

# ALEXIAD

(ΑΛΞΙΑΣ)

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I am in downtown Louisville and enjoying the reflection in a window when out of nowhere there is a plane reflected in the window. I jump back and my heart begins pounding. It is a few seconds before I realize the plane was just going about its business and nowhere as close to the building as the reflection made it look. Only then do I realize that even after twenty years how conscious I still am of that horrible day in 2001. Of what it felt like when Joe called and told me to turn on the television. My realization that my country was now at war.

— Lisa

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Richard A. Dengrove, Nic Farey, Tom Feller, Sable Jak, Lloyd Penney, AL du Pisani, George W. Price, Darrell Schweitzer, David M. Shea, Taras Wolansky

Comments are by **JTM** or **LTM**

The 67th Running of the Yonkers Trot (1st leg of the Trotting Triple Crown) was **July 2, 2021** at Yonkers Raceway in Yonkers, New York. Johan Palema won handily.

The 96th Running of the Hambletonian (2nd leg of the Trotting Triple Crown) was **August 7, 2021** at Meadowlands Racetrack in East Rutherford, New Jersey. Captain Corey won.

The 128th Running of the Kentucky Futurity (3rd leg of the Trotting Triple Crown) was **October 10, 2021**, at the Red Mile in Lexington, Kentucky. Jujubee won easily.

The 67th Running of the Messenger Stakes (1st leg of the Pacing

Triple Crown) was **July 2, 2021** at Yonkers Raceway in Yonkers, New York. American Courage won in the rain.

The 66th Running of the Cane Pace (2nd leg of the Pacing Triple Crown) was **August 7, 2021** at Meadowlands Racetrack in East Rutherford, New Jersey. Rockyroad Hanover won.

The 76th Running of the Little Brown Jug (3rd leg of the Pacing Triple Crown) was **September 23, 2021** at the Delaware County Fair in Delaware, Ohio. Lou's Pearlman won by a nose, beating out the favorite Perfect Sting, on a windy cool day.

The Breeders' Cup 2021 will be **November 5-6, 2021** at Del Mar Thoroughbred Club in Del Mar, California.

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## Art:

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Deadline is **December 1, 2021**

## Reviewer's Notes

Summer has ended and fall is beginning. Going out makes me cold. We are preparing to be snowed in, with caches of canned food all over the house. I don't think it will come to that but I remember 1977-8 — and I was delivering papers on a motor route then! Not fun.

We won't be going to Worldcon. Financial issues. But then I wonder how long Worldcons will go on. The problems of DisCon III are too well known. There are rumors that the Memphis 2023 bid is in trouble, which leaves Winnipeg as winner by default (Chengdu was problematic already).

When I had raised the prospect of a con committee having a collapse, it was pointed out to me that the "permanent floating Worldcon committee", the volunteers who filled out most of the offices, could manage. But these people are getting old and drifting off, dropping out, or giving up. Are there younger fans to replace them?

Local cons have dissolved due to a lack of people willing to do the work. And too many convention consumers go on the basis that what they want will be provided. They don't seem to have any investment in actually working to create the experience, the way the participants did.

And there are enough protests to make any convention problematic. (People didn't seem to note that Pacificon II was not incorporated. If Breen had molested a child, and the con had been sued for allowing him in, and lost, *every member* would have been liable for the judgment. This last point was used in Bill Fesselmeyer's "The Grinch Who Stole Worldcon" (1976).) Other protests have more purchase with the people who make up con committees these days.

— 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.

We regret to report the death of **David Roberts**, mountaineer and adventure writer, on **August 20, 2021** in Boston, of throat cancer. Born in Denver on **May 29, 1943**, Roberts studied mathematics at Harvard, where he became president of the Harvard Mountaineering Club, and went on to earn a Ph.D. in English at the University of Denver. His mountaineering career included many climbs in Alaska. His writing covered many fields of exploration, of which *Great Exploration Hoaxes* (2001) was particularly notable.

He is survived by his wife, Sharon, the many other writers whom he mentored (such as Jon Krakauer), and a community of climbers and their admirers.

Ireland's new marine research vessel will be named the **MV Tom Crean**. The ship is finished up to the hull and will be launched next year.

This is the centennial of Shackleton's final expedition, the Shackleton-Rowlett Expedition, or the *Quest* Expedition. In commemoration of it, several events are being held. A commemorative plaque was unveiled by the Hon. Alexandra Shackleton (EHS's granddaughter) and Dr. Jan Chojecki (John Quiller Rowlett's grandson) at Plymouth, the port of departure of the *Quest*. In commemoration of the two Boy Scouts who sailed with the expedition, a group of Scouts, the Kent Scouts

ReQuest2021, are going south on the bark *Europa*. The *SY Agulhas II* is setting out on the Endurance22 Expedition in February of 2022 to find the wreck of the ship, with it is hoped better undersea probes than last time.

ReQuest2021:  
<https://www.request2021.org.uk/>

The Agra Treasurers of Dayton proudly announce that the Great Hiatus is over! Their Holmes, Doyle, & Friends meeting will be **March 11-12, 2022** at the Airport Clarion Inn in Dayton.

<http://www.agratreasurers.net/holmes--doyle--friends--2022.html>

## OBITS

We regret to report the death of **Erle Melvin "Mel" Korshak** on **August 25, 2021**. Korshak was a First Fan. He was born on **October 29, 1923** and began reading SF in 1934. He was a publisher by 1939, and in that year helped organize the Chicon of 1940, thus making Worldcon a regular event. He had attended the Nycon that year.

He was a founder of Shasta Publishers, which brought out many notable SF works. (And unfortunately, collapsed after an effort at diversification, leading to much ill-will). He turned his efforts to mundane matters, becoming a lawyer, and did not resume contact with Fandom until the eighties.

He was named as a Guest of Honor for Chicon 8 in 2022. This is a loss for all fandom in general and the con specifically.

This leaves **Robert A. Madle** as the only surviving attendee of the first Worldcon.

## MONARCHICAL NEWS

**Grand Duke Georgi Mikhailovich of Russia and Princess Victoria Romanova Romanov** (née Rebecca Virginia Bettarini) were united in matrimony on **October 1, 2021** at Saint Isaac's Cathedral in Saint Petersburg, Russia. The Grand Duke is the son of **Grand Duchess Maria Vladimirovna of Russia**, Curator of the Imperial Throne, and **Prinz Franz-Wilhelm von Preussen**. The Princess is the daughter of Carla Virginia Cacciatore and Roberto Bettarini. The couple's civil marriage was on **September 24** in Moscow.

## CUPID AND PSYCHE

Commentary by Joseph T Major on

"This Earth of Hours"

by James Blish

(*Fantasy and Science Fiction*, June 1959)

Blish liked to speculate on the prospects of encountering a powerful and alien civilization towards the center of the Milky Way Galaxy. As he often did, he speculated in different ways. This universe is not the universe of *The Star*

*Dwellers* (1961) and *Mission to the Heart Stars* (1965), for example, for all that they have the same thesis.

We begin with the Matriarchy's latest effort in expanding its sway, a massive naval expedition to the planet Callë under the personal command of Flo-Mar 12-Upjohn, the Consort of State. It seems that sex-selection conception was perfected, which led to a glut of males, which led to women getting and keeping power. The former Marvin 12 was upwardly mobile and suitable for marriage, hence his position; but he is also a veteran of such absorptions.

The Matriarchal armada is approaching the planet Callë. 12-Upjohn stands on the bridge of the fleet flagship, the powerful battleship *Novoe Washingtongrad* (they seem to have blended various traditions). There had been a previous expedition, but the ship *Assam Dragon* had not returned. Perhaps a retaliation is in order. Also present is the senior n.c.o. of the ship's marine detachment Sergeant Olberholzer, a cynical old veteran. They notice an unusual element in the planetary system; there is a second apparently inhabited planet there. Olberholzer is ordered to prepare to land his unit.

There is a **ZAP!**

12-Upjohn awakens in the wreckage of his cabin from the *Novoe Washingtongrad*. Prowling around, he finds one other survivor, a poet and interpreter named Robin One. They begin to discuss what to do, since they are without water on a desert planet.

Then rescue shows up of a sort; Sergeant Olberholzer reports; he has five men, one of whom is injured. This still doesn't solve the problems but they do know there's another piece of the ship out there and they could improvise a rescue vessel (think of Eric de Bisschop's *Tahiti Nui III*, made of bits of his raft *Tahiti Nui II*, or if you want a skiffy version, the *Mikrotyria* from L. Sprague de Camp's *The Golden Wind* (1969)).

After a while an inhabitant shows up. The native speaks perfect English! Learned from the crew of the previous ship. The natives dissected the crew, finding they had cancer. The native knows how many "people" there are, and promises food and water. At the end of the discussion, Robin asks a few questions, then said he has no more — and the native departs, much to the annoyance of 12-Upjohn, who had a few more questions to ask.

This is a key discovery. The native presumed that all the humans were one individual, because all the beings of the native species on the planet are one individual. The "cancer" comes from having a brain; the Calleans (and presumably the other intelligent species of the other planets) have distributed neural ganglia.

Sergeant Olberholzer takes the Marine detachment off after the native, eventually reaching a city. After a less than useful discussion, he shoots the one he is talking to — and nothing seems to matter. However, they did get a promise that the surviving crewmember

of the previous expedition will be returned to them.

Fortunately, he is a navigator. This gives them a slight chance to return to human-controlled space. Then the problem of how to return comes up. They can take one single space jump, and if there is the slightest error, they will be lost. Or, they can go from planet to planet, where they can encounter either other hive intelligences, which will not be helpful, or other species of individuals, who will probably be hostile.

After some effort, they make their rescue craft, and it lifts off for the Matriarchy, taking the longer route:

"Very good," 12-Upjohn said. He was uncertain of his exact emotion at this moment; perhaps gloomy satisfaction was as close a description as any. "I make it unanimous. Let's get ready." The sergeant saluted and prepared to leave the cabin, but suddenly he turned back. "I didn't think much of either of you, a while back," he said brutally. "But I'll tell you this: there must be something about brains that involves guts, too. I'll back 'em any time against any critter that lets itself get shot like a fish in a barrel, whatever the odds." The Consort of State was still mulling that speech over as the madman's caricature of an interstellar ship groaned and lifted its lumps and angles from Callë. Who knows, he kept telling himself, it might even be true. But he noticed that Robin One was still humming the chorale from *Psyche and Eros*, and ahead the galactic night was as black as death.

Blish is portraying a bleak scenario, nothing like the upbeat one of *The Star Dwellers*. The Calleans are a remarkable triumph of the basic idea of aliens, a creature that thinks as well as a human, but not like a human (for example, Robin One's realization that the Callean is addressing all of them as a single individual). The human society is itself an interesting speculation; one suspects that, like with *Cities In Flight* (1955-1962) the background may be more interesting than the plot.

The sergeant utters a conclusion straight out of Pournelle; but 12-Upjohn is less sure. And their prospects, one way and another, seem dubious, which makes the last line very much to the point. Boldly going where no man has gone before can bring one to strange new worlds indeed.

The Standing Wave space drive was described in *Welcome to Mars!* (1967). This has been described as one of the most absurd spaceflight stories since *Rusty's Space Ship* (1957); a teenage boy builds a spaceship in a packing crate and flies to Mars, and his girlfriend finds his notes, builds a second one, and follows him; somehow they both survive.

So Blish described two different sets of results from the same invention, and then wrote the base story. He often shared innovations between decidedly different universes; for example, the Dirac instantaneous communicator, described in "Beep" (*Galaxy*, February 1954) and "A Style in Treason" (*Galaxy*, May 1970), also appears in *Cities In Flight*, which has a quite different background.

Sex selection, albeit through abortion, has not turned the People's Republic of China into a matriarchy. The naming convention has its amusing parts, as Bar-Rob 5-Agberg, another cabinet minister, could note (not to mention Robert Silverberg). And you can guess the pharmaceutical company Blish was working for at the time.

### THE RETURN OF THE KING, EXTRA APPENDICES

Review by Joseph T Major of  
**THE NATURE OF MIDDLE-EARTH:  
Late Writings on the Lands, Inhabitants, and  
Metaphysics of Middle-earth**  
(2021; Houghton Mifflin Harcourt;  
ISBN 978-0358454601; \$32.00;  
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (Kindle); \$16.99)  
by J. R. R. Tolkien  
edited by Carl F. Hostetter

If you avidly perused the Appendices printed in *The Return of the King*, you will fall upon this volume the way a Hobbit would fall upon a feast of mushrooms, served with a pint of the genuine fourteen-twenty. Naturally others may find it a trifle recondite, if not dry.

This is composed of notes Tolkien made after the publication of the book(s), with his thoughts on various items of the background. The scope is vast. He discusses the population growth of the Elves after their awakening, for example. And this is tied in to an exposition of their physiology, reproduction, and marital arrangements. Female Elves don't feel pain when they give birth, for example. And the survivability of wounded Elves seems to be very high (how do you say in Quenya: "Leave to an Elf his head and one hand and he may yet conquer"?).

Other papers discuss the geography of the island of Númenor, the social and political organization of the kingdom, and its relations with the lands to the west. Another section discusses the shape of Middle-earth before the great remaking. There are no tortoises or elephants holding up Middle-earth: "There was no childish pictorial myth of its supports; it was set there by the Maker (or his agents, and there remained by their will)." The scholars of Unseen University will be most disappointed.

