

# ALEXIAD

(ΑΛΞΙΑΔ)

\$2.00

This issue is dedicated to the memory of Chief Water-tender Peter Tomich, who on the morning of December 7, 1941 gave up his life to save fellow sailors.

— Lisa

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The Breeders' Cup 2021 was <b>November 5-6, 2021</b> at Del Mar Thoroughbred Club in Del Mar, California. Corniche won the Breeders' Cup Juvenile, which may lead to problems as he is a Bob Baffert-trained horse. Knicks Go won the Breeders' Cup Classic, beating Medina Spirit and Essential Quality.	
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## Reviewer's Notes

Mike Resnick's collection *Alternate Worldcons and Again, Alternate Worldcons* (1996) contains the story "Moskva 1995: Igor's Campaign", by Tom Veal. Louisville fan Mike Sinclair had put up a semi-joking Worldcon bid for Moscow 1995. Veal's story had it going through. And under the strange and distorted financial world of post-Soviet Russia, the Worldcon ended up being incorporated in Russia.

Another story in that anthology, Bill Fesselmeyer's "The Grinch Who Stole Worldcon", was of the time, yet it had other ramifications. It seemed that fans of *Lost In Space* had flooded the Worldcon, and managed to get themselves the Worldcon in alternate years (there was a two-year bid lead then). The old-time fans managed to turn the relationship on its head, and as part of the settlement the Worldcon became an invitation-only secret meeting.

My health is fragile again, as if I don't have enough problems. The issue at hand is low hemoglobin. I have been hospitalized for this, several years ago, and now it is recurring. And no, I can't take pills or eat iron-rich foods for it, because my ileum is damaged by the Crohn's Disease, and that would be where it was absorbed. Thus one health issue reinforces another.

The hematologist raised the possibility of a bone-marrow transplant as a last resort. More possible would be blood transfusions. And so my life limps on.

I'm seeing more and more comments on the Hugo Awards on the order of "I haven't read any of those." The award is drifting away on a different sea of standards.

There was a story in *Science Fiction Five Yearly* about a Fan going Rip van Winkle and waking up in a future where science fiction had triumphed. He didn't know any of the Big Name Fans or any of the works. Proof of the predictive ability of science fiction?

And in response, no one today knows what *Science Fiction Five Yearly* was, or what was in *Alternate Worldcons*. The world is changing and it is out of our control. It was fun while it lasted.

— 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.

J. Daniel Sawyer is getting ready to bring out *The Secrets of the Heinlein Juvenile*, described as “the definitive in-depth study of the Heinlein Juvenile as a literary form, with a focus on lessons for authors and students.” It would have been nice if he’d said hello.

In the forty-fourth year of Meiji (1910), explorer Shirase Nobu set forth from Japan with the intent of reaching the South Pole. Ice blocked his first attempt, and he did not land on the ice shelf until the first month of the forty-sixth year of Meiji (January 1912). He realized that being first to the pole was out of the question (having stopped by Amundsen’s camp Framheim at the Bay of Whales might have given him a hint) so he determined to have one unit march south across the Ross Ice Shelf while a second explored King Edward VII Land.

The first unit, under the command of Shirase, the Dash Party, marched south from the Bay of Whales but only got 250 kilometers south, on the twenty-eighth day of the first month of the forty-sixth year of Meiji (January 28, 1912). Their equipment was inadequate.

This year, Abe Matatasu intends to retrace Shirase’s journey and progress onward to the Pole, solo. In the thirty-first year of Heisei and the first year of Reiwa (2019), Abe made a solo trek to the Pole, having to recover a cache in order to make it and so missing “unsupported” status.

In stunning news, journalist Rupert “Nigel West” Allason has uncovered evidence that German Resistance survivor Otto John was an MI-6 asset, codenamed Agent WHISKY. He met with MI-6 officers for two years before the events of July 20.

## MONARCHICAL NEWS

Princess **Alina-Maria of Romania** is expecting a second child. I guess that means that her husband, Prince **Nicholas of Romania** (né Nicholas Medforth-Mills, son of Princess Helen of Romania) is royal now.

