridolph, the investigator with no financial sense worth mentioning, is represented by "The Kokod Warriors" (*Thrilling Wonder Stories*, October 1952).

Of stand-alone stories the most striking is "The Moon Moth" (*Galaxy*, August 1961), which highlights Vance's skills. It presents an engaging tale of detection (incidentally, Vance also wrote detective novels) set in a different and exotic society. He could tell a story set in a different world.

UP UP AND AWAY

Review by Joseph T Major of
SUPERMAN SMASHES THE KLAN
(2020; DC Comics;
ISBN 978-1779504210; \$16.99;
2020; DC (Kindle); \$11.87)
by Gene Luen Yang
Illustrations by Gurihiru

The Second World War is over and the Lee family is coming to Metropolis. Dr. Lee has a new job. His son Tommy joins a local baseball team, while his shy daughter struggles to accommodate.

However, a secretive organization called The Klan of the Fiery Cross rallies to purge the city of gooks. This is not "welcome to your new city" day.

But meanwhile, Metropolis's famed superhero fights a super villain who brazenly proclaims his allegiance to the losers. However, his outfit has under the swastika talisman a

strange glowing green stone — which makes Superman feel weak, and gives Clark Kent some uncomfortable days at work at the *Daily Planet*.

Nevertheless, he perseveres. Tommy is kidnapped and nearly drowned by hostile locals. His sister tries to speak up. And the sinister plans of the Klan of the Fiery Cross are revealed . . .

Yang and Gurihiru have brilliantly realized the rich canonical background of the Superman story. We see Jor-El and Lara dispatching their child to a safe place to survive the destruction of their homeworld, and Jonathan and Martha Kent finding a orphaned child. Clark grows up, discovers he is different, and resolves to live a somewhat normal life while using his super powers to protect his refuge. And Perry White, Jimmy Olsen, and above all Lois Lane work with their colleague to report the news.

This is an adaptation of a story from the *Adventures of Superman* radio program. Having fought Nazi super-villains during the war, Supes had to have something to do. So he took on a thinly-veiled KKK. (Much of the background had been provided by KKK infiltrating journalist Stetson Kennedy. The author did his homework, as may be seen by a reference to recruiters receiving most of the initiation fee paid by their recruits.)

They don't say, "Truth, Justice, and the American Way" any longer. This shows what the American Way *should be*.

SHIPWRECK

Review by Joseph T Major of
**THE SHIP BENEATH THE ICE:
The Discovery of Shackleton's
Endurance**
(2023; Mariner Books;
ISBN 978-0063297401; \$35.00;
2023; Mariner Books (Kindle); \$15.99)
by Mensun Bound

"The story that follows is true."

— Alfred Lansing, *Endurance*

Sir Ernest Shackleton called the Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition the last great venture of exploration. Finding the sunken *Endurance* is perhaps the last great venture of maritime archaeology.

For the *Endurance* is under an Antarctic ice pack. The climate, with storms and cold, is an additional hazard, and then there is always the chance of running into an iceberg and following the *Endurance* to the sea floor.

Monsun gives a day by day description of the progress of each expedition, recounting the efforts, the careful investigation, the time pressure the expedition was under, and other incidents. He includes some quite incisive comments about the Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition, discussing such matters as the four members who did not receive the Polar Medal.

And finally, they found the *Endurance*, on the bottom of the sea. The ship is well-preserved, due to such matters as the extreme

cold, which prevents the wood-consuming teredo worm from getting hold.

There will be no Dirk Pitt novel *Raise the Endurance*, with results that vanish by the beginning of the next book, and a helpful tip by a character “coincidentally” named Clive Cussler. One hopes, anyhow. The location of the wreck is kept secret, and it has been declared a memorial. (Not that this has not stopped wreckers from stripping metal from the memorialized sunken warships around the world.)

But we have pictures of a ship of the heroic age of Antarctic exploration, once lost, now found, and preserved by the lovely cold and dark.

OF SPIES AND STRATEGEMS

Review by Joseph T Major of
**THE DIRTY TRICKS DEPARTMENT:
Stanley Lovell, the OSS, and the
Masterminds of World War II Secret
Warfare**

(2023; St Martin's Press;
ISBN 978-1250280249; \$29.99;
2023; St. Martin's Press (Kindle); \$14.99)
by John Lisle

Lisle had one advantage. The first part of this book is based very heavily on Stanley Lovell's own memoirs: *Of Spies and Strategems* (1964). Lovell describes, and Lisle fills in some details, the intricate and befuddling technological tricks the OSS Research and Development Branch devised for use in the covert war. It is interesting to compare them with Clayton Hutton's hidden gadgets described in his *Official Secret* (1961). Apparently Lovell and Hutton never worked together.

Even though some of them slipped up. There were many innovations that did not work out. Animal bombs (the bat bombs were the most infamous) failed (and would be classified as animal cruelty). Others had been done: Lovell and Lisle expound proudly on the creation of bombs that resembled chunks of coal, seemingly unaware that the South used them during the War of the Rebellion (or whatever we have to call it now).

Lisle also describes in rich and often agonizing detail the sufferings of OSS agents caught by the Gestapo. Strangely enough, there seems to be no record of Lovell's items actually being used.

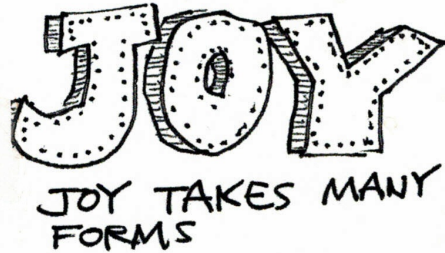
While Lovell was writing his memoirs, the CIA was using similar items against opponents of the U.S. Lisle touches on the absurd and ineffective efforts against Fidel Castro, which would be revealed by the Church Commission. He might have mentioned the effort to make Buddhists in Vietnam think there was a Second Coming.

This is an intriguing discussion of American technological ingenuity. Unfortunately, it was not tempered with judgment, creating intricate, unfeasible, and even perhaps im-

moral weapons. Much of this effort seemed to be on the level of boys tying firecrackers to frogs and watching them blow up.

The Joy of High Tech

by Rodford Edmiston



Being the occasionally interesting ramblings of a major-league technophile.

Please note that while I am an engineer (BSCE) and do my research, I am not a professional in this field. Do not take anything here as gospel; check the facts I give. If you find a mistake, please let me know about it.

On a Discord channel where I'm a member there recently was a discussion of what members of the channel considered the most important invention of the 20th Century. I had to point out that most of the things others had nominated (the automobile, air conditioning, vacuum tubes (the simplest tube, a diode was created in 1904, but the effect of electron manipulation using grids in a vacuum had been noted years before), even programmable computers (see the work of Babbage and Lovelace; they were limited to mechanical instrumentality but still developed programming)) actually had roots in the 19th Century or earlier. Even many of those things which were newly created in the 20th Century had been thought of before that.

As an example, the first antibiotics were sulfa drugs (first used in 1932) and specifics. (The arguably most famous of specifics is Salvarsan, which was first used around 1910. The most common modern descendant of specifics is cancer chemotherapy.) However, both of these groups of substances were presaged by older medications, some of them folk remedies. The idea of an antibiotic — something which attacked infections while leaving the larger organism largely unaffected — had already been around for a good while by the time the 20th Century dawned.