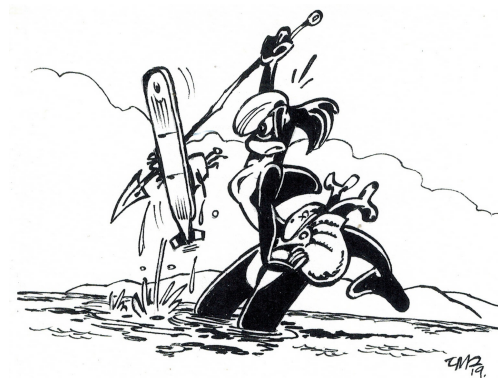
Tolkien originally set out to create a "mythology for England". The work has been assimilated and associated in many venues, from the comic (a disgusted Gandalf sitting at a dealer's table while Travis Hanson's RPG party from *Life of the Party* try to start a conversation, or the Wizard of Id and his wife finding out that one does not simply walk into Mordor,

one takes the excursion train) to the grisly (an alternatehistory.com thread where Westeros from *Game of Thrones* got annexed to Middle-earth, producing a GoTization of life and death, particularly the latter, in Rohan and Gondor). And then there's the politicization . . .

JRRT was deeply involved in the sub-creation of his Story. This is a level of background development worthy of a major science fiction epos. (The mind trembles at the thought of a Dr. Robert Lindner, unaware that an actual book existed, diagnosing this patient not exactly on "The Jet-Propelled Couch" (*The Fifty-Minute Hour* (1955)) as another "Kirk Allen", laying aside the real world to develop a fictional universe.) These papers will leave the reader with an impression of the breadth and depth of his efforts.

### FOR THE RODINA

Review by Joseph T Major of  
**THE CONSEQUENCES OF AN ERRANT  
SHELL PART 1:  
Russo-Japanese War and World War 1**  
(2019; ISBN 978-1696857888; \$10.98;  
2019; Amazon (Kindle); \$3.45) and  
**THE CONSEQUENCES OF AN ERRANT  
SHELL PART 2:  
World War 2 and the Sino-Russian War**  
(2019; ISBN 978-1696975216; \$10.98;  
2019; Amazon (Kindle); \$3.45)  
By John Hardinge



Could the Russian Empire have won the Russo-Japanese War? Or at least not lost it quite so badly? This is an enquiry into the possibility, and the events that follow from it. The difference, the Point of Departure, the "errant shell" means that Admiral Vitgeft wins the Battle of Port Arthur, while Admiral Togo dies. And the Russo-Japanese War goes a little better for Russia.

Under pressure, Nicholas allows a more responsible Duma, as well as changing the succession. Which works out when he and Alexei are killed in a train accident.

The World War goes a little better for Russia. (For example, the scene where Vladimir I. Ulyanov is hanged.) Germany breaks up differently (the *Elftagekaiser* Wilhelm III has



an interesting time). But the seeds are set for a rerun.

Somewhat better off, Russia continues its economic expansion. Democracy slowly spreads and all seems well. Then Hitler comes to power, and things don't go so well. (I have to wonder about this, the Russia described here wouldn't have qualms about allying with Britain and France during the Polish crisis.)

Unheeding, Adi launches war against everyone around. (A journalist named Benito Mussolini took a bullet in 1922, so there's that.) Russia fights well, and finally the allies prevail.

Hardinge has a way of putting in interesting flashforwards. As when he depicts a disgusted Okhrana officer in a dead-end assignment, or a successful lawyer attending a baseball game in Havana, Cuba, USA. (Yes, Putin and Castro.)

This is one of those what-ifs that follows the consequences, instead of being grotesque or outré. It's a different, and in some ways better (in others not so much) world.

### THE XKCD STRIKES BACK

Review by Joseph T Major of  
**WHAT IF?:**

*Serious Scientific Answers to Absurd Hypothetical Questions*

(2014; Mariner Books;  
ISBN 978-0544272996; \$28.00;  
Mariner Books (Kindle); \$11.99)  
By Randall Munroe

At one time or another all of us have considered making a wall decoration of the Periodic Table of the Elements with samples of every element in its place, illuminating the Moon with laser pointers, swimming in a nuclear power rod storage pool, and many other super-science projects. Thanks to the author and artist of the Hugo-winning XKCD (2014 Best Graphic Story for "Time"), these and many other pressing questions have been answered!

Have you ever wondered how strong in the Force Yoda really is? Did you think about what would happen if all the rain in a storm fell as a single drop? What would happen to you if all of your DNA disappeared? These and many other questions are discussed and rigorously analyzed here, illuminated by Munroe's stick-figure illustrations and described in his witty style.

### PICTURES FROM A TRIAL

Review by Joseph T Major of  
**NEVERGREEN**

(2021; Open Books;  
ISBN 978-1948598521; \$17.95;  
Open Books (Kindle); \$9.99)  
By Andrew Pessin

Someone must have been telling lies about Josef K., he knew he had done nothing wrong but, one morning,

he was arrested.

— Franz Kafka, *Der Prozess* (*The Trial*)

*Pictures from an Institution* (1954) is poet Randall Jarrell's take on the excesses of academia. One relevant comment was his observation that the faculty of the college where the book was set "longed for men to be discovered on the moon, so that they could show that *they* weren't prejudiced towards moon men." ("Hi there, I'm Professor Orthiss and these are my Kalkar research associates.")

J goes to Nevergreen College, founded on the site of an insane asylum, to deliver a lecture. He should have been warned when he discovers from his driver that there are no graduation requirements and indeed no majors; students take what they like and leave when they want to.

He delivers the lecture he came to deliver, to an empty auditorium. Then he spends a day or two exploring the campus. This means he is there when he is accused of . . . something. They won't tell him what he did or who was offended.

He flees. Along the way he encounters the reaction, a group of students who are reenacting as Confederate soldiers, not very well. He tries to find a place to stay for the night.

Meanwhile, the other students are holding a Hate Hate rally. This segues into a reenactment of *Lord of the Flies*, complete with the killing and butchery of a pig. (For some reason — does there have to be a reason here? — the island is overrun with pigs.) That done they set out to butcher a long pig.

Nothing goes right. J finds refuge with the librarian. But soon, the Hate Hate rally sets the library building afire.

There is one escape; J can take the ferry off the island . . . providing he survives until morning.



It is hard to write satire these days. Reality seems to be outracing it. For example, the Christian satirical website The Babylon Bee

(<https://babylonbee.com>) has a non-satirical spinoff, Not The Bee (<https://notthebee.com>). Somewhere out there at some university, all this and more is being done. Maybe we need to have the Kalkars step in.

### READERS OF GENTLEMEN'S MAIL

Review by Joseph T Major of  
**CODE GIRLS:**

*The Untold Story of the American Women Code Breakers of World War II*

(2017; Hachette Books;  
ISBN 978-0316439893; \$38.00;  
Hachette Books (Kindle); \$11.99)  
By Liza Mundy

David Kahn's *The Codebreakers* (1967, 1973, 1996) mentions Agnes Meyer, later Agnes Meyer Driscoll:

Early in 1921, [Edward Hebern, inventor of the rotor system for encryption] advertised an "unbreakable" cypher in a marine magazine, but Miss Agnes Meyer, a cryptanalyst in the Navy's Code and Signal Section, solved the sample message.

Mundy has a lot more to say about her. It seems that she was an unheralded master of decryption of the Japanese systems. Which was a dire burden, and for most of the later war she was sidelined. Think of Herbert Yardley's description of the immense pressure his female codebreakers in *The American Black Chamber* (1931) were under. (The one who was carrying a bag of stones on her back down a shingled beach, unable to discard any until she found one on the beach that matched it, is an example of how dreams can express waking pressure.)

This is a story of the dire toil of the laborers of the American codebreaking system. They were recruited out of the best colleges of the East Coast, congregated in high-security environments, and tasked with the monotonous yet crucial labor of analyzing and decrypting the enemy's messages. Perhaps the Axis (and Soviet) failure to use women in such service contributed to their failures.

Mundy tracked down the last survivors of these women, recorded and recounted their stories, and presents a picture of the tedious and dogged effort required. It adds to the picture of the codebreaking effort.

The remarkable Elizabeth Smith Friedman is covered, of course, though she has her own due in Jason Fagone's *The Woman Who Smashed Codes* (2017; reviewed in *Alexiad* V. 18 #1). She too was sidelined.

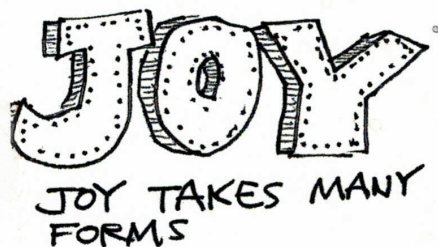
The portrayal of life in the forties is striking and the book recounts well the effort. Yet . . . it was, just, following operating procedures, yet intricate and stressful ones. They didn't even seem to have celebrated the end of the war the way the women at Bletchley Park did, which was to disassemble the Bombes and roll the cipher wheels along the floor.

**BERNARDINI**

March 23, 2003 — July 30, 2021  
by Lisa

Yesterday I realized I had not checked on Bernardini in far longer than I should have so I looked him up. I went cold when I saw the word was used in reference to him. He had died in late July. I sat back and remembered the day a big bay colt had raced into my heart fifteen years ago. He had been all fire, all Thoroughbred that day as he charged down the track and into the winner's circle. He succeeded Sunday Silence in my heart that day. Now I am once again without a living horse who means more to me than any other living horse.

**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.

**Watching The Enemy**

In both war and peace, knowing what your enemies — and even your friends — are doing can be very, very useful. Spies actively gather intelligence by going among the enemy, messages are intercepted, codes are broken, security measures are bypassed. However, this column will focus on the tech of aerial reconnaissance. Even with that limitation this is a huge topic. So, this column will mostly focus on material old enough to have been officially declassified.

Watching opponents from a high vantage point goes back thousands of years, though until very recently this only worked where there were mountains (or maybe tall trees) conveniently close. Observing the enemy from aircraft dates back to at least the US Civil War. The North and South both had tethered hydrogen balloons (hydrogen being easy to generate by applying acid to iron filings) many of which (besides carrying observers)

were equipped with telegraphs and large telescopes. Some even carried cameras. The balloons provided important intelligence, but were blatant targets for the other side. This practice — and the accompanying hazards — continued into World War One. At least some of those observers were given parachutes!

An interesting variation on the observation balloon involved going down on a cable instead of up. During the Great War German airships over hostile territory would sometimes stay above the clouds and lower an observer on a cable in a small, aerodynamic gondola. These were equipped with a lightweight wicker chair, chart table, electric light, magnetic compass, telephone, and lightning conductor. There were several designs, but these gondolas most commonly looked rather like large bombs! These were originally developed to keep long radio antenna wires dangling below German airships under control. The manned versions were used for navigation, bomb aiming and spying.

Lighter than air craft continued to be used for reconnaissance for decades; the LZ 130 *Graf Zeppelin II* (updated sister ship to the ill-fated *Hindenburg*) never carried paying passengers. However, the airship was used to scout the British coastal Chain Home radar from 12 to 14 July 1939.

Unfortunately for the Nazis, they were looking on the wrong frequency band and detected nothing. Ironically, they did have the first German sighting of several of the then new Supermarine Spitfire aircraft (accounts vary; they may have seen a different type of plane) which they photographed as the planes circled the airship. The airship also showed very strongly on the British low-frequency coastal defense radar.

German lighter than air craft also monitored radio, and even used the old spy basket or “cloud car” tactic during this period. The largest airships could carry more than could the airplanes of that time (they could even carry fighter airplanes) and had far greater endurance. However, heavier than air craft rapidly improved and eventually took over the observing duties. This change was accompanied by the development of civilian airplane photogrammetry. That is, the use of aerial photographs to make maps. The technology involved in that use complimented photographic intelligence gathering by military aircraft.

Some of the airplanes used for aerial reconnaissance were purpose-built; some were modified versions of service aircraft. While the modified versions of existing craft were usually less useful, some were more successful than many of the planes designed from scratch to gather information. The photo-recon version of the British Mosquito light bomber is an excellent example.

Getting intelligence from the air usually means flying very high, very fast, very low, or some combination. Flying higher means covering a larger area with each photograph. Flying lower gives more detail. Flying slower means clearer final images. Flying faster means being

harder to catch. Whatever is chosen, the camera and film (or digital sensor for more modern equipment) must match the choice. For example, the faster and lower the plane is traveling the shorter the exposure must be to reduce motion blurring. Camera angle is also important. In photogrammetry, the shot must be as close to absolutely vertical as possible, to reduce distortion in the finished map. This is also true for some photo intelligence gathering. However, oblique shots can provide information not available in vertical photos. Such as the heights of objects.

During WWII, the British equipped several single-engine fighters with oblique cameras for reconnaissance. They would fly at low altitude past — rather than directly over — features of interest.

Flying at high altitude either requires a wing designed to give lift at low speed in the stratosphere, or a wing designed to give lift at high speeds in the stratosphere. The latter is often used today because one way to get enough air into your jet engines up there is to go fast and use the ram air effect. Of course, some planes just use a wing which works well at subsonic speed at high altitude, and do what it takes to get enough power out of the engine some other way.