They already have a daughter, Princess **Maria-Alexandria of Romania**, born November 7, 2020.

## YOU'RE SO VAIN

by Joe

There was a total eclipse on **December 4, 2021**, visible in East Antarctica, from the Ronne Ice Shelf to Marie Byrd Land. The path passed above the Pole and thus ran from East to West, instead of from West to East as most eclipses do. The maximum totality was 1 minute 54 seconds, visible at 76° 46' S 46° 12' W, on the Ronne Ice Shelf. The eclipse is part of Saros 152, which began on July 26, 1805 and will end on August 20, 3049.

There will be two solar eclipses in 2022. The first will be a partial eclipse on **April 30, 2022**, visible in Chile, Argentina, Bolivia, and Paraguay with the maximum eclipse being visible at 62° 6' S. 71° 30' W., off the Antarctic Peninsula. The eclipse is part of Saros 119, which began on May 15, 850 and will end on June 24, 2112.

The second will be a partial eclipse on **October 25, 2022** visible through Europe and the Middle East, and past the Urals into Western Asia, with the maximum eclipse being at 61° 36' N. 77° 24' E. near Nizhnevartorsk, Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug, Russia. The eclipse is part of Saros 124, which began on March 6, 1049 and will end May 11, 2347.

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

Other useful eclipse websites:  
<http://www.hermit.org/Eclipse>  
<http://www.eclipse.org.uk/>

## MAY THE VRIL BE WITH YOU

Commentary by Joseph T Major on  
*THE COMING RACE* (1871)  
by Edward George Earle Lytton Bulwer-Lytton, Lord Lytton

Lord Lytton was originally a Whig, but he became a Tory, serving as Secretary of State for the Colonies in 1858-1859 in the Earl of Derby’s government. He was also known as a

writer. He had a problematic family life, including locking up his estranged wife for insanity. Their son, Robert, Earl of Lytton, was also a writer, as well as Viceroy of India. His heir and descendant the current Earl of Lytton, John Lytton, is a chartered surveyor and also a descendant of Lord Byron. The Bulwer-Lytton Fiction Contest began in 1982, giving awards for “the opening sentence of the worst of all possible novels”.

Lost city novels have been sort of crowded out by the advance of technology. La of Opar is giving guided tours, Josh Gates is filming his search amid the ruins of Kôr for the Pillar of Fire, Carnival Cruises has a stop at the Moon Pool of Nan-Madol, and there is a Hilton Hotels Resort at Shangri-La. Going underground seems the only thing left, unless you have a space ship to hand.

The book was published anonymously and usually eschews “It was a dark and stormy night” prose. The narrator tries to be as anonymous as possible:

I am a native of \_\_\_\_\_, in the United States of America. My ancestors migrated from England in the reign of Charles II.; and my grandfather was not undistinguished in the War of Independence. My family, therefore, enjoyed a somewhat high social position in right of birth; and being also opulent, they were considered disqualified for the public service. My father once ran for Congress, but was signally defeated by his tailor. After that event he interfered little in politics, and lived much in his library. I was the eldest of three sons, and sent at the age of sixteen to the old country, partly to complete my literary education, partly to commence my commercial training in a mercantile firm at Liverpool. My father died shortly after I was twenty-one; and being left well off, and having a taste for travel and adventure, I resigned, for a time, all pursuit of the almighty dollar, and became a desultory wanderer over the face of the earth.

In the year 18\_\_\_\_, happening to be in \_\_\_\_\_, I was invited by a professional engineer, with whom I had made acquaintance, to visit the recesses of the mine, upon which he was employed.

The reader will understand, ere he close this narrative, my reason for concealing all clue to the district of which I write, and will perhaps thank me for refraining from any description that may tend to its discovery.

The \_\_\_\_\_ mine turns out to be somewhat deeper than anticipated. An accident kills the engineer and leaves the narrator stranded somewhat far below the surface. But, he notices that he is now in a more natural passage.