The assembly line was greatly improved by Henry Ford, but had already been in use for decades before he started building automobiles. Of course, the real key to mass production is reproducibility. That is, the ability to churn out identical parts, any of which can be used in assembling the finished product, and which can be interchanged for repairs. As mentioned in a

previous JOHT column, Ford's success in mass producing cheap, identical automobiles was in large part due his use of Johansson gauges, which date back to 1896. These tools made consistent measuring easy. However, reproducible, identical mass quantities of parts was already an old concept in manufacturing, well before this.

The idea of using identical, interchangeable parts had been around for centuries (sailing ships needed so many sets of block and tackle that the blocks were made in standard sizes, on pantographic lathes controlled by a pattern; this is the same way many long gun stocks have been made for centuries, especially for the military). Eli Whitney was a prolific inventor, and had many things besides the cotton gin to his credit. For example, early in the Nineteenth Century he had a firearms business. He tried to make his guns with standardized, interchangeable parts but didn't quite succeed. His son took over the business and did succeed. Such reproducibility was essential to the Industrial Revolution. By the end of that century even tiny watch screws were being turned out in identical thousands.

On and on the list goes. To reiterate, most of the inventions people consider to be from the Twentieth Century are actually older, or at least were based on something created earlier. They simply became more common or better known in that span of time. However, the Twentieth Century does have its own set of important inventions.

My nomination for the single most important invention of the 20th Century is the cavity magnetron. Not only did this 1940 development by researchers at the University of Birmingham make possible microwave-frequency radar (improving Allied night and bad weather bombing and fighter intercepts during WWII) but it also made possible microwave communications. (This was used during the War but really took off later.) As well as microwave ovens.

Before this invention, microwaves had been produced but were mainly limited to laboratory curiosities. Because vacuum tubes just don't work well at such short wavelengths. The cavity magnetron made possible the creation of powerful microwave emissions. This in turn made possible the creation of smaller, higher-resolution radars. As well as microwave communication towers.

Because of their short wavelengths microwaves (the microwave band is arbitrarily set at 300 MegaHertz to 300 GigaHertz (1 m - 1 mm wavelength) of the electromagnetic spectrum; what I'm talking about is towards the shorter wavelength portion of that) can be transmitted and received with antennae which are small with respect to those used for longer wavelengths. This small wavelength also results in higher-resolution in radar and higher information density in communications. Microwave towers are still used for point-to-point communication in areas where optical cables and satellite links are contraindicated. (Why tow-

ers? Because microwaves travel in nearly straight lines through the Earth's atmosphere. The higher your source the further away your receiver can be situated.) Because they are very directional, the same frequencies can be used by multiple pieces of adjacent equipment without interfering with each other. However, there *is* interference. Natural interference. Determining the source of this existing noise led to a major discovery.

Radio telescopes have been around since Karl Jansky, an engineer with Bell Telephone Laboratories, built one in 1932. However, up into the Sixties these listened mostly to short wave and long wave emissions. It was research into interference with satellite communications — microwave uplinks and downlinks — which led to the discovery that there was a low-level microwave "hiss" present in all parts of the sky where the researchers looked, at a certain very narrow frequency range. This was eventually recognized as the faint, ancient echo of the Big Bang. This realization led to the development of the microwave radio telescope and confirmation of the Big Bang theory of the origin of the universe. It also showed us things about the universe we didn't even know to look for before this investigation and its results.

The Holmdel Horn is a large, highly directional microwave receiver that was used as a satellite communication antenna and radio telescope during the 1960s at Bell Telephone Laboratories (them again). In 1964 Arno Penzias and Robert Wilson were trying to find the source of a mysterious hiss in the horn's reception at a microwave wavelength of 7.35 centimeters. The noise wasn't thermal; the equipment was cooled with liquid helium, specifically to prevent that source of interference. The hiss was the same in all directions of the sky, regardless of time of day or night. They tried various measures to eliminate the noise, including putting metal tape over the rivet heads. This resulted in no reduction in the noise. For a time they thought the hiss might be caused by pigeon droppings in the horn. However, cleaning it caused no improvement. They soon concluded that the noise was natural. Was it caused by something in the Earth's upper atmosphere, or perhaps its magnetosphere? Was it solar, or perhaps even galactic? It turned out to come from much further away and back in time than any of those sources.

The existence of this noise had actually been predicted in the 1940s, as one sign of the Big Bang. In fact, astrophysicists at Princeton University — just 40 miles away from the antenna — had recently worked out the details of what characteristics this residual radiation would have and what equipment would be needed to detect it. Jim Peebles was actually preparing a paper on the potential of discovering this remnant radiation of the Big Bang, based on that work. When told of this paper by someone who had seen a prerelease version, Penzias knew that what he and Wilson

were detecting was this predicted echo of the Big Bang. Penzias immediately contacted Robert H. Dicke and his people at Princeton, who had done the work Peebles was reporting. Dicke, Penzias, and Wilson published their subsequent results jointly.

Though the equipment of Penzias and Wilson wasn't sensitive enough to detect any variance (the signal is, indeed, remarkably homogeneous, as predicted) later surveys found minor variations in this microwave background. This has told us much about the origin and current state of the universe.

How important was this discovery (actually, confirmation of a prediction)? In 1978 Penzias and Wilson jointly received the Nobel Prize in Physics for their work. Which has been called the most important development in the human understanding of the cosmos since the acceptance in the Nineteen Twenties of Edwin Hubble's discovery that the universe was expanding. Today, the Holmdel Horn antenna, the associated and attached hut and the directable mount those are on are a National Historic Monument.

I do have other nominations for the most important invention of the 20th Century. Not all are obvious. As just one example, by one estimate, people who use seat belts when they drive add on average 6 months to their lives.

The atom bomb is a purely Twentieth Century invention. Radioactivity was not even officially described until the work of Antoine Henri Becquerel in 1896, though there were several near-misses before this. Most of those involved work with uranium salts and photographic plates. (Before the discovery of radioactivity, uranium was mostly known for the propensity of the pure metal to spontaneously catch fire just sitting on a shelf. Heavy metals can have weird chemical and physical properties.) Even after radioactivity was formally accepted as a valid phenomenon, where the energy came from was a mystery. The idea that mass and energy are two phases of the same thing had to wait a few years for Einstein and his famous $E=MC^2$. Even then, nuclear fission due to chain reactions was not confirmed until 1938. So, creating a rapidly runaway (read: explosive) chain reaction so early was a major feat.