The U-2 was pretty much designed from scratch in the Fifties for high altitude recon. It is essentially a sailplane with a single turbojet engine. At cruise altitude the stall speed is only a few knots below the Never Exceed airspeed. Still, it flies so high that it remains viable. Especially since, these days, most of its work it done with oblique sensors. It rarely flies directly over the target. These aircraft also do far more than take photos.

Note that not only is the U-2 a relatively small plane, but that at cruise conditions maintaining the correct angle of attack is critical. This means keeping the balance of the aircraft the same for the entire mission. Until digital cameras replaced the film ones, the rolls of film used in U-2s were split down the middle. Half started on a feed reel aft of the actual camera, with a takeup reel for film coming from the other direction beside it; half started on a feed reel forward of the camera, but on the other side with respect to the plane's centerline. As photos were taken, one half fed forward, and the other rearward. Always maintaining the balance of the aircraft. After developing, the two halves of each shot would be matched up for making prints.

The US Air Force took a different approach towards the same end with the Canberra B-57. During the Vietnam War some of the reconnaissance version of that plane were given wing extensions to raise the aircraft's ceiling. Then an even more radical wing extension modification was performed, so it could go even higher. Again, the result was a jetpowered sailplane. In this case, it was a modified bomber with more than one engine, so it can carry more. Extra engines were sometimes added under the extended wings.

Another military aircraft modification which proved very successful for spying on the enemy was the RB-36. The B-36 was designed to fly high and far. The recon version of the late Forties on was lightened, and could fly even higher than the base model. Instead of carrying the usual type of bombs in its four voluminous bays, the forward two bomb bays were replaced by pressurized manned compartments. The forward compartment generally had 14 cameras (and could carry up to 23) and a compact darkroom where the exposed film could be processed. The second bomb bay carried up to 80, T-86 photoflash bombs. The third bomb bay housed a 3,000 gallon fuel tank, to extend the plane's already significant range. The fourth bomb bay contained specialized electronic countermeasures (ECM) equipment. The exposed film would be developed during the flight home. The main camera was a huge, boxy rig the size of a closet. (It is frequently said to be the size of a Volkswagen Beetle. I've seen the one at the WrightPatterson museum, and that's not far off. Talk about large format!) The RB-36 — for a while — flew over the Soviet Union (and pretty much anywhere else it wanted) with impunity.

The RB-36 could be spotted and could be intercepted. However, the early Soviet jets attempting to shoot the bomber down would be in a zoom climb, unable to match the bomber's sustained altitude or even to steer. RB-36 crew members on these missions said they could see the interceptors starting their zoom and going "ballistic" trying to reach the US plane, since the bomber was well above their service ceiling. I haven't been able to verify this, but I believe no RB-36 was lost due to enemy action.

When using film it is necessary to get it home. Even if it is processed in flight, as in the RB-36. Current recon planes — including drones — use digital cameras and send the images (and many other types of information) via satellite in pretty much real time. Before that, though, bringing the film back could be as difficult as getting the images. The very early photo satellites had to drop film in reentry capsules. These were often snagged in the air, using a plane modified to grab the parachute lines of the capsule.

Much time and energy must be spent to reach high altitude. That's one reason high-flying recon planes are rarely intercepted, even with missiles. If what is being spied on isn't all that far from where the flight begins, though, staying low and going fast is a better option. This also reduces the chance of the mission being hindered by clouds.

The recon version of the Mosquito — mentioned above — was even faster than the light bomber version. It flew so low and fast that during after-mission maintenance, mechanics would sometimes find a chimney pot in an air intake. One particularly grisly find was a human head in an intake. Despite such hazards the Mosquito and fighters modified to

take photos provided good service. Even today, some fighters and attack planes are so modified. Many do a good job at low-altitude intelligence gathering. With good cameras and film (or the modern electronic equivalent) and clear weather, high is still usually better.

The main problem with flying high is the thin air, as mentioned above. Piston engine planes can overcome this by using a mechanically driven supercharger or a turbocharger. This latter is powered by waste energy which would normally go out the exhaust, so efficiency and performance are both increased with their use. Some piston-engine bombers adapted to photo recon in the late Thirties and early Forties had an additional engine inside the fuselage. This drove a compressor, which provided pressurized air to the piston engines driving the propellers at altitude. That was much simpler than fitting a turbocharger to each engine. However, during WWII many bombers came from the factory with turbochargers on the engines.

As mentioned, the B-36 was designed from the start to fly at high altitudes. The plane had six 28-cylinder Pratt & Whitney R-4360 "Wasp Major" radial engines, which came equipped with turbochargers and huge, fat-bladed propellers, arranged at the rear of the wing in a pusher configuration. Soon after the bomber entered service, a pair of pods containing two GE J47-19 jet engines each were installed, suspended near the end of each wing. These helped shorten takeoff runs and increased speed over the target.

So far this article has been about taking photos during the day, when there's usually plenty of light. What about at night? With film that is usually not an option, though there were exceptions. The T-86 photoflash bombs, mentioned above, helped with this. However, the inventor of the photographic strobe had a better idea.

One interesting WWII project to provide night recon photography involved modifying large planes to carry cameras and one of Harold Edgerton's giant photographic strobes. Edgerton proved the worth of the arrangement to skeptical intelligence spooks by illuminating all of Stonehenge on a moonless night. Several aircraft were so modified, including B-24 and A-20 bombers. Edgerton was actually along on some of these flights over enemy lands, purportedly to keep the huge strobe working. The plane would fly over Germany or occupied territories at night, at a fixed speed and altitude and course, taking giant flash photographs of what lay below. The concept worked well, but could not be used for long. German anti-aircraft gunners soon learned that the flashes occurred at regular intervals and quickly began anticipating where the plane would be. Oops! Still, the flash system did work well for taking night photos. As just one example, these rigs were used to gather intelligence needed to plan the drop zones in Normandy ahead of Allied paratroop landings.

One dedicated reconnaissance platform used by the Nazis was the Fw 189 *Uhu* (Eagle Owl). It looked a bit like the US P-38. It had twin

booms, each containing an engine. The booms started ahead of the cockpit — the engines and their propellers being well forward of the pilot — and extended through the wings to the twin rudders at the tail. Design work began after the German Ministry of Aviation formally let aircraft designers Arado and Focke-Wulf know that they wanted a three seat observation plane. Blohm & Voss threw their hat in the ring, and proposed something even more radical: the unique asymmetric BV 141. The Fw-189 won the contract. Though slow and fragile compared to then contemporary fighters, it was far more maneuverable. Original production versions were armed with four thirty-caliber machine guns, one of them in the tail. Despite that sparsity of offensive capability, it is credited with a few Soviet fighter kills. The Fw-189 could also carry four 50 kilogram bombs. However, its primary payload was either an Rb 20/30 or an Rb 50/30 aerial camera.

There were multiple versions of this aircraft, some built with other uses in mind besides reconnaissance. The central pod was supposed to likewise come in several flavors, with the specific task assigned to the plane requiring a specific design of central pod. I don't think that was ever done; the change to different purposes was instead handled by changing what was in the same design of crew pod.

Of course, the best scam is one that the mark doesn't know happened. There have been reams and entire books (novels as well as non-fiction) written on unsuspected spies in various institutions in many nations, and what they got away with. However, this is a technical brief, and it is focused on hardware. Specifically aviation hardware. Most reconnaissance aircraft — and even satellites — are detectable, which means the subjects of the spying are well aware of the efforts to watch them from above. So, stealth was developed.

Unfortunately, even stealthy aircraft aren't completely invisible. The Blackbirds — in the forms of the A-12 and SR-71 — could be detected by radar and infrared. However, being inherently stealthy the detection range was greatly reduced. The shorter response time this generated, combined with the speed and altitude of the planes, meant that none were ever successfully intercepted by aircraft or missile. Apparently, the closest any enemy came to shooting down a Blackbird was during one A-12 mission over North Vietnam. The pilot reported seeing a missile detonate ahead of his flight path. Later, a small piece of brass with Cyrillic characters on it was found embedded in the leading edge of a wing. This was eventually identified as part of the fuse on a Soviet anti-aircraft missile.

*Gog* was a movie made in 1954 by Herbert L. Strock. It was the third and final feature film in Ivan Tors' "Office of Scientific Investigation" (OSI) series, the others being *The Magnetic Monster* (1953) and *Riders to the Stars* (also in 1954). I see a lot of influence from this movie on the base in *The Andromeda Strain*,



especially the way the underground desert facility has color-coded levels, but that's getting off topic. One of the more interesting bits of tech in this movie is the sound detection system, used to discover aircraft by their characteristic noises. (Unlike the pre-radar aircraft sound detectors used in places like the east coast of Britain, this type of device uses resonant circuits which only responded to aircraft engine noises.) In the movie they use tuning forks hooked to amplifiers as the resonant components, which leads to one of the stupidest scenes in the movie (death by tuning fork volume). However, the concept is sound. (Sorry about that.) The system at the secret base keeps detecting an aircraft high overhead, but nothing shows on radar. Spoiler alert! They eventually discover that a "foreign power" has a stealthy plane built of fiberglass. Which doesn't show on radar.

Great Britain. However, there were only 2 to 4 flights before the first prototype crashed in December 1944, killing the pilot. Larger prototypes of this plane were subsequently begun but not completed, with the third being captured by the Americans. This last prototype is being restored by the Smithsonian's Paul E. Garber facility. Decades after the war, Reimar Horten stated the fighter/light bomber was intended to be stealthy, but this seems unlikely. As with the YB-49, any stealth effect would almost certainly have been accidental. For both planes, the flying wing design was adopted for aerodynamic efficiency, not stealth.

Recon aircraft can do far more than take photos. ELINT, or electronic intelligence gathering, is also important, and has been since at least the Thirties. Remember the *Graf Zeppelin II* looking for British radar? The airship was also outfitted to monitor radio traffic.

Today, reconnaissance drones do most of the work without risking lives, at least for flights over hostile targets. Even if the drone is lost, the data is safe, having been sent back to the controlling agency by the same satellite relay used to fly it. Additionally, much can be learned by aircraft outside the border of targets. This is especially true for things like radio and radar. There are still many — and many types — of crewed aircraft flying whose mission is solely to spy on the enemy.

### ANIMADVERSATIONISM

by David M. Shea

Every year, my brokerage used to send me a computer-generated "birthday" card pretending to offer good wishes for my "special day". For the first few years I ignored it. Finally one year, maybe I was already stressed or in a bad mood, but it particularly irritated me. So I ripped the card into confetti and mailed it back to them with a snotty note; saying that I have a date of birth (it says so on my driver's license), but I don't have a "birthday". And if I did have one it was none of their business. And that the card was a hollow and meaningless gesture with no human care or concern behind it.

Naturally I assumed I would never get a reply. Who knew that the national firm had a formal grievance department? My comment, intended as a mere gesture of frustration, had been assigned to one of their specialists. Was there anything else I wanted to express on the subject? Well ... they asked!

I promptly pointed out there are other people than myself who do not celebrate a "birthday". The noted African-American poet Maya Angelou did not observe her birthday for reasons that seemed valid to her, as my reasons seem valid to me. CNN news anchor Anderson Cooper has said that he "never liked" birthdays, including his own. once, he grudgingly agreed to a dinner party at the urging of his good friend, talk show personality Kelly Ripa. But he specified: no gifts, no cake, and no singing "that stupid song". He did agree that Kelly and her husband could serve any dessert they wanted, as long as it was

not cake.

As a child, Edwin Hubble once told his parents that rather than a birthday party, he would rather have a telescope. In those days you could order a small telescope from a catalog, mail order. For all I know, maybe you still can. Young Edwin and his grandfather spent the evening on the lawn looking at the night sky. (Yes, Hubble space telescope. Yes, Hubble's Constant, the rate of expansion of the universe. And on that note, with all due respect to Hal Clement, you should read the greatest hard-SF book ever written: Poul Anderson, *Tau Zero*. If that doesn't give you cold chills, maybe you should not read SF. Though I did not mention that to the brokerage.)

There is, or used to be, a television program called *Long Lost Family*. It's about people who were adopted as babies, searching for the stories of their actual birth. one case was about an infant who was found abandoned, early one morning, on the doorstep of a laundromat. Police took the baby girl to a hospital; a nurse estimated she was about 12 hours old, thus probably born the previous night. They put her in the nursery with a notice on the crib: NTBR. Another nurse from a different part of the hospital passed by and asked about the card. Not To Be Released, it meant. If no one showed up to claim the child, she would be placed for adoption. The nurse blurted, "I'll take her!" She and her husband affirmed they wanted the baby. A court order ruled that they were suitable candidates, and granted temporary custody; in due course they adopted the girl. They always observed the day they first saw her as her "birthday". She kept the custom as an adult. She always thought of the day of her actual birth as having been a day of "fear and trauma" for her birth mother.

In fact, not only do some people born in the United States not care about their birthdays, they may actually not know. In a book about the Mormon polygamy cult, it was clear that whatever records the group kept were not reliable, because the self-appointed "prophet" would go through the records and alter them, changing dates of birth or parents names according to his whim of the moment. In any case such records were seldom reported to state or county registers: the group were taught to distrust and avoid outsiders.