There are no runic “AS” marks on the walls and the Mahars are not at hand. Instead he finds a pleasant, strangely lit vista. Where he gets intercepted by winged people.



SHAKE WELL BEFORE TAKING

Instead of dissecting him, eating him, or merely killing him, they set about teaching him their language. This is possible by their mastery of vril. Vril is all about them, life creates it, makes it grow, its energy surrounds us and binds us — oops, that’s the Force. There are parallels, though.

The wings are artificial, and can be taken off indoors, by the way. Flying is a popular hobby. *The Moon Maid*, anyone? The Vril-ya, as they call themselves, have a most placid form of life.

Indeed, the Vril-ya society qualifies as a utopian one, what with its unlimited access to power. (Think of *All Our Wrong Today’s* (2017, reviewed in *Alexiad* V. 17 #5).) The narrator goes through the usual tour of the advantages of the utopia, which for some reason seems to lack anyone who objects. The community is crime-free, peaceful, and placid in spite of having weapons that can devastate vast areas, wielded by children no less. An armed society is a polite society.

They live in small communities, and when one becomes a little too crowded, some people strike off into the wilderness to build themselves a new home. The Vril-ya are ruled by an absolute ruler, the Tur, who is chosen for life.

They have become very serene and attractive, due to the lack of stress and conflict. Their names are rather brief. The young woman who found the narrator is named Zee. She oversaw his teaching of their language (through the power of vril) and is instructing

him patiently in their ways.

But all paradises must have an expulsion. Zee’s father thinks the narrator is getting too close to his daughter. They have been in discussions about disposing of him. Followed by a move to the surface.

Zee and some sympathetic friends contrive an escape. The narrator is taken to where he can get to another mineshaft, and he climbs up, finds aid, and returns to Earth’s surface.

For all that this was a speculative novel, it is to be noted that it was accepted in literary circles. (So were *She*, *The Time Machine*, and other such British works.) Its popularity has declined, but it has left a mark in an unusual location.

John Lawson Johnston, a Scottish-Canadian contractor, was hired to provide meat to the French Army during the Franco-Prussian War. For ease of transport, the beef was made into a meat extract paste. The demand continued after the war.

Johnston called the product “Bovril”, from “bovinus” (Latin for “Ox”) and vril. The company Bovril LTD was formed in 1889 by Johnston’s son George, who became Lord Luke in 1929. (The current Lord Luke, Ian Johnston, is his great-grandson.) Bovril is now made by Unilever.

Shackleton took Bovril on the Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition and the marooned men had some on Elephant Island after the arduous boat journey. Later on, the Double-Cross Committee gave their Catalan double agent the code name BOVRIL before they decided that GARBO was more appropriate.

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

### NO MAN’S WORLD

Review by Joseph T Major of  
**THE APOLLO MURDERS**

(2021; Mullohand Books;  
ISBN 978-0316264532; \$28.00;  
2021; Mullohand Books (Kindle); \$11.99)  
by Chris Hadfield

Martin Caidin had optimistic views of the launch capabilities of both the United States and the Soviet Union. (And later, even more optimistic views of his telekinetic ability.) *No Man’s World* (1967) features an all-out war between the American and Soviet moon-landing programs, on the Moon, terminated by the intervention of the Chinese.

More so than Caidin, Colonel Hadfield has been there and done that, racking up 166 days in space on two Shuttle Missions and one stay at the International Space Station.

Somehow the space program has found money and equipment for one more Apollo

mission, Apollo 18. [The American part of Apollo-Soyuz was designated Apollo 18, and then there’s that movie.] Apollo 18 has an all-military crew and some semi-military missions.

Not to mention something a little more catastrophic than exposure to rubella; the Lunar Module pilot is going up in a helicopter for some practice, and it crashes. (And, it seems, it was not an accident, but a deliberate.)

Before Apollo 18 goes to the Moon, to investigate some anomalous lunar features, it will do a flyby of the Soviet space station. And so, after liftoff, there is some juggling with orbital planes, followed by a close encounter.