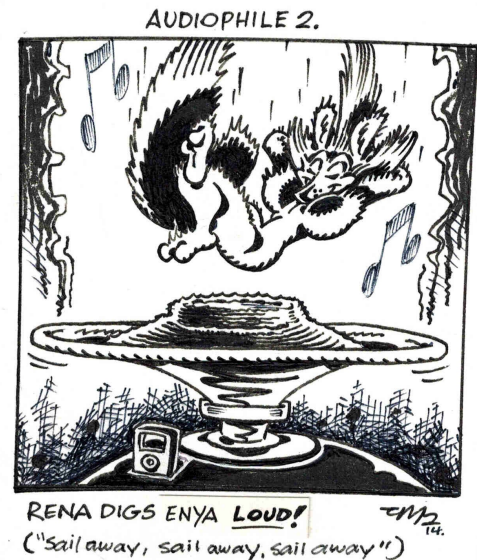
The Hubble Space Telescope has shown us many things we didn't anticipate, as well as adding detail to our knowledge of familiar objects. The James Webb space telescope has also done both. So have multiple other telescope probes located off the Earth. Most of them by looking at parts of the electromagnetic spectrum well outside the narrow, visible portion. The very idea of putting a telescope above the atmosphere dates back to long before either instrument was even planned. There is a good reason observatories are usually placed on mountains. Putting one completely above the atmosphere is an obvious next step. However, there is more to be gained from this than simply removing the distortions caused by air currents and temperature bands. The air acts as a filter, actually stopping much of the electromagnetic radiation in space from reaching us. While this

protection is of great value to life on Earth it does remove an important source of information about the greater cosmos.

However, microwaves are barely affected by the atmosphere. Not only are terrestrial microwave frequency radio telescopes still being built, they keep getting bigger, to increase sensitivity and improve resolution. The late, famous Arecibo dish was sensitive at microwave frequencies. As is the similar — though larger — Chinese dish. The Atacama Large Millimeter/Submillimeter Array is primarily intended to work at microwave and shorter radio wavelengths. Like most large radio telescopes this uses multiple antennae spaced well apart to improve resolution. (As with optical telescopes, the larger the aperture — even if synthesized by using multiple, widely-spaced detectors — the more detail which can be seen.) Since radio (and IR, the forte of the JWST) tends to penetrate gas and dust much better than do optical wavelengths, these frequencies allow us to gather information about things which are literally unseen by optical telescopes, no matter how large.

However, none of those existed in 1964, when Penzias and Wilson were trying to find the source of a mysterious noise in satellite communications. Which, in turn, were made possible by the cavity magnetron.

Besides, don't you like being able to quickly reheat leftovers?



NEBULA AWARD FINALISTS

Novel

Legends & Lattes, Travis Baldree (Cryptid; Tor Books)

Spear, Nicola Griffith (Tordotcom Publishing)

Nettle and Bone, T. Kingfisher (Tor Books; Titan UK)

Babel, Or the Necessity of Violence: An Arcane History of the Oxford Translators' Revolution, R.F. Kuang (Harper Voyager US; Harper Voyager UK)
Nona the Ninth, Tamsyn Muir (Tordotcom Publishing)
The Mountain in the Sea, Ray Nayler (MCD; Weidenfeld & Nicolson)

Novella

A Prayer for the Crown-Shy, Becky Chambers (Tordotcom Publishing)
 "Bishop's Opening," R.S.A. Garcia (*Clarkesworld* 1/22)
I Never Liked You Anyway, Jordan Kurella (Vernacular)
Even Though I Knew the End, C.L. Polk (Tordotcom Publishing)
High Times in the Low Parliament, Kelly Robson (Tordotcom Publishing)

Novellette

"If You Find Yourself Speaking to God, Address God with the Informal You," John Chu (*Uncanny* 7-8/22)
 "Two Hands, Wrapped in Gold," S.B. Divya (*Uncanny* 5-6/22)
 "Murder by Pixel: Crime and Responsibility in the Digital Darkness," S.L. Huang (*Clarkesworld* 12/22)
 "A Dream of Electric Mothers," Wole Talabi (*Africa Risen: A New Era of Speculative Fiction*)
 "The Prince of Salt and the Ocean's Bargain," Natalia Theodoridou (*Uncanny* 9/22)
 "We Built This City," Marie Vibbert (*Clarkesworld* 6/22)

Short Story

"Destiny Delayed," Oghenechovwe Donald Ekpeki (*Asimov's* 5-6/22)
 "Give Me English," Ai Jiang (*F&SF* 5-6/22)
 "Rabbit Test," Samantha Mills (*Uncanny* 11-12/22)
 "Douen," Suzan Palumbo (*The Dark* 3/22)
 "Dick Pig," Ian Muneshwar (*Nightmare* 1/22)
 "D.I.Y.," John Wiswell (Tor.com 8/24/22)

Andre Norton Nebula Award for Middle Grade and Young Adult Fiction

Ruby Finley vs. the Interstellar Invasion, K. Tempest Bradford (Farrar, Straus & Giroux)
The Scratch Daughters, H. A. Clarke (Erewhon)
The Mirrorwood, Deva Fagan (Atheneum)
The Many Half-Lived Lives of Sam Sylvester, Maya MacGregor (Astra Young Readers)
Every Bird a Prince, Jenn Reese (Henry

Holt)

Ray Bradbury Nebula Award for Outstanding Dramatic Presentation

Andor: "One Way Out," Beau Willimon (Lucasfilm, Disney+)
Everything Everywhere All at Once, Dan Kwan, Daniel Scheinert (A24, AGBO, IAC Films)
Nope, Jordan Peele (Universal Pictures)
Our Flag Means Death, (Dive, HBO Max)
The Sandman: Season 1, (DC Entertainment, Netflix)
Severance, (Endeavor Content, Red Hour Films, Apple TV+)

Game Writing

Elden Ring, Hidetaka Miyazaki, George R.R. Martin (FromSoftware, Bandai Namco)
Horizon Forbidden West, Ben McCaw, Anna Kitain (Guerilla Games, Sony Interactive Entertainment)
Journeys through the Radiant Citadel, (Wizards of the Coast: Dungeons & Dragons 5th Ed.)
Pentiment, (Obsidian Entertainment, Xbox Game Studios)
Stray, (BlueTwelve Studio, Annapurna Interactive)
Vampire: The Masquerade: "Sins of the Sires," Natalia Theodoridou (Choice of Games, Paradox Interactive)



FAAN AWARDS

Best Personalzine: *This Here* by Nic Farey

Best Letter Hack: Jerry Kaufman

Best Fan Artist: Ulrika O'Brien

Best Fanzine Cover: *Beam* by Alan White

Best Fan Writer: Tie: Justin E.A. Busch & Nic Farey

Best Special Publication: *1957 The First British Worldcon*

Corflu Lifetime Achievement Award: Rob Hansen

WORLDCON BIDS

2025
 Seattle
 Worldcon Seattle 2025
 August 13-17, 2025

2026
 Los Angeles

Cairo, Egypt
 PharaohCon
 September 1-5, 2026

2027
 Tel Aviv
 August 2027

2028
 Brisbane, Australia
 Mid-August 2028
<https://australia2025.com/>

Kampala, Uganda
 Kamcon: The 86th World Science Fiction Convention
 August 23-27, 2028
<https://kamcon.org/>

2029
 Dublin
<http://dublin2029.ie>

2031
 Texas
<https://alamo-sf.org/>

NASFiC BIDS

2024
 Buffalo, NY
<https://buffalonasfic2024.org/>

WORLDCON

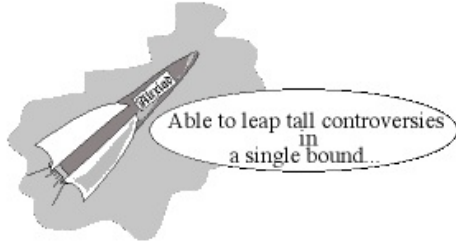
2023
 Chengdu
 Year of the Water Rabbit
 October 18-22, 2023
 "6th International SF Convention"
<http://en.chengduworldcon.com/>

2024
 Glasgow
 August 8-12, 2024
<http://glasgow2024.org/>

NASFiC

2023
 Winnipeg
 Pemmi-con 2023
 July 20-23, 2023
<https://main.winnipegin2023.ca/>

Letters, we get letters



From: **AL du Pisani** February 28, 2023
du.pisani@kilos40.co.za

I have been trying to write this letter since early January, but got lost in the weeds every time.