Many of Zenna Henderson's stories, though fictional, drew on her experience as a teacher. In the 1970 story "The Believing Child", a parent registering her child at school for the first time says, "She's six." When the teacher tentatively asks for a birth certificate, the mother replies, "Never had none. She was born anyway." The teacher guesses at an approximate birth date, calling it "usual procedure". The story is fiction; the episode has the ring of truth.

Naturally I did not mention fantasy stories to the brokerage. My basic argument was that people have different customs, and it's riot their business to assume everyone acts the same. Jews don't eat pork. Mormons don't



THE AMAZON N' TH' INFILTRATORS

In the real world, aircraft such as the B-2, U-2 and F-117 use a special paint with tiny "iron balls" mixed in, which absorb radar. I believe this technology was pioneered on the U-2 and later also used on the Blackbird family of aircraft and others. This, combined with aircraft shape in some cases, has proven very successful in greatly reducing aircraft radar signature. However, both measures are frequency-dependant. This means that some aircraft effectively invisible to military radars show clearly on civilian radars!

Note that the Northrop jet-powered flying wing bomber of the Forties, the YB-49 (there were actually several of these built by modifying piston-engined B-35 bombers, with a couple of different engine configurations) had an unusual radar return. Besides being able to outclimb and turn inside the chase plane fighters accompanying its test flights, this rather large aircraft vanished from the screen when it turned directly towards the ground radar antenna. This has lead to a claim that the Nazis were planning to use the Horten flying wing — the Ho 229 — in stealthy attacks on

drink coffee. That's none of my business and none of the brokerage's business. I don't have a "birthday" because I don't choose to, and no ape should inflict the custom on me.

The brokerage firm agreed to remove my name from the computer program that sent "birthday" greetings, and I left it at that. I still think it was a misguided policy.

### "We Gotta Get Out Into Space"

by Lloyd Daub

(With Apologies to The Animals)

You see trash heaps of old held Truths  
Near abandoned Western values  
People tell you there ain't no use  
In Tweeting  
(We say 'Worship the new')

Now Cassandra you're so young but cursed  
And one thing I know is true  
You'll be cancelled as fast as they can sue  
(We're woke, you know)

Watch the news abroad so worried  
Freedom's future is turning grim  
You've been warning and blogging  
From dawn to dim  
(We're Ivy League — not you)

You've been Facebooking so hard  
I've been emailing too babe  
Every night and day  
Every night and day  
(Blah! Blah! Blah! Blah!)

We gotta get out into space  
If it's the last thing we ever do  
We gotta get out into space  
'Cause Cass, there's a better world  
For me and you

Now Cassandra we're so young but cursed  
And one thing we know is true  
We'll be cancelled as fast as they can sue  
(Trump trailer trash!)

Watch the news at home so tragic  
Freedom's future is turning grim  
We've been warning and blogging  
From dawn to dim  
(Delete your account!)

They don't listen, no

We gotta get out into space  
If it's the last thing we ever do  
We gotta get out into space  
Cass, there's a better world  
For me and you

Somewhere Cassandra  
Where they'll believe you girl

We gotta get out into space  
If it's the last thing we ever do  
We gotta get out into space  
Cass, there's a better world for me and you

Somewhere Cassandra  
I believe you  
(And stay out!)

### WHERE DOES UHURA COME FROM, or I'm censored by Tor.com again

by Taras Wolansky

[The Tor.com article I was commenting on is *Star Trek: Strange New Worlds Announces Its Crew—Including Lieutenant Uhura*, by Emmet Asher-Perrin. The censored comment is at the bottom, after several that remain posted (so far). My interjections here are bracketed and italicized.]

[Responding to a complicated discussion of why Gene Roddenberry dropped the female First Officer from the pilot.]

For what it's worth, in the intergalactic stories from the early Forties by A.E. Van Vogt that probably inspired Roddenberry, both the captain and first officer were women. (These stories were later collected as *Mission to the Stars*.)

I would not swear to this, but I think it was William Shatner in *Star Trek Memories* who said that it was the preview audience, especially the women, that put the kibosh on the woman first officer. Of course, Shatner may merely have been repeating what Roddenberry told him.

Getting back to the new series, I'm not entirely clear on one point. Will the Aenar character be played by an Aenar actor?

[The Aenar are an alien race related to Andorians. There was a lot of discussion of casting characters with actors of the right ethnicities. Anyway, next comment.]

This might be interesting to do, though I don't know how the fans would take it. Anything we "know" from TOS because we were told about it, rather than seeing it ourselves, could be revealed as more ambiguous than we thought; or even that what we thought was the true story was actually a cover-up. It's how Neil Gaiman adapted *Beowulf*: the uncorroborated part of the story is revealed to be a fiction.

About the casting, I'm a little uneasy about this genealogical approach. For me, Benedict Cumberbatch was wrong for the role of Khan because he didn't look the part, not because of his ancestry per se.

In the *Godfather* saga, Don Vito Corleone is played by Marlon Brando, who did not have a scintilla of Italian ancestry. (The name was originally Brandau.) His grandson and eventual successor, Vincent, is played by Cuban-American actor Andy Garcia.

[Responding to comments about the chilly relationship between Spock and the doctor.]

Bones as a "human supremacist" — I like it!

Africa is a very big place, with a vast number of peoples and languages. Did they ever figure out what part of Africa Uhura is from? (Just don't tell me it's Wakanda ...)

[Responding to a comment that Uhura has, on occasion, identified herself as a speaker of Swahili.]

According to Wikipedia, Swahili is a lingua franca with a lot of Arab loan words, which developed to facilitate trade between Arabs and locals speaking various Bantu languages. It's spoken as a first language by only a few people, and a second or third language by many people in a dozen countries.

Of course, over 200 years, that may have changed. But it doesn't seem to do much to narrow down Uhura's background. I mean, we know Kirk comes from Iowa, not just North America.

[Responding to a comment about use of Swahili as a first language in Tanzania.]

Interesting. Perhaps we should place Uhura in what is now Tanzania. (Where there are actually poets writing in Swahili, it sez here.)

On the other hand, the articles on the languages of Tanzania and Kenya indicate that English and Swahili are used for intergroup communication, while people speak their "mother tongues" back home; i.e., within their ethnic group.

I think it would be nice if Star Trek acknowledged that Africa is not a country, but a continent containing many countries, each of which contains a wide variety of ethnic groups speaking an astonishing variety of languages. Uhura might mention, offhand, that she speaks Kikuyu or Maasai when she goes home.

[\*\*\*Censored comment begins, quoting a previous comment about the casting of Benedict Cumberbatch as "Khan" in one of the movies.]

"There is a lot more distance between an East Asian and a caucasian [sic], than between an Italian and Hispanic person." Actually Marlon Brando's ancestry was North European.

It occurs to me that Africans are probably a little annoyed when American blacks, mostly of West African ancestry, play East Africans or North Africans. (We may not be able to distinguish a Hutu from a Tutsi, but the Hutu and the Tutsi certainly can.) I recall that the Egyptians were unhappy with the casting of the great Louis Gossett, Jr. as their martyred president, Anwar Sadat. I'm guessing that London is full of East African actors who could play Uhura — if they don't want to try East Africa itself, that is.

[Continuing censored comment, responding to a long comment that had been posted but was itself censored after I saw it.]

Much as Spock had to go home to Vulcan to perform certain rituals, we might discover that Uhura is tribal royalty, with responsibilities back home.

[The Tor.com censors never explain why they suppress something; and this time I am at a loss. Any ideas?]

### Khan-Cave 2021

Con Report by Tom Feller



My wife Anita and I had not taken an overnight since before the pandemic when we attended this little mini-convention in Bowling Green, Kentucky over the weekend of July 16-18. It had begun as a combination committee meeting and summer party for the organizers and regular attendees of Con-Cave, a relaxacon that normally takes place in February. In other words, it is a relaxacon for the people who are too busy to relax at the regular relaxacon.

Although we left our home in Nashville at mid-day, we still ran into heavy traffic leaving town and also when we arrived an hour later in Bowling Green. Our room at the Clarion was ready, so we had no trouble checking in. Then we had a late lunch at the Mexican restaurant next door. We were pleased that it had survived the pandemic, and we noticed that they had built a deck for outdoor seating. Afterward we found Claude Miles, the con chairperson, at the outdoor swimming pool, where we paid for our memberships.

The con suite was in the room they use for the art show at ConCave, and we found it well stocked with beer and snacks. Unfortunately, they never had soft drinks or bottled water, but we made do. We got into a conversation with a few people, and one of them had a small dog that amused Anita.

After the sun got low enough so that the pool was in a shade, we found a couple chairs and visited with Pat Molloy, a well-known Huntsville, Alabama fan. Our friends Frank and Millie Kalisz hosted a room party that night, where we also saw more friends, such as Gary and Corliss Robe, Dan Caldwell, Fran Bray, Bob Embler, and several others whom we had not seen since the pandemic started.

The con suite doubled as a movie room, and we watched *Sharks of the Corn* Friday night. One of the stars was Claude, our con chairperson, who provided commentary, such as pointing out a character played by the movie's director. As you can guess from the title, it is a spoof of horror movies. It has its moments, and it is certainly no more implausible than the *Sharknado* movies.

The next day we slept late, for us at least, and visited the con suite for a snack. We found that they were showing *Black Widow*, which we had seen in a real movie theater the previous weekend. They were about 30 minutes into it, so we stayed and saw it again.

After the movie, we drove over to Cracker Barrel for lunch. I was wearing a fannish t-shirt, and our waitress commented that I must be a "sci-fi" fan. She asked about my favorite science fiction. I admitted to being an old Trekkie, so she asked what my favorite alien species was. When I replied that that would be the Vulcans, she responded that she figured that.

We returned to the con suite, and since we were the only ones there, the person in charge of the movies asked us to choose from his list. When he mentioned *Summer of Soul*, I took him up on his offer. This is a documentary

that has received a lot of buzz on the Internet. It consists of discovered footage from the Harlem Cultural Festival of 1969 and features The Fifth Dimension, Stevie Wonder, Sly and the Family Stone, and other African-American singing groups of the time. The swimming pool was in the shade by this time, so we returned, talked to Frank and Millie briefly, and ate our dinner of hot dogs which were cooked at pool-side.

The big party that night was a tea party co-hosted by Corliss Robe and, once again, we visited with people we had not seen since the pandemic. The main event of the evening was a concert by Five Year Mission, although they were missing two of their members. As you would guess from their name, most of their music is based on *Star Trek*. We found them quite entertaining. We also noticed a drone that hovered above the pool for quite a while during the concert. Anita and I were sitting in the shadows, so if it took pictures, I doubt if we were included. We did not linger Sunday and were back in Nashville in time for lunch. It had been a long-time between conventions, and we were glad we went.

### Archon 44

Con Report by Leigh Kimmel

Archon is a long-running science fiction convention held in the St. Louis area. Last year it had to be canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic, so Archon 44 was held in 2021 rather than 2020. However, it was still held over the first weekend in October at the Gateway Center in Collinsville, Illinois (one of the Metro East suburbs), October 1-3, 2021.

We hit the road on Wednesday so that we could include a visit to my dad. Even with a couple of stops in Champaign for shopping, we still got to his place earlier than he'd expected. I had time to wash all the laundry we'd brought and go to the Homecoming parade for the local high school, and still had time to visit with Dad and put two merchandise orders in for upcoming shows.

On Thursday we carried our belongings back out to the van and hit the road for Collinsville. We made good enough time that we decided to eat our lunch when we stopped to do some shopping in Litchfield, rather than eating on the road. It's certainly more restful, and easier for me to not be trying to eat while driving. It also simplifies taking various medicines and nutritional supplements at noon.

Even with the extended break at Litchfield and two stops at rest areas, we still got to Collinsville early enough that there was some question of whether we'd be able to check in to our hotel room right away. We discussed going over to Walgreens to pick up a shipment of t-shirts that was to be held for me, but a check of the shipping company website showed that it was still in transit. Shortly afterward, we got a message that we could check into the hotel, so we headed straight there.

We were just settling in after carrying in our

personal belongings when I got an e-mail that my shipment was ready for me to pick up. I went back out to the van, made sure we had a stable load, and drove over to Walgreen's. I was a little surprised to be given only one box, since the messages from the shipper had indicated it would come in two boxes, not just one. A little more checking the shipping company's website showed that the second box was lagging behind, and might come as late as Monday — which would be awkward, since we were planning to leave the area after loading out on Sunday. However, as it turned out, the shipper had arranged things so that the return address was our home address, so if the package bounced, it would go to our home, not back to the shipper.

With that crisis made less urgent, I headed back to the hotel and took the box in to inventory the product. When I had a list of what we had received, I carried the box back to the van, then sent my wholesale agent a list of what we had received, checking that the other things would be in the second box. Apparently part of the shortfall was the result of mice getting into some boxes of product and damaging them.

After supper, we headed over to the Gateway Center to pick up our badges. There were some new procedures as a result of the pandemic, but the process went smoothly once we got someone to let us in and we realized that yes, con registration was indeed open. Then we headed back to our hotel room to take it easy for the night.

On Friday we got up early and had the hotel's complimentary breakfast. This year's offerings were rather scant compared to what they'd offered in previous years. I really missed the little omelettes with bits of pepper and mushroom or cheddar cheese, but they probably had to be eliminated as a result of new food safety rules imposed for the pandemic. Normally I'd hope that a hotel would return to their usual breakfast offerings once the pandemic ends, but due to some other policy changes, we've decided we won't be returning to this hotel for the foreseeable future.