Whereupon there is an oopsie. The Mir turned out to be an Almaz — a military station. An armed military station. The ensuing exchange leaves one Apollo astronaut dead and one Soviet cosmonaut dead. And one who got rescued — a woman.

This would seem to be shouting “ABORT! ABORT! ABORT!” in large unfriendly letters. Instead, NASA decides that some international action is in order, and the mission will proceed with the unexpected crewmember. Detente, anyone?

In Steve Lawrence (*The Pilgrim Project* (1964; reviewed in *Alexiad* V. 12 #2)) style Apollo 18 progresses. Their landing goes without trouble. Close enough to the Soviet Lunokhod rover, which is supposed to be inspected and if necessary disabled. But they both have their own agendas, and there will be a conflict on the most dangerous battlefield.

Hadfield wants to do more novels. This may be the beginning of something interesting.

### FALL ELFENBEINKÜSTE

Review by Joseph T Major of  
**THE ROMANOV RESCUE**

(2021; Baen Books;  
ISBN 978-1982125707; \$25.00;  
2021; Baen Books (Kindle); \$9.99)  
by Tom Kratman, Justin Watson, and Kacey Ezell

On November 21, 1970, Operation IVORY COAST went into effect. With massive Navy and Air Force support, a task force of 56 Special Forces troops commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Arthur “Bull” Simons stormed the North Vietnamese POW camp at Son Tay.

The operation had been extensively planned, thoroughly equipped, and profoundly rehearsed. It went off without a hitch, and with no casualties among the raiders.

That the POWs had been moved from the camp had not been communicated to the raiders. Worse yet, the unit was a one-off and when the 1st Special Operational Detachment — Delta [Delta Force] was created to do that sort of thing and other such affairs it had to be built from the bottom up.

This is the story of the Imperial German *Fall Elfenbeinküste*. It did a little better than its American OTL equivalent but . . .

In the latter part of the (First) World War,



the combined forces of the Central Powers, under the command of Prinz Leopold von Bayern, continued the successes of Hindenburg and Ludendorff on the Russian front. The Prince was ably coordinated and assisted by his chief of staff, *Generalmajor* Max Hoffmann. Hoffman was *not* a Junker, not a noble, of very modest ancestry. His wife was an artist, of Jewish ancestry (“I used to be a hunchback.”). He was considered to be the most able staff officer of the war.

On November 21-25, 1917, the Zeppelin *L 59* conducted the longest sustained military airship flight recorded (6800 km in 95 hours), having flown from Yambol, Bulgaria in an unsuccessful attempt to bring supplies to Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck in German East Africa. Loaded with 15 metric tons of supplies, the airship flew over Greece, the Mediterranean, and Egypt, being recalled partway across Sudan due to the lack of a safe landing place. The airship blew up on April 7, 1918 while making a bombing raid on Malta.

It seems Hoffmann had another use for it. He figures that with the ex-Tsar Nicholas and his family in German hands, the Bolsheviks will be deprived of a Symbol. And there are plenty of Russian prisoners, many of whom would be anti-Bolshevik. Finding a Russian officer, *Kapitan* Daniil Evardovich Kostyshakov, willing to undertake this dangerous mission, he starts pulling strings.

Much of this section of the book will seem tedious. The unit has to be recruited (their screening ran into someone who duped them back), trained, and equipped. Arthur Simons would find the process direly familiar.

For depth, the story contains descriptions by the Romanov children of the slow increase in depravations. Along with some cases of unseemly behavior.

As the situation in Russia deteriorates, the operation proceeds. The incident of the advance party of infiltrators contains some harsh portrayals of the breakdown of social control in Russia and the harsh measures dealt out in retaliation.

But finally the “LOS” order is given, and the *L 59* sets out with Kostyshakov and the first half of the raiding party. (Fortunately they do not get intercepted by a British Vimy bomber carrying Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson, piloted by RFC Captain Kent Allard.) The advance party has found that the Romanovs are in Tobolsk, and manage to get an idea of the situation. They will be facing a town packed with various Bolshevik armed mobs, which adds a troubling disproportion to the conflict. (And in an interlude, we see the Politburo debating the fate of the Tsarist oppressors.)