Important news – I have moved away from my house in Johannesburg. After 32 years it was over. House sold, Moved down to the Southern Cape coast, and am currently living in the family holiday shack – The one my grandmother bought 70 odd years ago.

I heard that in the UK you get three days leave to recover from a move — I am at the age where I needed that, but thought I could bull through.

I am slowly acclimatising to life away from the big city. Just hope I can continue to work from home for the next couple of years, until I have to retire.

The other big thing is that since 10 September 2022, Eskom has been unable to provide enough electricity to the country, and we have to go without for anything between 2 and 10 hours per day – usually split so that we are not without electricity for more than 4 hours at a stretch.

We have wonderful tools that assist us in planning our days – but the end result is that we are without electricity for anything between 2 and 10 hours, and trying to live with it.

The government had 25 years to deal with the problem – More and more people think it is time to get rid of the government. Unfortunately, the way the electoral system is set up, is for coalitions to form. And we do not have a lot of long term stable coalitions governing cities or anything else, for the matter.

It does look if we are in a worldwide unstable and unserious time. I hope we do not end up in a dystopia.

In Germany they have just shut down their last nuclear power plant. And they have problems with forming coalitions, too.

—JTM

From: **Darrell Schweitzer** March 2, 2023
darrells@comcast.net

I think you have a typo on page 1. I think you mean that we live in a declining world that OUR betters (i.e. the World War II generation) built. Our fathers, indeed, came out of the Great Depression and left the world in a better condition than they found it. How many generations can claim to have done the same?

I don't feel I have the wisdom to tell other people how to live their own lives. I am not trans. No none in my family is trans. I can think of four trans people among my friends or acquaintances, all of them in their sixties or seventies, so it isn't just a recent fad. I would agree that it is ridiculous to push this stuff on gradeschool kids, who don't know what sex is about yet, but then most reports of such things happening come from far-right propaganda sources, so I am not sure how much of it is real. I do know somebody whose twenty-something "son" is now her daughter. Gender dysphoria is real. Not being a medical or psychiatric expert, I cannot tell you how common it is, or if there is a rush to treatment based on hasty diagnoses. I did see something in the news recently about a GOP legislator who was trying to simply ban trans people altogether, i.e. outlaw all such treatments, for everybody, regardless of age. Thus "trans" becomes the new pink triangle. I think many in the GOP would like to eliminate such people altogether, either by locking them all up in asylums or by killing them outright. I saw something on my news feed the other day about an far-right commentator who argued this cannot be called genocide because trans people are all fakes and do not really exist.

What do you think about gender transition treatments for children less than a year old?

As for vaccines, how many polio or small-pox cases have we had of late? The Covid vaccine was a limited success, but the result is that it is now far less likely that a vaccinated person will get seriously ill, even if they get the disease. This has had a huge impact on society, which is why we are able to go to science fiction conventions again, even if we are expected to wear masks and one or two people always seem to test positive afterwards. There are still people dying, but not nearly as many as before, and a lot of them are anti-vaxxers, i.e. voluntary disease carriers, who are considerably less worth our sympathy.

The early 1970s, were, if you will count, fifty years ago. Since then, as all of us have been able to observe, the climate has gotten steadily warmer, so that just about every year is the hottest on record, as I am sure 2023 will be, even as climate catastrophes wreck billions of dollars' worth of damage. Right now, Philadelphia is having a snow-free winter. On warm days in February I could see people out in shorts and sandals. Just imagine what July will be like. We are, admittedly, seeing some bizarre patterns that I did not expect, like Alaska sometimes being warmer than Texas, but then I didn't do very well in the meteorology course I had

in college. We already have climate refugees within the United States, in Alaska, as some coast villages have gone under. And I have seen fish swimming in the streets of Miami on the evening news.

I will agree with Taras that some of Heinlein will survive and some will not. The best way to salvage Heinlein's reputation, I think, would be to eliminate *Sixth Column* a.k.a. *The Day After Tomorrow* because it is a pulp-style Yellow Peril novel of the sort that *Argosy* used to run a couple times a year in the late '30s and which was the plot of every issue of *Operator 5*. Then eliminate *Podkayne, Farnham's Freehold*, and everything after *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress* except maybe *Friday*. Go back to the shorter, edited editions wherever possible. The edited versions of *The Puppet Masters* and *Stranger in a Strange Land* are much superior. It is of course only natural that some of any writer's works fall by the wayside, and when they don't, as in the case of super-canonical writers like Hemingway or Poe or Lovecraft, sometimes you wish that they would. This is also the case with Heinlein. In the long run maybe half to a third of his work may be of interest to the next generation. He may be not unlike James Branch Cabell (a writer who notably influenced him), who wrote a whole shelf of books, of which six or seven may be worth reading today. That is still far better than none.

As for *Sixth Column/The Day After Tomorrow*, that genre has a long ancestry. There was Homer *Leads the Valor of Ignorance* (1909) which, like Chesney's *The Battle of Dorking* (1871) sought to provoke better preparations for defense (at least Sir George didn't have to pile on the racist tropes).

Page 3. One Nitpicking comment about that final battle in *The Hour of the Dragon*. If you are fighting from a position from which there is no retreat, then the only option is to win. This calls to mind Suetonius Paulus vs. Boudicca's Britons. In the final battle, the badly outnumbered Romans placed themselves in a V-shaped valley, from which there was no retreat, with hilly forests on either side. Before them, the Britons had assembled on a broad plain. The Britons were so confident of an easy victory that they lined up their families and wagons behind them, so the non-combatants could watch the fun. (Rather like the spectators at First Bull Run.) If the Romans had lost, they would have been massacred. But the advantage of this position was that three sides were protected by the terrain and only one side faced the enemy. If the Britons could have gotten around behind them, the result would have been very different, but the same features that precluded a Roman retreat precluded a rear attack. It was therefore a strong defensive position, but to win and survive, every Roman

soldier knew that the only way out was forward, through the Britons. With superior discipline and tactics, that is precisely where they went. The Romans attacked in wedge formations so that the Britons were too crowded to use their weapons effectively, and as they were pushed back, they crashed into the spectators. The result was an enormously lopsided massacre of the Britons, and the war ended right there.