After dealing with an unexpected mess, we headed over to the Gateway Center to load in. Since we were running close on time, I just went ahead and started getting merchandise out so we could have a cart ready. As it happened, my husband was able to snag one of the convention center's carts, so I didn't have to get our own cart out.

At first I was working by myself, focusing on getting the most critical items in soonest so that my husband could get a good start on building the structures. However, our helpers soon started arriving, and I was able to get stuff in more quickly. I pulled out our cart and started putting stuff on it, so one of our helpers could run things in while the other helped my husband build structures. We actually got things in and set up before the dealers' room opened, and I would've had time to put up signs and take a look around if I hadn't gotten a message that my second package was at

Walgreens and ready for delivery. So I had to grab my purse and head out to the van.

At least this time I knew which desk handled FedEx shipments, so my trip to Walgreens was pretty straightforward. The package turned out to be so small I hardly needed a cart to carry it, which simplified getting it into the dealers' room, especially considering that I had to find a different parking spot. Fortunately I was able to get in through the roll-up door, although it was closed shortly thereafter. I quickly inventoried this shipment and got my new products in with the existing merchandise.

Then the doors opened and people started coming in. Sales were slow at first, but soon picked up. I was surprised to get a fair number of book sales, including one in which a person bought a whole stack of books. I don't see too many of those purchases any more, so I was particularly gratified to see it.

After the dealers' room closed for the day, we considered dropping in on the book release party we'd heard about. However, that would've required driving over to the Doubletree hotel and finding a parking place, and we weren't sure that the party hadn't been canceled. Finally we decided not to risk wasting our time and just headed back to our hotel room to have supper and wind down. I did some blogging and worked on a writing challenge before turning in for the night.

On Saturday we got up and had breakfast before heading over to the Gateway Center for what is usually our biggest day of sales. I'd hoped to get some time to walk around, but I ended up using the entire prep period to redo a display, correcting some well-meaning mistakes by a helper who didn't understand our processes.

However, that time was worth it, because we got a lot more sold than we would've had things been left as they were. In fact, we sold a lot more merchandise than I'd expected, including several large book orders. After moving up second copies and filling in gaps from the last of them, I consolidated our back stock and discovered we'd already emptied an entire box. This was a really nice discovery, especially after several years of lukewarm book sales. It really made me think of the old days when we could count on emptying three or four boxes of books at Archon.

After the dealers' room closed for the evening, we headed back to our hotel room for supper. Because I knew time would be at a premium on Sunday morning, I decided to just go ahead and take some stuff out to the van that we wouldn't need. Then I soaked my very sore feet while I caught up on my blogging, then wrote up a writing challenge for Sunday's blog post, so I didn't have to worry about getting it done on a day when we would be very busy.

On Sunday we got up and had breakfast. Then I carried the rest of our belongings out to the van and we got checked out. We headed over to the Gateway Center, and once we got

our tables open for business, I finally had some actual time to walk around the dealers' room and see who was there.

Sales were actually pretty good for a Sunday, to the point that I was busy right up to the point we really needed to get started on packing our smaller stuff. We sold a decent number of paperbacks, and I was able to further consolidate our back stock. However, we didn't sell nearly as many hardcovers as we had in 2019, when we'd emptied our back stock box and ended up having to creatively rearrange the remaining boxes to keep them stable.

Once the dealers' room closed and the convention center staff opened the rollup door, I went out to the van and retrieved all our empty boxes. I used one of the convention center's big carts to speed the process. Usually I'd box the t-shirts myself, but I wanted to get the books out as fast as humanly possible, for two reasons. First, two of our helpers, including our strongest, needed to leave early due to work obligations. Second, we had storms coming in, and I did not want to be trying to haul books out to the van in the pouring rain. We've done it when we've had to, but trying to keep the books properly tarped makes every thing harder.

As it turned out, I was able to get most of the books out before even the first intermittent showers. Then we got a break in which I was able to get the rest of our merchandise loaded into the van. The showers had been light enough that the parking lot dried quickly and we were able to pile boxes on the concrete and let me sort through them to put them in their proper places. Thanks to our remaining helpers bringing everything else out so I didn't have to run back and forth, I not only got everything loaded tighter than when we'd come, but also left almost an hour before all dealers were supposed to be out. Instead of being the very last dealers out, we saw several still breaking down displays when we left.

And not a minute too soon, as it turned out. As I pulled out of the convention center complex and headed for the interchange to get onto I 55/70, the first raindrops started to hit our windshield. Soon it became a deluge, and by the time we passed mile marker 20 and the two Interstate highways splitting off, we were driving in a downpour so heavy that I was having to slow down because of limited visibility.

Thankfully the rain slacked up and stopped altogether by the time we reached the second rest area. We stopped briefly, then continued north. We had a brief period around Litchfield in which we jumped off I-55 and followed a parallel track that had apparently been an old alignment of Route 66. There were places where it had clearly once been four lane divided, but the two lanes closer to the Interstate had either been repurposed for storing IDOT equipment or allowed to decay altogether. It was an interesting excursion, but I was still glad to reach an interchange north of the backup and get back to Interstate speeds.

It was still light when we went around

Springfield, but by the time we passed Lincoln it was getting dark. We drove to my dad's place in darkness, and I was very glad to pull into the driveway and power down the van. I carried in our stuff and started a load of laundry, then warmed up the supper we'd brought with us. We did get some time to visit with Dad before we turned in for the night.

We didn't set an alarm for Monday morning, but we got a good enough night's sleep that we were able to get up and moving fairly quickly. We had breakfast and I started carrying things out to the van. I was able to get them out quickly enough that I even had some time to get on the Internet before lunch.

After lunch we carried the last few things out to the van and said good-bye to Dad. Then we hit the road west for home. On the way we stopped again at Sam's Club in Champaign to get gas.

We ran through some fairly heavy rain shortly after we crossed the Indiana state line, and I had to slow down for a while. Even so, we still were able to get to Brownsburg before the branch of our bank closed and were able to make our deposit. Then we headed down to Greenwood to a free community meal before we finally came home. Much as I love Archon (I've been going since 1996), it's still good to pull the van into the driveway, power down, and walk back to my own front door.

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### AN ALIEN DEATH

Review by Thomas E. Simmons of  
**REMOTE CONTROL**  
 (2021; Tor; ISBN 978-1250772800;  
 \$19.99; Tor (Kindle); \$10.99)  
 By Nnedi Okorafor

In Ghana, a decade or two in the future, a bookish Muslim girl named Fatima hangs from the branches of her backyard shea tree, sketching constellations with "sky words." Fatima is tiny for her age and stoically endures waves of Malarial fever every few months. One night, as she sketches Sagittarius, she is inspired by a creative impulse just as a meteor shower dusts her with a glowing seed, altering her existence and that of her family and her town. The seed sinks into the ground with an agency all its own, and soon thereafter, it emerges as something else.

A glowing seed which burrows into the earth at the base of a tree and generates both wonder and danger, upsetting the life of a child-protagonist, recalls the opening chapters of Roald Dahl's *James and the Giant Peach* (1961). Like Dahl's tale, the mysterious seed generates a journey, too. This novella also reminds one of another charming sci-fi novella, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince* (1943).

Fatima's transformation is so thorough that she misplaces her name and obtains a new one, Sankofa. Like the golden-haired extraterrestrial from *The Little Prince*, she is befriended by a fox, whom she eventually tames. And like the boy-prince, she is befriended by a more forbid-

ding presence, death itself. She soon becomes known by a second new moniker, the "Adopted Daughter of Death." Sankofa wears death like a cloak, killing men with a glow and technology with a touch. There is much destruction in *Remote Control*, but most of it is soft and unwelcome.

There is a richness to Okorafor's prose that carries her narrative. There is a rhythmic quality to Sankofa's interior dialogues. There is a warmth to the descriptions of her family. Okorafor writes confidently of the texture of soil and of Sankofa's new skin — seemingly invulnerable but always in need of moisturizing shea butter.

Not every riddle in *Remote Control* is solved. Not every image is translatable. This is a deeply rewarding, mysteriously framed story which is well-worth reading and re-reading.

### Dragon Awards

Courtesy of File770.com

#### 1. BEST SCIENCE FICTION NOVEL

*Project Hail Mary* by Andy Weir

#### 2. BEST FANTASY NOVEL (INCLUDING PARANORMAL)

*Battle Ground* by Jim Butcher

#### 3. BEST YOUNG ADULT / MIDDLE GRADE NOVEL

*A Wizard's Guide to Defensive Baking* by T. Kingfisher

#### 4. BEST MILITARY SCIENCE FICTION OR FANTASY NOVEL

*Gun Runner* by Larry Correia, John D. Brown

#### 5. BEST ALTERNATE HISTORY NOVEL

*1637: No Peace Beyond The Line* by Eric Flint, Charles Gannon

#### 6. BEST MEDIA TIE-IN NOVEL

*Firefly: Generations* by Tim Lebbon

#### 7. BEST HORROR NOVEL

*The Hollow Places* by T. Kingfisher

#### 8. BEST COMIC BOOK

*X-Men* by Jonathan Hickman, Mahmud Asrar

#### 9. BEST GRAPHIC NOVEL

*The Magicians: New Class* by Lev Grossman, Lilah Sturges, Pius Bak

#### 10. BEST SCIENCE FICTION OR FANTASY TV SERIES

*The Expanse*, Amazon

#### 11. BEST SCIENCE FICTION OR FANTASY MOVIE

*The Old Guard* by Gina Prince-Bythewood

#### 12. BEST SCIENCE FICTION OR FANTASY PC / CONSOLE GAME

*Assassin's Creed: Valhalla*, Ubisoft

#### 13. BEST SCIENCE FICTION OR FANTASY MOBILE GAME

*Harry Potter: Puzzles and Spells*, Zynga

#### 14. BEST SCIENCE FICTION OR FANTASY BOARD GAME

*Dune: Imperium*, Dire Wolf Games

#### 15. BEST SCIENCE FICTION OR FANTASY MINIATURES / COLLECTIBLE CARD / ROLE-PLAYING GAME

*Warhammer: Age of Sigmar: Soulbound Role-Playing Game*, Cubicle 7

#### Mike Resnick Memorial Award

For the best unpublished science fiction short story by a new writer.

Z. T. Bright: *The Measure of a Mother's Love*

### WORLDCON BIDS

2023

Chengdu  
Year of the Water Rabbit  
August, 2023

<http://www.worldconinchina.com/index-e.html>

Memphis, Tennessee  
August 23-27, 2023  
<https://www.memphis23.org/>

Winnipeg, Manitoba  
August 24-28, 2023  
<https://winnipeg2023.ca/>

With the delay in Worldcon this year, the con bid deadline has also been pushed back, and CanFandom has leapt into the breach.

2024

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

2025

Seattle

Mid-August 2025

Brisbane, Australia  
Mid-August 2025  
<https://australia2025.com/>

2026

Jeddah, Saudi Arabia  
<https://jedddicon.com/>

Los Angeles

Nice, France  
August 12-16, 2026  
<http://nice2023.com/en/home/>

Orlando  
Early to Mid-August 2026

2027

Tel Aviv  
August 2027

2029

Dublin  
<http://dublin2029.ie>

2031

Texas

### WORLDCON

2021

DisCon III  
Washington, D.C.  
December 15-19, 2021  
<http://discon3.org/>

2022

Chicon 8  
Chicago  
September 1-5, 2022  
<http://www.chicon.org>

DisCon has released its membership records as of August. There are 4649 members, divided into 2439 Attending, 1932 Supporting, and 278 Virtual.

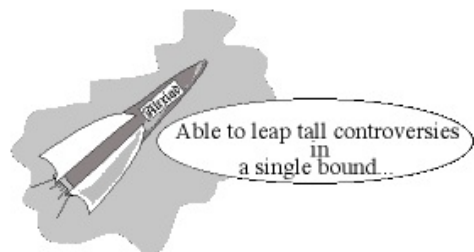
There are no members from Saudi Arabia. There is one (1) Attending Member from China (along with 8 Supporting and 2 Virtual, with 2 Supporting Members from Hong Kong). Make of that what you will.

Of course I haven't written- take a ghould look at me!





## Letters, we get letters



From: **Sable Jak** August 19, 2021

I hope you don't mind me using your first name. Martha suggested I contact you.

First of all, thank you so much for accepting her review of *Bright Morn of Issareth*. She's been a staunch supporter of the serial since she read the first volume.

### How much does it cost?

Unfortunately we found that the link she put in to the website doesn't work. The serial is currently running on the new Kindle Vella platform and without the link if anyone is interested in the story they'll have to hunt for it. We realize it's too late to do anything about it, but if in the next issue you could mention that it would be lovely.

Also the Moondance awards she mentions are actually from Moondance International Film Festival, a film competition that, for writers, also takes novels, TV, plays and audio dramas.

From: **Nic Farey** August 19, 2021  
[fareynic@gmail.com](mailto:fareynic@gmail.com)

Thanks as always Joe,

I'm sure I won't be the only person to point out that you omitted Carrie Kelley from your list of Robins, perhaps because Miller's 'Dark Knight' series isn't considered strictly canon?