Nevertheless they persisted. The strike is devastating and successful — except for the infiltrator’s actions . . .

Surprisingly, this is not the sort of story that one would expect from Kratman. Perhaps the co-writers kept things on an even keel. It

is meticulously researched and developed, perhaps by emulation of Simons’s preparations for the Son Tay raid.

And it is ruthlessly honest about the Romanovs. (You will recall that Baroness Orczy pointed out that Louis and Marie Antoinette were not the most worthy of rulers.) And of their fate:

2. We encourage the reader, especially the reader who retains some sympathies for socialism, to look over the Nexmuse pictures of the Romanov children, and then to realize how they were killed. In our time line, in the first place, they were tricked into the basement of the Ipatiev House, the “House for Special Purposes,” on the night of 16–17 July, 1918. There, a firing squad entered, opened fire, and shot them: father, mother, five children, doctor, footman, maid, and cook. In the words of chief murderer Yakov Yurovsky, “The firing went on for a very long time.” Because their mother had had them sew jewels into their clothing, against a possible escape, the children did not die quickly. Rather, they were finished off with bayonets, rifle butts, and close-ranged head shots. That took about twenty frightful minutes. Even *after* all that, one of the girls was found to be still alive while being carried out. She was shot yet again in the head. Remember, too, they were three innocent young women and a girl, plus an equally innocent boy, aged thirteen. The Reds also killed two of the three pet dogs, one immediately and one sometime after. Perhaps they were worried that the dogs would testify in court someday.

You know, this is the sort of thing that makes one hope there is a Hell.

— Appendix C, *The Romanov Rescue*

Кто Посмеет Побеждает

## THE ADVENTURE OF THE BRUCE-PARTINGTON PLANS

Review by Joseph T Major of

**DEAD DOUBLES:**

*The Extraordinary Worldwide Hunt for One of the Cold War’s Most Notorious Spy Rings*

(2020; Harper; ISBN 978-006285699;

\$28.99; 2020; Harper (Kindle); \$11.99)

by Trevor Barnes

“. . . The papers which this wretched youth had in his pocket were the plans of the Bruce-Partington submarine.”

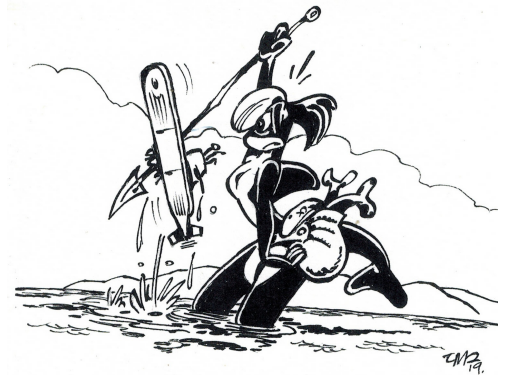
Mycroft Holmes spoke with a solemnity which showed his sense of the importance of the subject. His brother and I sat expectant.

“Surely you have heard of it? I thought everyone had heard of it.”

“Only as a name.”

“Its importance can hardly be exaggerated. It has been the most jealously guarded of all government secrets. You may take it from me that naval warfare becomes impossible within the radius of a Bruce-Partington’s operation. Two years ago a very large sum was smuggled through the Estimates and was expended in acquiring a monopoly of the invention. Every effort has been made to keep the secret. The plans, which are exceedingly intricate, comprising some thirty separate patents, each essential to the working of the whole, are kept in an elaborate safe in a confidential office adjoining the arsenal, with burglar-proof doors and windows. Under no conceivable circumstances were the plans to be taken from the office. If the chief constructor of the Navy desired to consult them, even he was forced to go to the Woolwich office for the purpose. And yet here we find them in the pocket of a dead junior clerk in the heart of London. From an official point of view it’s simply awful.”

— “The Adventure of the Bruce-Partington Plans”



The submarine HMS *Dreadnought* was as revolutionary as the battleship whose name she shared. The key element was the elaborate SONAR equipment, which if not making naval warfare impossible within its radius of operations, made it extremely perilous.