Page 4, mystery cliché #5. The murder solved by an exotic (or meddlesome) but talented amateur. I heard about a Mystery Writers of America banquet where they had a real homicide detective as a speaker. Someone asked him if he had ever encountered such a know-it-all amateur in real life. He said, "Yes, but unfortunately she did it."

I thought of a eighth such point: Has there ever been a crime solved by knowledge of some arcane item of trivia?

One other comment on general fandom and fanzines. In the 1980s, which was, if you will count, forty years ago, it was discovered (by me, going through a box of fanzines at a Midwestcon) that the Philadelphia Science Fiction Society (a surviving chapter of the original Gernsback Science Fiction League) had had a fanzine in the 1940s called *Variant*. I brought home two or three copies and showed them around. No one had known about this or ever mentioned it, although we knew some of the people mentioned in those issues of *Variant*. John Betancourt decided to revive the zine, now called *New Variant*. There were two issues. He and I and some outsiders filled the pages, but there was absolutely NO interest from within the club. John finally stood up in a meeting and announced that if he did not receive at least one letter of comment from someone in the membership within a month he was shutting the zine down. No one seemed to even know what he was talking about, and that was the end of the PSFS fanzine. These were intelligent and enthusiastic science-fiction fans, many of whom are still active in the club and in conventions, but they'd just never had any experience with fanzines or fanzine culture and did not respond to the opportunity. I think the difference was that unlike the fans of yore, most of them were not would-be writers.

Which was the principal content of fanzines at that point. That was the age of fanfic, often slash.

—JTM

From: **Garth Spencer** March 4, 2023
hrothgarweems@gmail.com

About the Second World War and the passing of its survivors: You may already know my own reasons for remembering the

war, despite being born twelve years after it was over. For one thing, my grandfather serving in the Canadian Navy, shepherding convoys through the North Atlantic while playing dodg'em with U-boats; for another thing, my father serving as a fireman in London, during the Blitz. It took a while for me to realize that the survivors of that decade sought to normalize their world as much as they could, and probably the survivors of the first World War reacted in the same way.



About your books: When I checked out your link to Advent Publishers, I learned that they were not, in fact, publishers of fanzine volumes such as *All Our Yesterdays* or *A Wealth of Fable*. I guess I had somehow confused them with NESFA Press. Strange, that.

So, lacking a market, I have been vacillating as to whether to self-publish a volume of Canadian fanhistory, if I can ever get it finished, or whether to produce it as a set of Web pages, linked to each other when one region's story links to another region.

About Laur Flom and the politically-correct trend of expunging ungoodthinks: While noting that this isn't what "woke" means — yes, I've noticed this trend, and yes, it's silly. I try to cultivate a sense of humour about these things, on the theory that they pass. We shall see if that theory is correct.

About *The Way of the Sword-Worlds*: Interesting to see how people are elaborating the story universes of H. Beam Piper, who is probably as politically incorrect as any. I have to wonder whether Haggard and Kipling will come back into fashion in another twenty or forty years.

About the *Nitpicker's Guide to Ancient Military* (was there a word missing at the end of the title?): Yes, the obstinate ignorance of filmmakers about representing ancient military uniforms, arms, and tactics authentically is an

old story. The same complaint can be applied to contemporary war films, for that matter.

There seems to be a divide, though, between writers who will not pay attention to the issue and writers who pay only too much attention. I have described such writers as David Weber as people who wrestled with the Expository Lump and lost, or writers such as James Blish as having swallowed Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* and never recovering.

No, Asimov swallowed *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Blish swallowed Spengler's *Die Untergang des Abendlandes* (*The Decline of the West*).

About your letters received: I am surprised that anyone is surprised by the lack of fanzine programming at DragonCon. For several reasons (not all mentioned in the letters column), fanzine fandom has become just one fandom among many, and DragonCon has always been in another fandom. I used to organize fanzine rooms and fanzine panels and saw the level of general interest drop rapidly. I gather that fans with other interests felt cold-shouldered by fanzine fans, or "frozen out" of running existing conventions ... perhaps only for emotional reasons. I also gather that when fannish fans tried to involve younger fans from other fandoms in fanzines and conrunning, the response was "meh." But this is a tale that has been told.

When fanzine panels consist of old fans reminiscing about Publishing Giants who filled mailboxes with hundred-page zines, and apparently hadn't read any fanzines since the sixties, no wonder new fans are not particularly interested.

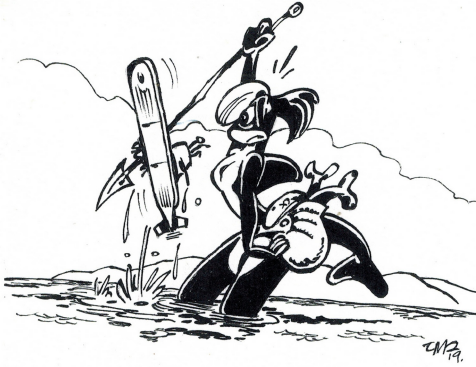
—JTM

About Heinlein, as George Price describes him: there's something oddly quaint or foreign in Heinlein's juveniles, which I just took for granted when I was a juvenile myself. After all, the fiction I read back then was always set in another time, usually 20 to 30 years before mine, and in another place, whether it was England or Australia or the Midwestern US. I had to put up with slightly cramped and precious language in Enid Blyton and C.S. Lewis, and equally I had to put up with the difference between Heinlein's future Terran settings ... which always seemed just like the Eisenhower era, if not Teddy Roosevelt's; and the teenagers and twentysomethings in the juveniles seemed to come from those eras, too. Make of this what you may.

About the Balkanization of fandom (again): Heath Row nailed it. SF fandom was already several separate fandoms, decades before COVID-19 — in fact, from firsthand experience, I testify that it was several separate fandoms

before personal computers and the Internet were widely available. I took a long time to accept this fact of life. Mind you, it wasn't because there was no focal point fanzine; media fans, comic fans, the several kinds of gaming fans, filk fans and anime fans were unaware of, or alienated from fannish fandom by 1980. Out of touch already, that is.

Maybe it's time I started that Liberal Secular Rational Humanist Cult I was talking about?



From: **George W. Price** March 19, 2023
 4418 N. Monitor Avenue, Chicago, IL
 60630-3333 USA
price4418@comcast.net

February *Alexiad* (#127).

“Random Jottings”: Joe cites scholarship confirming that President Theodore Roosevelt “really did say ‘Pedicaris alive or Raisuli dead’,” referring to the 1904 kidnapping of an American by a hill bandit chieftain in Morocco.

Oops, I thought, misspelling there – it should be “Perdicaris.” Just to be sure, I looked it up on Wikipedia. Yep, it is Perdicaris. Then I noticed that Wikipedia’s article, “The Perdicaris Affair,” has “Raisuni,” not “Raisuli” as Joe has it and as I remember it. Googling “Perdicaris and Raisuni” found several other entries with that spelling, and a few with both. So they seem to be legitimate variants.

The review of David Flin’s *Nitpicker’s Guide to Ancient Military* prompts me to offer my explanation of why battle-hardened soldiers are called “seasoned” troops. It’s because the enemy has assaulted and peppered them.