**It seems that way. There is lots of art with "five Robins", almost none with six.**

— JTM

Good arrers!

From: **Tom Feller** August 24, 2021  
[tomfeller@aol.com](mailto:tomfeller@aol.com)

Thanks for e-mailing the zine. Did you ever run a review of *Code Girls* by Liza Mundy? I recently read it for a book group and wrote up a review for one of my apas. It is about the thousands of young women who went to Washington, D.C. during World War II to work for the Army and Navy as cryptographers.

I remember the late George Alec Effinger telling me that he would be perfectly happy if *The Last Dangerous Visions* was never published. His first sale was to Ellison for the anthology, and he did not consider it up the standard of his more mature work.

**And one of the points in the Patchin Review article was how many of the writers had died since their work had been submitted.**

—JTM

Glad to hear that Inconjunction is back. Anita and I went to Khan-Cave, the ConCave summer party and hope to attend Outsidecon next month. We had been thinking of flying to New Orleans for Contraflow, but it has been canceled.

There was an item in our local newspaper the other day that Nashville passed the 50% threshold of residents being fully vaccinated.

From: **George W. Price** August 26, 2021  
 4418 N. Monitor Avenue, Chicago, IL  
 60630-3333 USA  
[price4418@comcast.net](mailto:price4418@comcast.net)

Thanks for *Alexiad* 118.

I was no little surprised that my loc was not included (nor was I listed in the WAHF box). Did you not receive it? I sent it on July 18, both email and postal mail, well before the deadline.

Or was it a lack of space? If you didn't have enough additional material to make a full two pages, it would look odd to have a lot of blank space at the end. If that was the case, I hope you will see fit to print my letter, or some of it, in the next issue. I would particularly like to have the note on Senator Tim Scott published.

If there was some other reason, I am extremely curious as to what it might be.

**If I received it, it's disappeared. It's not in my reserve mailbox.**

— JTM

On a another matter entirely, in the not too distant future you will need to revise your standard note that *Heinlein's Children* should be ordered from me. Advent is about to go out of business, and all Advent print editions will have to be ordered from Pulp Era Booksellers, which is affiliated with ReAnimus Press. I will let you know when the details of how to order have been settled.

August *Alexiad*:

First, a special announcement:

Hear ye! Hear ye! Hear ye!

Effective immediately, print copies of Joe Major's book *Heinlein's Children: The Juveniles* should no longer be ordered from me, George Price. Both print and ebook editions of this (and all other Advent titles) should now be

ordered through the Advent website via this link:

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

Orders and inquiries by postal mail should go to: Advent Publishers, P.O. Box 16143, Golden, CO 80402.

I am now retired from publishing, and have relinquished ownership of Advent, which is being rejuvenated as Advent Publishers LLC under the direction of Andrew Burt in Golden, Colorado. He plans new titles from Advent.

Please start ordering, and happy reading!

\*\*\*\*\*

Cathy Palmer-Lister remarks on science fiction conventions "moving from participatory to consumer-oriented." David Shea says, "I wrote off the Hugo Awards as a lost cause years ago."

Such comments, and the con listings in *Alexiad*, interest me — and are practically all the information I get on conventions these days. I stopped going to the Worldcons years ago, though not because of any dissatisfaction with them. My last was 2006 in Anaheim.

I had been a very regular attendee starting in 1952, when the Worldcon was in Chicago, my hometown. Ironically, I had to travel 700 miles to get there, since I was in the Army stationed near Baltimore.

Thereafter I made it to nearly every Worldcon held in the U.S. or Canada. I skipped all the overseas cons except Heidelberg in 1970. That one I attended with a girlfriend as the centerpiece of a three-week tour of Europe.

But 2006 was my last, because my wife's health had declined to where she could no longer drive, and I did not want to leave her alone even for a weekend.

After she passed away in 2013 I could have resumed going to the cons. But I had gotten out of the habit, and truth to tell, old age had crept up on me too. Worsening vision forced me to give up driving four years ago when I turned 88. Glaucoma has made my eyesight so bad, even after a corrective operation, that reading is very slow and arduous. I barely skim the daily newspapers to keep up with world events, and I'm behind even on that.

That's why I haven't read a science fiction book or magazine in several years, and *Alexiad* is just about my only source for what is going on in fandom. So these commentaries on con politics keep me informed, but, alas, are no longer directly relevant to my life.

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The recent New York City mayoral primary seems to have been mightily screwed up by "ranked-choice" voting. It took the Democrats fifteen days to learn who their candidate is.

The "ranked-choice" idea sounds great, but in practice appears to have severe flaws.

One problem I haven't seen discussed is how it would handle an election in which one candidate is "everybody's second choice." That

September 24, 2021

is, each of several candidates has his or her base of enthusiastic supporters, and then there is also one candidate who does not set anybody on fire, but because he is known as competent and moderate, nearly all voters would settle for him if they couldn't get their own star choice.

Would ranked-choice make Mr. Second Choice the winner? Not bloody likely! Precisely because he is everybody's second choice, he gets no first-place votes. And therefore he is eliminated in the very first round. That makes no sense in this case, but it's how ranked-choice voting works.

Even I might figure out a better way to calculate a "ranked-choice" winner. Suppose we use a "weighted point score" like this:

Say there are five candidates. Each one gets a point score calculated as the sum of [five times his number of first-place votes] plus [four times his second-place votes] plus [three times his third-place votes] plus [two times his fourth-place votes] plus [one times his fifth-place votes]. Highest point score total wins. No need to drop anybody, nor to recount any votes. Mr. Second Choice might still lose, but he would have a much better chance to win.

In any case, "ranked-choice" as it stands needs serious reconsideration.

\*\*\*\*\*

You can imagine my horror and disgust at the dreadful debacle in Afghanistan. I point no finger; there is plenty of blame to go around.

The central problem is that "nation-building" just plain does not work in a place like that. Afghanistan is not and never has been a real nation — it is a wretched stew of tribes and sects who mostly hate each other's guts.

Millions of people live in Afghanistan — but mighty damned few give their first loyalty to Afghanistan.

In hindsight, we should never have bothered to conquer and eject the Taliban after 9/11. And henceforth let's do what we should have done then: Send in spies and reconnaissance drones to locate terrorist and jihadist bases, then follow up with clouds of bombs and missiles, and the occasional take-no-prisoners commando raid. And we should not give a diddly damn who is ruling in Kabul.

From: **Lloyd Penney** September 7, 2021  
1706-24 Eva Road, Etobicoke, ON  
M9C 2B2 CANADA  
[penneys@bell.net](mailto:penneys@bell.net)  
<http://lloydpenney.livejournal.com/>

Thank you for *Alexiad* 118. We all know that Labour Day is not the last day of summer, for there is still about three weeks of it left by the calendar, but sometimes, no one tells the weatherman. It is already getting cool here, and friends have already seen the leaves of the trees start to change colour.

The electrical grid in Texas failed, and of course Hurricane Ida destroyed houses, roads,

lives, and much of Louisiana's electrical system. We keep finding all kinds of neat projects to work on, but maintaining infrastructure just isn't one of them until something like a massive hurricane comes along, and scrapes everything of value off the surface of the earth.

Science is a continual discovery, and when new discoveries are made, science, which is the sum total of all that we've discovered, changes. Being a petulant child won't change anything, as in too many children in adult bodies campaigning to do away with masks, social distancing, vaccines, and anything else COVID-wise that might offer the least inconvenience. (They were probably vaccinated when they were children, against mumps, measles, diphtheria, etc., how is this vaccination any different? Too many Trumpers remain...) We did catch COVID-19, we recovered, we got two shots, and if a booster shot is taken, I will happily take it. There will be life after COVID, and I will do what I can to see that life. I will be damned if I am going to let some fool who doesn't want to mask up endanger my life.

A shame to see Ed Meskys go. He was always pleasant and interesting to talk to, and we are as guilty as any in loving his guide dogs to the point where they weren't much use to Ed. We remember Noreason Three well, with their bidzine, *The Mad 3 Party*, in which my letters regularly ran, plus two parody zines, and I wound up in those two, as well. Some great fun. And, I do believe I will pick up a copy of *The Last Dangerous Visions* when it eventually sees print, no matter what may or may not be within its covers.

I have read very little SF over this pandemic myself, and I have a shelf's worth to choose from. I did purchase the various associated books from Sir Philip Pullman to fill in the gaps between this two Dust trilogies, and they were entertaining. To follow up on what Cathy P-L says, the Wizard World series of pro-run conventions was recently purchased by the Fan Expo chain, with head office here in Toronto. This now makes 17 megacons in their network...and I still won't go to them. However, if things get desperate, I might look into how I might get some work in their head office.

My letter... To follow up on Americans coming into Canada in August, as of today, the rest of the world can fly into Canada. Let's hope they don't have fake COVID-19 vaccination cards. We are getting about 800+ COVID cases every day in the province of Ontario. I think Canadians will be able to come into the US near the end of September, but wouldn't be surprised if that is put off again, probably to the end of October. The cicadas are happily buzzing away here, but they may end soon if the temperatures continue to drop the way they have been doing.

Too late. You've already got  
~~stupid~~ antivaxx marches there.

—JTM

Made the page, and off it goes! Have a

happy autumn when it arrives.

From: **Richard A. Dengrove** Sept. 9, 2021  
2651 Arlington Drive, #302, Alexandria, VA 22306-3626 USA  
[RichD22426@aol.com](mailto:RichD22426@aol.com)

Here are my comments for *Alexiad* August 2021.

First, in your "Reviewer's Notes," you discuss how the 'truths' of science are, by no means, permanent. Let me add that, one reason for that is new facts or perspectives are the stuff of new theories. Also, let me tell of a group you wouldn't expect that agrees with this. According to John L. Heilbron Galileo, the Catholic Church recently concluded Galileo was wrong about science but right about Catholic Doctrine. It pointed out all theories are open to change; and, in fact, science has progressed ahead of Galileo. At the time, Galileo was reluctant to accept that about his theories. ...As for Galileo's view of Church doctrine, I will leave that for another time.

Also, in your "Reviewer Notes," you talk about Ed Meskys. I think I saw him once at a convention. As you say, he was blind. Nonetheless, he seemed to enjoy his life far more than others with seeing eyes. I'm sure it helped that he had a very cooperative seeing eye dog.

He and I were attending a panel at Millennium Philcon. Dave Kyle was on the panel. Ed was sitting on the front right of the audience section, his dog on the floor by him. He asked me to ask if that was all right, and Dave said it was. So of course I told him, "Dave Kyle says you can sit here." Lisa observed that if looks could kill...

In "The Events of the Unhappy Anniversary," you relate the tale of a novel *The Guardsman*, which won the Hugo in the '80s. At first, votes were disqualified as block voting. However, later, the votes were permitted, and the novel won. You give evidence that maybe it should have been disqualified. However, from that particular evidence, it looks, to me, like we'll never know.

No, it didn't win. Cyteen won that year.

—JTM

In "At Last, Dangerous, Visions," we will know. The evidence is the publisher of it would have lost the right to publish the originally accepted tales after all these years. Of course, someone could always publish a book if it was an all new anthology. Then, it would have the title "*Last Dangerous Visions*" only for publicity sake.

In "*Axis of the Andes*," while tales of alternate timelines might be rare, I suspect that science fiction has been set in Latin America. I

remember several novels having to do with Brazil. I also remember an Alexis Gilliland novel from the *Rosinante* series that talked of a future Organization of American States. Of course, since I am depending on my memory, and a Google search on this yielded nothing, I can answer no nay sayers.

In the “*Land of White Myth*,” I knew that Barents was an Arctic explorer. Also, I knew he was trying to find a passage to China and India. I did not know it was for the Dutch and to circumvent Spain rather than the Arabs. However, that makes sense. So who finally did complete the northeast passage? An Adolf Erik Nordenskiöld, of the Swedish Navy in the years 1878-79.

Now for the letters. Of course, I’m going to answer the comments about mine first. I will answer Lisa’s comment first. I had said I had minded when cicadas landed on me. She said the cicadas’ bizarre biology reminded her of extraterrestrials. That’s why she didn’t mind them landing on her. A friend told me something similar. He didn’t mind because it was the last day of their lives.

Now for your comment on my letter, Joe. You told me you were getting a bone marrow transplant, and it would come from your brother. I have to praise him for it too. With the conflict I and my brother had, would I give him some of my bone marrow? I hope I would.

From here on, I will comment on other people’s letters. To begin with, Kathy Palmer-Lister. She complains about cons becoming mercenary, no longer allowing us to come into any contact with pros and charging a lot for everything. I haven’t had that experience. A con from the late ‘70s I went to, a Creation Con, had a no-show for its pro. In addition, it was all dealers. On the other hand, I admit one convention I have gone to recently, MediaWest Con, had no pros. On the other hand, the con goers didn’t want any.

Of course, I haven’t been to DragonCon.

Next, I will comment on one of the points in Al de Pisani’s letter. There, he says alchemy is actually based on zinc. As far as I can tell, we really can only guess on a lot of the chemicals the alchemists used. It was a completely different system than modern chemistry. A few things can be identified, like oxygen; but many cannot. Even the gold they produced was not necessarily our gold. Sometimes it was red and weighed half again as much as our yellow-element gold.