Darrell Schweitzer very strongly disagrees with me about the dangers of climate change. He says, “the next generation will conclude that climate change is a tragic example of government underreach. They will curse us because we knew what was happening and

chose to do nothing effective.”

He is certainly right that we are doing nothing effective, but wrong about what would actually be effective.

The human race as a whole is not significantly curtailing its use of the fossil fuels which are the presumptive cause of climate change. For obvious example, the Chinese rulers (controlling a huge chunk of humanity) are still building coal-fired power plants – two a week, last I heard. They’ll stop in 2030, so they say. Are we to believe they will then turn around and start phasing out these plants that they have just spent billions building? I would laugh, but it’s not funny.

India is another huge chunk of humanity that shows little sign of cutting back on fossil fuels. And what happens as the underdeveloped countries of Africa start seriously industrializing?

We won’t live to see how this plays out, but I am quite sure that when Americans or other Westerners complain, the reply will boil down to, “We will stop using fossil fuels when we have built ourselves up to your level. Until then, up yours.”

As for doing nothing effective, it is slowly being recognized that solar and wind power cannot come anywhere near replacing fossil fuels in the huge amounts needed. They just can’t handle the baseload demand.

To be sure, many of the troubles could be avoided by rapid conversion to nuclear power. A new generation of smaller reactors using advanced technology offers great promise. But have you noticed how so many of those who are hottest to get rid of fossil fuels are also dead set against nuclear power?

Note above what I said to AL du Pisani about the shutdown of the last German nuclear power plant. “Pastoralization”, anyone?

In short, I see no realistic chance of avoiding climate change in the short run, and maybe not in the long run either.

I still think that ample use of fossil fuels while we convert to nuclear is the least painful option. Abandoning fossil fuels before we have good replacements strikes me as the most stupid option.

Two months ago both Chicago newspapers ran the identical article, reporting that forty-some years ago Exxon Mobil scientists made climate change predictions that have proved to be astonishingly accurate – and which the company disputed and disregarded.

Leaving aside the company’s supposed duplicity, just what were these predictions? In the words of the newspapers, “the globe would warm about .36 degrees (.2 degrees Celsius) a decade.” Note the decimal points and the use of “decade,” rather than “year.” That is, the warming is at the rate of 1 degree C (1.8 degree F) per fifty years – not quite 4 degrees F per century.

And a change so small and slow is supposed to turn our planet into a hellhole?

As near as we can tell, how much variation

has there been in Earth’s average atmospheric temperature in the millions of years that life has existed and flourished? I don’t know what the prehistoric evidence shows, but I suspect the average air temperature has varied considerably over the ages. Were all the changes catastrophic?

Richard Dengrove comments on my criticism of Pohl’s “The Midas Plague,” saying “It was very appropriate for its time. People were worried that ad men were ‘forcing’ us to buy things.” He adds, “Of course, we really weren’t having goods forced down our throats.”

Looking back on that time, I was apparently so little susceptible to the ads that I had great difficulty understanding why so many people found them so oppressive. I only found them boring or silly – certainly not worth getting upset about.

I suppose that being so unaware of the alleged problem left me free to notice the gross plot defects that ruined the story for me.

Vance Packard’s *The Hidden Persuaders* (1957), about how advertising was making us buy things, was a bestseller.

—JTM

From: **Lloyd Penney** March 31, 2023
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 CANADA M9C 2B2
penneys@bell.net

I’m taking it right to the deadline, but here is a fast loc on issue 127 of *Alexiad*. We hope you’ve had good health...we’re both getting over bad colds, and we are checking if there is anything COVID-related.

I have never heard of Laur Flem...I think what this person is doing goes too far. Is this what the supposed cancel culture is all about? This is censorship taken too far. Today’s society has become neo-Puritan, and it’s going that way more and more. If you don’t like Rowling, don’t buy her books new. Buy them used. You can still enjoy the Harry Potter books without putting any fresh money in her pocket. Look what’s happening to Roald Dahl...I do not defend his beliefs, but he wrote not in this day and age, but in his own, and sensibilities were different. Keep the original, and if you have to rewrite to appeal to the neo-Puritans, make sure we all know that this edition is edited to reflect the sensibilities of 2023.

Now they’re editing Agatha Christie and P. G. Wodehouse. And R. L. Stine, against his will.

—JTM

The 2023 Winnipeg NASFiC...I wish we could go, but it is just too expensive for us. We are, however, expecting that Buffalo will win the right to host the 2024 NASFiC. At least, we will be able to drive there.

The octogenarian says all my friends are

dying...well, I am not quite 80 yet (soon enough), but I have made the effort to pick up some newer interests, and therefore, probably have some younger friends along the way. Right now, we are working on selling the dealers' tables in our local anime convention's Vendor Hall, and we are almost done. We have lots of new friends, 20 to 30 years our junior, and we definitely aren't the only ones on the committee who are in their 60s or 70s.

My loc...the 'throne of Hugo', hm? Well, I do have some workload, but I do not have near the workload of the publisher, Kermit Woodall. I do have a novel and 15 short stories in my queue, and with the weekend at hand, I intend to attack it, and try my best to catch up, at least a little.

Richard Dengrove's loc...I do have a little employment. Over the course of April, I will have six days of employment, planned by PAL Communication, publisher of the three magazines I proofread. My other occasional employer, BBW International, has been so quiet, it may have gone under. My work with *Amazing Stories?* All volunteer. I wish I was getting paid, and the egoboo exchange rate is poor right now.

It's tired, and I'm late. Or, something like that. This has been fun, but I am having trouble keeping my eyes open, so I will wind this up, send it on its way, and hit the sack. Many thanks, and I will try to be more timely the time around.

From: **Taras Wolansky** March 31, 2023
Post Office Box 698, Kerhonkson, NY
12446-0698 USA
twolansky@yahoo.com

Thanks for another interesting *Alexiad*.

Joe: "It seems more and more that the Chengdu Worldcon is floundering." We can only hope. If the Worldcon proves to be an embarrassment, then the Chinese Communist Party will order Chinese "fans" to lay off. So we will no longer suffer the humiliation of holding a literary convention in a country where freedom of speech and the press are not recognized.

On rebinding "Harry Potter" with J. K. Rowling's name removed: In his absurd review of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Isaac Asimov wondered why it wasn't about Nazis!

There wasn't that much difference. Read Paul Hollander's works for a discussion of that.

Review of *The Way of the Sword Worlds* by John F. Carr and Mike Robertson: I have all the Pequod Press sequels to H. Beam Piper's Space Viking, as well as all the sequels to *Lord Kalvan of Otherwhen*, but so far reading them has remained in the planning stage.

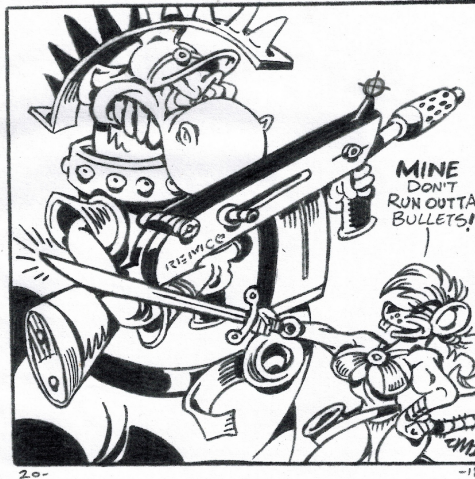
Minas Tirith sans suburbs in the LOTR movies: In one of the bits of *Game of Thrones*

that I saw, a group of travelers comes to the great gate of the city that is the story's equivalent of Byzantium; but there's nothing in front of the gate but wasteland, no inns or peddlers or tents. I figured the filmmakers must have run out of money.

Review of *Nitpicker's Guide to Ancient Military* by David Flin: Why filmmakers usually present sword and shield combat as a disorganized melee, I'm not sure. Perhaps fighting in organized groups doesn't look exciting enough. Realistically, fighting unsupported is a quick way to get yourself killed from behind.

It gives the hero a chance to display his valor. Rome gave Lucius Vorenus a chance to show his valor in the disciplined ranks of a century of legionaries.

The shoguns had some success with keeping firearms out, I believe, presumably because the samurai had a very powerful vested interest in the matter. Perhaps someone told them what happened to European chivalry when firearms were introduced. In M.Z. Bradley's *Darkover* stories, of course, the mages have a strong vested interest in keeping out projectile weapons as well.



"Basically, supporting a large army by wagon caravans just can't be done."
Um, what's the alternative?

Flin discusses this. Riverboat convoys, mostly.

Review of *The Abandonment of the Jews*, by David S. Wyman, and other books about US policy toward the Holocaust: Reading about the FDR administration's gruesome policies toward Jewish refugees, I had to wonder if the enormous power of the Ku Klux Klan in the Democratic Party at the time played any role. (FDR famously sat on his hands and let a Federal anti-lynching bill be voted down by the Democrats.)

I remember seeing an ABC report which described how the FDR administration considered German Jews "enemy aliens", and shipped them back to Nazi Germany to their deaths. An article in *The National Interest* some years back described how the President of Haiti wanted to admit 100,000 Jewish refugees — now that's an alternate history to conjure with — but FDR pressured Haiti not to do it. Based upon the international track record of Jewish refugees, Haiti might have become the richest country in the Caribbean!

Darrell Schweitzer: Scientists just recently discovered that there were dense forests inhabited by mastodons (!) in northern Greenland (!!!), just 2 million years ago. I suspect that the one real problem with global warming is that, living in the current Ice Age, we've built our cities on what is really continental shelf, so centuries from today our descendants will have to pull on their galoshes. All the rest is hype.

Activists always exaggerate, because they think the public won't do what they want otherwise. Remember how crack babies were going to grow up into conscienceless super predators?

And we were all going to be overrun by hordes of dysgenic Jukes and Kallikaks unless eugenic laws were enforced.

Richard A. Dengrove: "I suspect the empires fall, because the weather and land has not been cooperative." It's the old Malthusian story. When the climate is warm, bountiful harvests cause the population to grow. When the climate cools, the harvests fail, with the inevitable grim consequences.

George Phillis: I heard the late David Hartwell describe N3F as "the halt and the lame of fandom". Which struck me as unfair, considering that most people would describe fandom as the halt and the lame of society.

Joe: The first science fiction convention was held in London, in honor of Lord Bulwer-Lytton's *The Coming Race* (1871)? Tell us more.

Read my discussion of the book in *Alexiad* #120:

Bovril was also served at the Vrilya Bazaar and Fête in London on March 5-7, 1891. The meeting had people dressed as Vrilya, and dealers selling the book, the drink, and other related items. This has been called the first ever science-fiction convention, forty-five years before the Eastern Science Convention in Philadelphia.

—JTM

From: **Richard A. Dengrove** April 11, 2023
2651 Arlington Drive, #302, Alexan-

dria, VA 22306-3626 USA
RichD22426@aol.com

Here are my comments on *Alexiad* February 2023.

Lisa. That's the thing about probabilities. Someone must have a fate that is improbable. It may be a one in a million that your father is still living even though his ship sank. I hope I got that right. However, there are more than a million people in the US.

REVIEWER'S NOTES. The Chengdu Worldcon. I was talking to Ben Yalow at DeepSouthCon 60. A well known organizer of conventions. He's very conservative but he was working with the Chinese to make it a success. One reason, he told me, was there are more people reading science fiction in China than here. As to how successful that con will be, I don't know.

They aren't being very forthcoming. The last news was that last year's revenue of SF was 82.96 billion yuan, which is about \$12 billion. What that has to do with the con, aside from bragging rights, I have no idea.

The Arctic vortex. So your pipes have burst too. In DC, they may have burst at one time. However, I remember when we had colder winters and had to get equipment to dig people out. That was then. Currently, the pipes are strong enough not to burst: we've learned our lesson.

World War II. My father was in World War II but as a physician with the Flying Tigers in China. No talk about heroism. He did say that doctors did come up with a cure for battle fatigue, sodium pentothal. U and critical race theory on the right.

A-VIKING-WE SHALL GO. Space vikings? That's going to take a lot of imagination or chutzpah. The reason: it sounds like the author is trying to get away from imagination. There were vikings historically.

THE HOLLYWOOD HISTORY OF BATTLE. At one time, I hear a film got the rights to film a battle in Mexico between Pancho Villa and someone else. The movie company got the rights to stop the battle when they needed new shots elsewhere. However, the public found the resulting film boring; and it was never done again.

The Life of General Villa (1914), which is a lost movie, though stills survive.

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0004223/>

INDIFFERENCE. I know that Americans were pretty racist in those days, relative to what we believe to day. Thus, when the Germans decided the Japanese were yellow Aryans, nearly everyone supported the war against Germany. That was an even worse race than the Jews. By the way, I heard the

Japanese considered the idea that they were "Yellow Aryans" a joke.

NAMARI. I guess, especially in those days, anyone going on an arctic expedition was crazy.

LETTERS, WE GET LETTERS. DARREL. No way to fight climate change because we're too addicted to oil. Also, I imagine it's going to come slowly, and people will hardly know it's happening.

Also, maybe Africans read science fiction. I don't know. They may be primitive relatively but there is no accounting for taste. As I said, apparently, the Chinese read far more science fiction than we do.

Afrofuturism is the coming thing in the academic establishment that has taken power.

GEORGE PHILLIES. I can imagine DragonCon doesn't have anything to do with fandom. They just want people who are there to be entertained by big shots.

LLOYD PENNEY. I was wondering is the new *Amazing Stories* going to be in paper or on the web. Paper magazines are a dying breed. On the other hand, web magazines have arisen.

GEORGE PRICE. I don't find that joke anti-semitic. And I'm Jewish. Because it's a bad pun, the only ones who are blamed for it are the joke tellers. ...Tch, tch, "this knight is different from all other knights."

As for when did Heinlein go bad. I always thought what Heinlein needed in the end more than a good heart surgeon was a good editor. Unfortunately, he wasn't being edited when he wrote his bad novels. For that reason, he often hit you the wrong way; and included long dissertations that bogged down what he wrote.