Next still, I will comment on Taras Wolansky’s letter. He wonders whether anyone ever identified Richard Hooker’s characters in the novel *M\*A\*S\*H*. For what it is worth, Wikipedia claimed Hooker was a pseudonym for a Richard Hornberger. Now to answer the question. Obviously, the novel was based on his experiences in Korea. However, I suspect the publisher might open himself up to a libel suit if the villains too closely resembled real people. That is if an experienced co-author didn’t have Hornberger change the characters.

Now we come to the tale in back. I don’t

think Lenin was killed by Stalin. I think he died on his own. Of course, this is ‘Shakespeare’s’ ‘Lenin’, and we have to forget realism. ...God wot

At this point, I’m going to end the letter.

From: **David M. Shea** September 4, 2021  
4716 Dorsey Hall Drive Unit 506,  
Ellicott City, MD 21042-5988

I don’t know that anyone in Maryland made a decision that liquor stores were “essential”, during the pandemic; they just stayed open.\* I did see one that refused to accept cash, perhaps on the theory that Covid was passed on paper? I was surprised by Lloyd Penney’s comment that he and Yvonne had to rest for two days after receiving their vaccinations. I was told to wait fifteen minutes after my shots. The first time I did, checked with the pharmacist and said I felt okay. The second time I waited seven or eight minutes and just left.

As for those who refuse to get the vaccinations, well, stupid people should be allowed to suffer the consequences of their stupidity. Lately I’ve been hearing about a drug used to treat worms in livestock, pushed as a Covid cure by some lunatics.

**I saw a tweet that explains this: “I think the mane reason was not being saddled with needing a prescription and easily trotting over to tractor supply and pony up a few bits for some ivermectin, Neighsayers will cry foal and accuse me of gaitkeeping but this unbridled situation is becoming a night mare.”**

It was interesting to hear that some in-person SF cons have gone ahead this year. A non-SF convention of a group in which I am a member plans to meet in Boston this fall, proof of vaccination required.

I am no longer doing book reviewing. However, I enclose a brief piece for your consideration. John Purcell says he is doing an article for Justin Busch’s fanzine. I have also sent an article there. It appears I am drifting slowly back into a minor active role in fandom. Objections to this will be noted.

Sometimes technologies developed in the regular world are adapted for use in sports. (Aluminum baseball and softball bats.) Sometimes it’s the other way around. Disc brakes were patented in the 1920’s by a company that made farm tractors. They were rarely if ever used on cars until Jaguar racing cars in the 1950’s. There is at least a tradition that rear-view mirrors in cars were invented at the Indianapolis 500 motor race.

**After the War, Eddie Rickenbacker got into the auto manufacturing business. Using his experience in auto racing, the**

**company introduced four-wheel brakes. Other manufacturers spread rumors that they were dangerous. The Rickenbacker Mofor Company went out of business — and other manufacturers introduced four-wheel brakes! Rick went on to buy the Indianapolis Motor Speedway.**

Incidentally, the “Mini-Cooper” derives its name from John Cooper, maker of racing cars. He was asked to upgrade the performance of the original Austin Mini (of which, in the original form, the only way you could get it over 50 mph would be to drive it off a cliff).

Richard Dengrove: In C. J. Cherryh’s “Chanur” sequence, both gold and jewels are used as currency and also as personal decoration. One character has gold inlays in his teeth. Silver is not mentioned.

In any clean glass jar, combine:

½ cup extra virgin olive oil  
¼ cup balsamic vinegar  
2-3 cloves garlic, finely chopped  
1 teaspoon dried basil  
½ teaspoon ground black pepper

Mix well and let it sit a couple of days. Do not refrigerate.

Toast your favorite bread. (I prefer sourdough, Panera makes very good sourdough.) Dip and enjoy.

Other recipes available on request.

\* I stand corrected. Recently in a local liquor store, I fell into conversation with the assistant manager while she rang up my purchase. The subject came up and she said the managers of liquor stores had been told by the county government, very early in the pandemic, that liquor stores would be considered an “essential” function of the local economy and should remain open. The thinking was that people come into liquor stores one or two at a time, make their purchase, and leave. It’s not a place where people *assemble*. I guess that makes sense.

**Quite. You go home and drink alone.**

—JTM

From: **Darrell Schweitzer** Sept. 22, 2021  
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When is the science “settled” on something? I would agree that there are a lot of premature announcements, which are reversed after an influx of new data, but we are still agreed that the Earth goes around the Sun, and that it is round, if a bit squeezed at the poles. The science is settled. The science is also settled than mankind and all presently living creatures on Earth evolved from earlier forms. The details of this evolution change from time to time, but the basic fact of it does not. All the



evidence backs this view. Nothing contradicts it. The science is settled that Newtonian physics work, although this was qualified when we began to discover things on a very large or very small scale. Newton's laws explain the movements of planets just fine. They may not necessarily apply to subatomic particles.

So what is the "science" on mask-wearing? It is easy to show that when people wear masks, there is a lot less disease. It is true that you could breathe in a germ right through a cloth mask, but what the mask does control is splatter, from coughing and sneezing. Cut down on this and you cut down on disease, including Covid. There was what I would call the Kansas Experiment, which perfectly demonstrated by this. The state government of Kansas called for mask mandates. Most counties opted out. Later, when data was collected, it was shown that the counties which had enforced the mask mandates had a much lower Covid rate.

**I have been posting the weekly report from Jennie Stuart Hospital in Hopkinsville (which, incidentally, is where I was born) of Covid cases, which shows how many of those admitted, in the ICU, and on a respirator are not vaccinated. It isn't freedom if you keep someone with a medical emergency from being treated.**

The reason the disease is surging now is that there are enough voluntary disease carriers who are embracing the disease, and value their "freedom" more than their own lives or the lives of others. I have no sympathy for them. If they only killed themselves, this would be evolution in action and would raise the intelligence of the population slightly. The problem is that they can spread disease to innocent people, particularly children, and they do not give a damn. They also provide a reservoir in which the virus can mutate into new forms. They have to be shamed, shunned, quarantined, or whatever it takes. They are enemies of society.

I of course will wear a mask any time I am required to. I often wear it at "chinstrap position" when out on the street, so I can raise it quickly if I pass through a crowd of people or when I need to enter a store or a vehicle. I don't see any need to wear it up when I am outdoors and not near anyone. I am anticipating going to a few conventions this Fall where masks will be required all the time. (Capclave states you must wear a mask all the time except while sitting down and eating.) I figure if we are going to be wearing masks for some time to come (as long as the anti-vaxxers can prolong the pandemic), we might as well start paying attention to fashion. I now have a Cthulhu/tentacles mask and a Three Stooges mask. I also have a plain cloth mask for dealing with normal people, when I have to do that.

I expect that custom masks will become a growth industry, like custom t-shirts. Media

tie-ins, political statements, humor, etc. I have also seen vampire fang masks, cat-face masks, etc.

Speaking of conventions, I do not recall the affair of the Todd Cameron Hamilton book that you write about on pp. 2-3, or at least I did not pay much attention to it at the time, but I know there have been ballot stuffing attempts in the past. The late George Scithers, who was chair of Discon I, told me that they received a whole series of nominations for one story by a minor British author, all of which seem to have come from one village in Britain. There was no publicity about this, no fuss, but the ballots were quietly discarded. This has not been recorded in fan history to my knowledge, but I see no reason why George would have made it up and he would have been in a position to know if it happened. Very likely the decision to discard the ballots was his own.

Now of course we have had the outrageous ballot-stuffing of the Puppy era, and the reaction to it. The reaction continues and a lot of voters seem to nominate and vote on the basis of demographics, to win points for one group or other. It is not that there aren't good and worthy works within that narrow range, but the winners are no longer competing against the whole field, so it diminishes the value of the award.

This year's convention seems to be such a train wreck that I have withdrawn from it. I could not get all my money back, but I dropped down to Supporting, and will use my Hugo ballot to vote down that stupid tirade against George RR Martin, which is a personal attack and never should have been allowed on the ballot.

**The "Best Related Work" category seems to have been ruined, what with a fan fiction website beating two serious works on SF history, with a previous rant getting on the ballot, and now this.**

As for Charles Platt's antics, he had the bad habit of attributing things to people who did not write them, as in the false report about Sam Lundwall that you cite. He tried something similar on me. He allegedly received an unsigned, badly spelled and badly typed postcard which contained an illiterate and homophobic attack against Samuel R. Delany, and wrote to "thank" me for this and proposed to publish it with my name attached. Fortunately I had learned from George Scithers how to cope with this sort of thing. Don't argue back. Undercut it. I got to Delany first, explained the situation, assured him I did not write the postcard, and we have been friends ever since. Platt later admitted he was "convinced" I had not written it. But that was the standard of journalism of *The Patchin Review*. I will also mention that he did not want me to read his magazine. He actually returned my money when I attempted to subscribe. (He didn't realize that I could get it from the F&SF Book Co., so I saw it anyway.) He too, like Vox Day, earned much contempt in his

day, but I suspect he got off on it, as Vox Day does. He was no doubt proud to be despised by those he despised.

**He seemed to be one of those people who felt himself above those buffoonish sci-fi fans.**

*Last Dangerous Visions* (p. 3). Wait and see. I have seen notices that J. Michael Straczynski is ready to submit his version of the book to publishers, but I haven't seen anything about his actually selling it. The problem is that this is a book for the Baby Boomer audience, which is fading in its book-buying power by the day. I don't know that younger people (particularly those under 35 or so) know who Ellison was or care about the legend of LDV. It of course will not be the book Harlan would have produced, or anything like it, but it will perhaps contain some lost stories by long-dead authors who are still of interest, like Ward Moore, Edgar Pangborn, Daniel Keyes, Tom Reamy, Clifford Simak, etc. The hundred pages of Tim Kirk illustrations, many of which will now not fit any of the stories, should be published as an art book.

**I liked the "community" aspect; Ellison's introductions with his personal observations, and the authors' afterwords discussing their vision of the work.**

—JTM

Taras Wolansky: I think you're absolutely right about the American invasions of Canada. One of the things we are not taught in schools is the religious history of the American revolution, or of the American experience for the two centuries before that. A French Canadian had to explain to me why the French Canadians sided with the British. First, they had a rather feudal mindset, and figured that if King Louis had signed them over to King George, they were King George's subjects now and owed him loyalty. But, indeed, more importantly, most of the invaders in 1775 were Puritans from New England, determined to exterminate Popery in North America. This early failure to win hearts & minds resonates in American policy to this day.

Beyond that, British tolerance explains their successes in North America. The British developed the notion that non-conformist religion could be tolerated in the colonies, if not at home. This meant that dissenters of all sorts, from Quakers to Puritans to Catholics, moved to the colonies and had to stay there. They raised their families there, as they had no hope of returning to England. They had to make it work. By contrast, the French and Spanish did not do this, and as a result their colonies were much less heavily settled. Lots of the Frenchmen in Canada just wanted to trade furs, get rich, and go home. Many of the Spanish in regions to the far south wanted to steal some gold or get rich in the slave trade, then go

home. (Meanwhile French Protestants—Huguenots—could only find sanctuary in the English colonies. Spanish Protestants, Jews, etc. had been killed by the Inquisition or expelled long since.) But it is precisely because the English colonists couldn't go home, that their settlements were so successful. The larger population made the difference. In the French & Indian Wars there was no way the French were going to take Boston or New York or Philadelphia, but the British finally did take Montreal and Quebec.



From: **Taras Wolansky** September 29, 2021  
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Thanks for the August, 2021 *Alexiad*! It struck me as kind of an "out of the past" special issue, given some of the stories.

So sorry to hear about Ed Meskys. Chatting with him at room parties was a grace note to my convention-going. A life well-lived.

Gradually the familiar faces melt away; on dune and headland sinks the fire. I just got a note from an old friend, with more risk factors than I, saying he will not be at Capclave this year because he's uneasy about the Delta variant. I had almost decided not to go, too, because it will require mask wearing.

My own decision to get vaccinated for COVID-19 was an easy one. I figured that, at my age and relative health, my risk of serious repercussions from the virus was maybe a thousand to one; while my risk from the vaccine was about a million to one.

If I were younger, or if I had bad side effects from a previous vaccine, that might have changed my calculations. Also, given that billions of people in the world haven't even gotten their first vaccination, it's almost obscene to insist that people who had COVID-19 be vaccinated as well. (Sarah Palin was attacked over this, after she appeared on *Gutfeld!*—which is, incidentally, now the highest rated late night talk show.)

When I found out that CVS was offering

vaccinations, all the places near me were already fully booked, so I had to go farther from home, driving 80 minutes to the hamlet of Margaretville in upstate New York. I can't call that a hardship, though, as it was a lovely spring drive in the country both times.

I had been wearing a mask all along, in spite of the—apparently deceptive—advice of the "experts" that wearing a mask was useless or even dangerous. I'm lucky enough to live 5 miles from a Walmart, which stayed open throughout. Fortunately, unlike in Michigan, it wasn't forced to block aisles featuring "nonessential" merchandise: an idiotic idea which forced shoppers closer together. I was able to zip around the store through the empty aisles, mostly avoiding other shoppers.

Joe: Your synopsis of Todd Cameron Hamilton's *The Guardsman* sounds like a neophyte wrote a samurai novel but learned there was no market for such; make it SF instead. Incidentally, did that factitious group of T.C. Hamilton fans who claimed to attend one convention a year together ever bother to mention what those previous conventions had been?