MYSELF. "The Midas Plague," I don't think Pohl, like a lot of science fiction authors, was always interested in actual predicting. During those times, he was more interested in hitting our emotions. The lower class would never be the class with all the money. However, that is what advertising would do if taken to its "illogical" conclusion.

Galaxy in the Gold era had a lot of stories about human society with one facet taken to its extreme, in a unpleasant way. The writers could have written for *Star Trek: The Next Generation*,

HEATH ROW. The new fans will change a lot that we love – or at least remember. Nonetheless, we should remember something else – they are standing on our shoulders. With us and the people before us, they will also become passé and fall into the abyss.

About the *National Enquirer*, I once met a reporter from it. He was investigating the facilities in Federal buildings. He complained to me that he would report the facts and the editors would translate them into grunts.

About Worldcon, I agree with you. I won't be going to the Chengdu Worldcon. I haven't

been to a Worldcon since 1998.

About technocracy, the rule by experts. I suspect the best government is where the people rule. They'll be more satisfied with the result. That is if the people are not split into many factions that can't get together on anything.

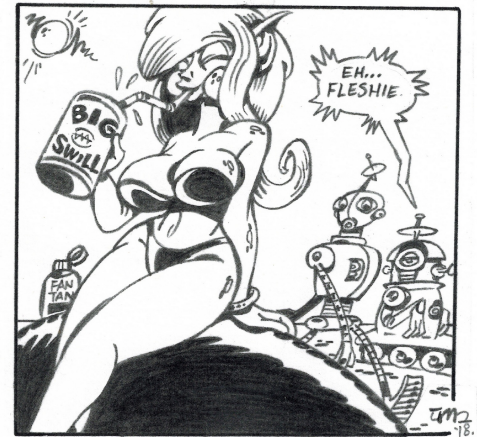
TARAS WOLANSKY. The Crusaders. To be honest, I don't know that much about the Crusaders' attack on Constantinople. There could have been a son who wanted the emperorship.

No, it was pure greed. As may be considered from the establishment of the Latin Empire in Constantinople. (The current claimant to the Latin Empire is Prinz Friedrich-Wilhelm of Prussia; at one point it was Frederick the Great.)

— JTM

Climate change. For a Liberal, this is strange but I am dubious about climate change. I already gave some reasons. Here are some more. Apparently, it's just increased 2.7 degrees fahrenheit since the pre-industrial days. We're talking about worldwide on average. My source is on Google. Nearly all of it in the 21st Century. That doesn't prove overwhelming heat or even a trend. Another reason is life flourished in the Cretaceous era and there was far more carbon in the air due to volcanoes.

I guess that's it for my comments on the February *Alexiad*.



WAHF:

Lloyd G. Daub, with various items of interest.

HORNBLOWER AND THE SKEERED O'NUTHIN

Commodore Sir Horatio Hornblower, K.B., walked the deck of his flagship, the H.M.S. *Nonsuch*. He had taken his small and varied squadron through the dangerous fortified passage of the Belt, past Bonaparte's allies the Danes, to be the armed part of negotiations with the Czar.

Now there was a ship on the horizon. She was on fire. Crisply, Hornblower said, "Mr Bush, prepare to render aid."

Bush cracked out orders, the *Nonsuch* turned and headed in the direction of the burning ship. As they approached, though, it seemed that the fire was coming up through a chimney. And then he noticed that the ship had sails furled, and was moving upwind.

"Get me my glass," Hornblower said, and when he had it, he focused on the ship. There was a structure on the forecastle; a crane of some sort?

Abruptly, the other ship turned and revealed a similar device on the afterdeck. Both of them swung to point to the *Nonsuch*. Then fire exploded from their ends.

There were crashes in the hull of the *Nonsuch*. Bush shouted, "Beat to quarters! Man the guns! Prepare to fire!"

A moment later the other ship fired again. One shot blew the mainmast off, the other hit the quarterdeck and Bush seemed to disintegrate. Something struck Hornblower's head and he fell away into darkness.

He opened his eyes. He had a dreadful headache. Brown said, "Good, sir, you're awake. I'll get Captain Vickery." So he was on the *Lotus*.

Vickery entered. "Sir? The other ship sailed off after sinking the *Nonsuch*. She seemed to be flying a yellow flag with a snake on it."

A painful memory came to Hornblower. Richard had been discussing it as some length over dinner one night. "American. After their constitution was overthrown the states set up militias. I think this was a naval militia flag."

Vickery was puzzled. "But why would the Americans attack us?"

"There are hints of war." He tried to gather his thoughts through the hammering in his head. "I am more worried about that ship's capabilities. What happened?"

"She sailed off, we picked up the survivors, and now we're waiting."

In the morning another ship approached. She turned out to be Swedish, and was flying a flag of truce. The Swedish captain was brought aboard, with an officer who spoke English. "Lars Strider, Lieutenant in the Royal Swedish Navy. And this is Captain Harfangner. I understand you have had an encounter with the *Skeered o'Nuthin*."

So that was what the American ship was

called! "Yes," was all Hornblower said.

Strider talked to his captain and said, "We can render aid to your injured men, and return them once they have recovered.

"The American ship has been operating out of Swedish Pomerania. We have reports that she has rifled, muzzle-loading guns — and that she is powered by steam!"

Hornblower couldn't understand how, but he knew it was dangerous.

Strider said, "We shall render what aid we can in destroying this ship. The Americans are constantly fighting. They quarrel over almost anything, and shoot it out with those large-calibre pistols they carry."

"They are no more than pirates," Hornblower said.

The *Skeered o'Nuthin* was in a lagoon. It did not look like she had fires up. Freeman had taken the *Clam* up as close as he dared, and apparently the American ship was reprovisioning. That night, the two bomb ketches made their approach and anchored. In the morning, they would shell the American ship and, it was to be hoped, sink her.

... Hornblower tried to write a good report. "The efforts of the bomb ketches were speedily successful," he wrote. The American ship had tried to fire at the bomb ketches, but they dropped their mortar shells more effectively. One seemed to have struck the *Skeered o'Nuthin* — it pained him to write such an absurd name — and started a fire that quickly reached the magazine. The ship had spectacularly exploded. He tried to put the dramatic scene into words.

... The *Lotus* tried to put on a decent reception for Lord Wychwood. The red-faced and pop-eyed peer came over the side, saluted Hornblower, and said, "There are despatches from London."

Below, he described the situation. "Some of the American states have begun sending out privateers. They all but abolished their central government, remember, so there's no one to protest to. The Lords of the Admiralty are not about to desert you, since so far you have been the only commander to defeat an American ship."

That night, Hornblower read his despatches. He was receiving two more ships of the line, all the better to influence the Czar and Crown Prince John.

He would have to send them the statement of Captain Neil Neil of the *Skeered o'Nuthin*, which was the most extraordinary blather. His actions were not much better. He had tried to walk out of the Swedish prison where he was held, claiming that he had already been acquitted by American law and they had no right to hold him. He had complained that he had been disarmed. The Swedes were considering hanging him as a pirate. Hornblower decided not to complain if such should happen.

— Not by Cecil Lewis Troughton Smith

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