No. Given that they were "mid-western" fans you would think they would go to *Inconjunction* in Indianapolis, *Windycon* in Chicago, or *Rivercon* here.

David Shea: Finishing *Dhalgren* (and writing a nasty letter to Samuel R. Delany for wasting my time) broke me of the habit of finishing every book I bought.

SF Jeopardy:

- A. The speed of light, the center of the Sun, the final chapter of *Dhalgren*.  
Q. Name three things man will never reach.

— JTM

Lloyd Penney: What Andy Weir is writing is not space opera, but Analog-style hard SF. With, in the case of *Artemis*, an admixture of Heinlein juvenile.

Richard A. Dengrove: If I had heard about ConGregarate, I might have gone; though it's a little far for me to drive. I usually learn about conventions from the flyers given out at conventions!

Finally, when I purchased a new iPhone last year, I discovered that I had also been given a complimentary subscription to Apple TV for one year. I don't expect to renew it but, while it lasts, I've seen a couple of shows that would be interesting to SF fans.

*Mythic Quest* is a sitcom about what goes on behind the scenes at a company that maintains an online fantasy role-playing game with millions of subscribers. The biggest name in the cast is F. Murray Abraham, as a hack writer who is still living off the Nebula Award he won 50 years ago. In fact, one of the most interesting episodes is a flashback that explains why,

as a fledgling writer working as a reader for an SF magazine, he won that award, and why he could never do it again. (Hint: It involves Isaac Asimov.) A catchphrase from Heinlein, "Watch out for stobor", plays a role in the episode.

*For All Mankind* is an alternate history that presupposes the Soviets won the race to the Moon, leading to a much more active space program on both sides of the Iron Curtain; with moon bases and, eventually, women astronauts. (I particularly liked Sarah Jones as an astronaut's wife turned astronaut, loosely based on Gordon Cooper's first wife, Trudy.) The series generally gives the Soviets more credit than they deserve: given the failure of their copycat space shuttle, it's clear that the Soviet space program was suffering from more than bad luck. Also, the second season ends in a flurry of silliness: for example, the show runners apparently believe that, in a vacuum, a human body will explode like a kernel of popcorn.

The trailer for *Foundation* suggests they're trying to make it look as much like *Dune* as possible, of course minus the sandworms. I've seen just the first couple of episodes: not what you would call fast moving, but interesting. Presumably they are based on some of Asimov's prequels, with which I'm not very familiar. Evidently the show runners thought the story was too male-dominated, so they've cast some of the male characters as cute girls instead. I ain't complaining.

From: **AL du Pisani** October 14, 2021  
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Greetings.

Our overlords have weakened the restrictions imposed for the "control" of Wuhan Pneumonia. And to allow the parties to prepare for the local government elections. So it is now again legal to buy alcohol over weekends, go to church and gather in private. There still is a 4 hour curfew from midnight, and nightclubs are still illegal.

All local governments' term of office lapsed in August, but at that time was THE THIRD WAVE, so cowering in place was highly recommended. Not totally so, I managed to go on holiday and see some of my family at our place by the sea, but that is another story.

The original plan was for the elections to take place on 27 October, which would have been, as normal for elections, on a Wednesday. The IEC (Independent Electoral Commission—the independence is that they are not employed by the National Party Government) then petitioned the courts for leave to hold the elections some time next year, as they were not ready, most of the political parties were not ready, and they are still in the process of replacing obsolete equipment dating from the late 1990s.

The courts ordered them to get their affairs in order and hold an election no later than 1

November, so that is when the election will be. On a Monday.

Every election I have voted in for the past decade, had a bottleneck at scanning the voter's ID documents or cards. At my local polling station there had been one of the machines, and it was slow. If they had originally been bought in the late 1990s, it would explain a lot.

**Voter ID is very controversial here in the USA. We have it in Kentucky, however.**

The registration weekend the IEC ran had a lot of issues, but it looks as if the election is going ahead. Even though the ANC managed to botch a lot of their party lists etc, so that they did not put forth any candidates in some areas.

The IEC also floated a trial balloon for electronic voting, but that seemed to have been shot down quickly. They are now proposing electronic ways of counting paper ballots.

Taras Wolansky: I have two thoughts, that may guide you in my thinking.

One: The ANC have been trying their best to live down to expectations created by the National Party's election propaganda of the 1950s to 1980s. For myself, I saw the writing on the wall immediately after the 1994 elections, when it became clear that all the talk about unity and the rainbow nation took second place to the ANC's desire for power. To a very large extent the ANC is behaving in the way I expected. Even though I hoped for better.

Two: I recently read a very interesting article which claimed that the UK is currently undergoing a major political realignment, of the type which might cause the Labour Party to fade into mostly irrelevance. It is that the primary issue of the day for voters are separating into the Somewheres versus the Anywheres.

The Somewheres are people that are to some extent bound to a place or geographic region, whereas the Anywheres call no place their own, but can and do live anywhere. Or, is a politician trying to impress the voters of Bournemouth, Liverpool or Little Stick in the Mud, or is he trying to impress his close friends and colleagues in Paris, Rome or Geneva?

This division between the Somewheres and the Anywheres clicked with me for two reasons: I realised some time ago that I am a Somewhere, and my place is South Africa. Although I visited overseas and want to visit Japan again, I am a creature of South Africa.

The other reason is that I suddenly understood a lot of things which confused me a bit about South African politics in the 1920s and 1930s. That the National Party of the time were Somewheres, that were trying to put South Africa first (as an election slogan had it), against the South African Party (later United Party), which tended to put the interests of the British Empire, and later the British Commonwealth, first.

Over the past couple of Christmas holidays I read firstly a facsimile copy of JBL Smith's

"Old Fourlegs", an account of his search for the Coelacanth, with commentary and illustrations from a perspective of 70 years later. And then a biography of JBL Smith and his second wife, who did a lot to create South Africa's centre for aquatic biodiversity.

Now JBL Smith was a smart guy – at one stage acknowledged to be one of the top three scientists active in South Africa. (This was in about the 1940 – 1960 period. The book names one of the others – Basil Schonland). Interestingly enough, these people were the first generation of people who did their primary university education in South Africa, only going overseas for their doctorates. They tended to have a much less rosy view of the universities of Europa than the people a generation earlier, which did most or all of their university education at European universities.

(Shonland did a bunch of things, but is mostly remembered for building South Africa's first radar set. Apparently, at the beginning of the Second World War, he was informed about the existence of radar and how it worked, and then asked to design and build radar for South Africa, as Britain could not send South Africa any radar sets.)

One of the things about which the contemporary author had a lot of issues was with JBL Smith's measurements of Prime Ministers: He was not very complimentary about Jan Smuts, and in fact told an interesting parable about him, that I have never heard before. And he was really complimentary about DF Malan.

Now, from a contemporary perspective Jan Smuts is revered as a great man, and DF Malan hated as the person who initiated the introduction of formal Apartheid. To JBL Smith, Jan Smuts was the guy he could not get to see, even with an appointment, when Smith approached him for assistance in getting to a large scale fish die off event off the coast of Namibia. And DF Malan was the guy that got him an aeroplane to get him to and from the Comoros, to collect a Coelacanth specimen.

The aeroplane, a DC3 of the SA Air Force, still exists, have the nickname of The Flying Fishcart, and is in a museum painted as it had been at the time of the flight. There was at one stage a fiftieth anniversary commemoration of the flight, where one of the original crew was still alive and participated.

Now this digression about JBL Smith is mostly to illustrate my understanding about some of the tensions regarding the Somewheres and the Anywheres.

I do think that this tension is going to be interesting in future. Especially in South Africa, as there is already a disconnect, with parliament more interested in promulgating laws that will play well in Addis Ababa, London and New York, rather in Soweto, KwaMachu or Putsonderwater.

You may recall me mentioning the theft of 1 million rounds of 9mm ammunition, which was discovered after the riots. I have since found a second newspaper article, which referenced some other articles I did not see at the

time, and which told me a little bit more. Firstly, that the 1 million rounds of ammunition weighed 14 tons – so not a spur of the moment theft.

Secondly was a claim that some of the ammunition had already been used in crime – but the evidence for that seems to be that casings with the manufacturer's headstamp had been found at a crime scene.

I still find myself indifferent to the product of most SF publishers. But have still been able to find reading matter.

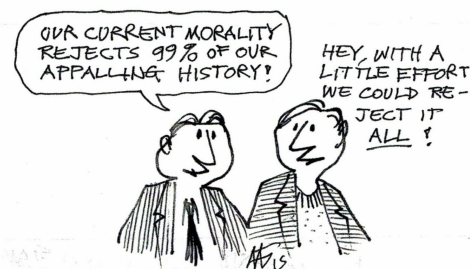
**There is a lot of interesting stuff on Kindle-only (including mine). The problem is finding it amid so much other.**

I suppose it is a bit of an indictment against SF TV that the most interesting thing to watch I found recently has been *Countdown*, the Inspiration 4 documentary series. How four somewhat ordinary (and yet extra ordinary, in some respects) people travelled to space.

I hope that we keep on living in days of miracle and wonder, and that we have the time to appreciate the miracles of everyday living.

**Thus William Shatner, who on that glorious day in October, shatnered the age record for astronauts.**

—JTM



#### WAHF:

**Martin Morse Wooster**, with various items of interest.

**Lloyd G. Daub**, the same.

**Robin Usher**, who doesn't seem to be.

**Lacy Thomas**, with thanks.

**Robert Lichtman**, worried about my health.



## THE UNPLEASANT PROFESSION OF NERO WOLFE

Wolfe looked at the check, pushing his lips in and out the way he does when he is displeased. Then he looked up at the would-be client, sitting there nervously in the red leather chair. He said, "A man once offered me a far greater sum of money to ask him questions. He turned out to be a murderer."

Hoag flinched at the tacit accusation. After gathering his will he said, "That's the problem! I don't know!"

"It seems utter flummery that you have no memory of your activities at your place of employment. The convolutions of the human mind are often strange."

"I will accept this check. Mr. Goodwin will follow you from your residence tomorrow morning, and if you return at nine tomorrow night we may be able to answer your question."

Hoag got up, thanked Wolfe, and I walked him to the door. "He's eccentric," I said. "I know how his mind works, though. He doesn't need the money right now, but the problem is piquing his mind."

"I hope he can find out." Having said that, Hoag got his coat, looked at the dirty nails of his hand again, and stepped out into the night.

"This is getting expensive."

Saul Panzer is one of the highest-charging private detectives in the city. He is also one of the best, so there is that. He sat in front of Wolfe's desk, with a strange look on his face.

"Report. What was the result of your investigation of Mr. Hoag's place of work?"

Saul looked at me. "Archie, are you sure you got that location right?"

"Absolutely. I followed him to work, gave him a few minutes to get started, then went in myself and asked about getting a present for Lily."

"You entered the premises." Saul paused. "How? There's no such business in that building, and there isn't even a thirteenth floor."

Wolfe had to digest this. "Poppycock!" he finally said. "You went to the building Mr. Goodwin indicated? He is not delusional. His description of the facilities is of an active and presumably profitable enterprise."

"Indeed, from his description I suspected that this stain under our client's fingernails which so troubled him was some jeweler's rouge. The peculiar mental block which obliterates his memories of his workday would naturally keep him from recognizing it. But this — this flummery! Archie, are you absolutely certain you went to the thirteenth floor?"

"Yes. I even saw him there, at work."

"Pfui. When will we meet with Mr. Hoag again?"

He pushed the button to summon Fritz to bring him a beer. Discussion of the case was through for now.

"I thought he had gone mad."

We had never had a case end like that, with the client babbling nonsense and then apparently dying. And such odd conditions for this meeting, such as I should bring Lily Rowan.

She said, "When we get into that little town we can call the New Jersey state police and report that. And you can call Wolfe."

We got out of the hills and into the little town. There was someone standing on the curb and Lily rolled down the window. "Is there a —"

It had been an ordinary Jersey day. But when she had rolled down the car window, that was gone. There was nothing but gray mist. Lily began to roll the window up as the mist started leaking in, and I leaned over her and helped her finish the job.

We sat there for a moment, breathing hard. I lowered my window very briefly, just a crack, and there it was on that side. I took a breath. "Would you like to see my mother?"

We drove nonstop, just about. After four hours, when I checked, the grayness was gone, but I bought coffee, broke out some of the provender Hoag had made me buy, and drove on to Ohio.

Lily could get money, so we bought a house. I sent Wolfe a telegram, followed by a letter, regretting that I had to resign. She sent him a check and offered to pay for a new car.

We never heard back from him. The check was never cashed. I've never heard from Wolfe or Saul or even Cramer. Lily doesn't talk about her old friends, but I don't think she's heard from them either. We don't listen to the news.

Without a mirror in the house, it's hard to shave. Lily does it, saying, "Escamillo, you just don't look good with a hairy face."

And every night, when we go to bed, I use one piece of my detective equipment. I handcuff us together.

— Not by Rex Stout or Robert Heinlein

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This is issue **Whole Number One Hundred and Nineteen (119)**.

**Art:** What we are mainly looking for is small fillos. Your fillo will probably be scanned in and may be reused, unless you object to its reuse.

**Contributions:** This is not a fictionzine. It is intended to be our fanzine, so be interesting.

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