And the papers were taken by a junior clerk in the Registry of the British Underwater Detection Establishment, the submarine research center of the effort to build and equip the *Dreadnought*. But this story did not begin with a corpse on the London light rail, but with an anonymous man calling himself *Heckenschutze* (“Sniper”), who wrote to the British authorities about this spy leak.

Before the story was resolved, a far-flung network of intelligence agents would get involved, overcoming the skepticism of James Jesus Angleton, employing the interrogation skills of William James “Jim” Skardon, and

drawing in *Spycatcher* Peter Wright. The enemy operatives included a veteran of the International Brigades, a former prisoner of the Koreans, and a deep penetration illegal whose setup omitted one small snip. And did I mention that Heckenschutze was sort of daft?

At the center of all this was the sordid couple of Harry Houghton, retired naval petty officer, and Elizabeth “Bunty” Gee, minor clerk.

Houghton had had a poor marital life, breaking up with his wife after his retirement from the navy, and ending up near Portland. The Security Service began investigating and observed one striking situation; Houghton was living far beyond his income, and yet never seemed to be given to credit manipulation, defalcation, or other such measures. Jonathan Pollard, anyone?

The surveillance on Houghton and Gee was extraordinary in its attention to detail. And they soon unearthed links. Houghton went to meet with his control officer, followed all the way (“I saw no one.” “That is what you may expect to see when I follow you.” (“The Adventure of the Devil’s Foot”)). Three people came to notice.



One, Gordon Arnold Lonsdale, was a Canadian, a man with investments in juke boxes and such, none of which seemed to do very well. The other two were Peter and Helen Kroger, a bookdealer and his wife, from New Zealand. Investigation into their backgrounds revealed — voids. They seemed to have appeared out of nowhere. Again, this was an elaborate process, requiring international inquiries, drawing in the CIA and the RCMP.

In the middle of all this Heckenschutze defected. He turned out to be Michal Golewski, an agent of the Polish Ministry of Public Security, a liaison to the KGB. (Later on he said different things about who he was, but that’s another story: *The Hunt for the Czar* by Guy Richards (1970).)

So on January 7, 1961, when Houghton and Gee went to meet Gordon Lonsdale, they all and the Krogers were arrested. Things began to come apart.

It quickly became clear that Lonsdale was not Lonsdale. And it turned out that the Krogers were Morris Cohen, CPUSA activist and International Brigades veteran, and his wife Lona Petka. (China veteran Morris “Two-Gun” Cohen was not reached for comment.)

They all were tried and found guilty. As was someone else dragged in, MI-6 officer George Blake. Blake had been captured in Korea and “turned”, becoming a spy for the Soviet Union. He too was sent away to the nick.

Most of them served their time. Houghton and Gee got married after they were released and died in obscurity. “Lonsdale” went to the Soviet Union, where he was greeted by an old friend going by the name of Rudolf I. Abel — William Fisher, that is. And “Lonsdale” was Konon Trofimovich Molody. He had an autobiography ghosted by no less than Kim Philby, and died remarkably young.

The Cohens followed. Morris’s most noteworthy act was to declare, when it came out in the nineties, that the western powers would never find out who Manhattan Project agent MLAD was. The next year it was revealed that MLAD was Teddy Hall.

Two nitwitted peace activists and an IRA man engineered George Blake’s escape. He fled to the Soviet Union and only died recently, having seen the ruin of the idea he had given his all for.

### VALIANT VOYAGE

Review by Joseph T Major of  
**SHACKLETON’S ENDURANCE:**  
*An Antarctic Survival Story*

(2021; A & U Children;  
ISBN 978-1760626092; \$13.99;  
2021; Allen & Unwin (Kindle); \$7.00)  
by Joanna Grochowicz

There are a number of books for children (and more for adults) about the life and adventures of the Boss, from Alfred Lansing’s *Shackleton’s Valiant Voyage* (1962), an edited version of his *Endurance* (1959), on to now.

Grochowicz tells the story by going from man to man, describing them, showing their reactions to each other and the situation, as the expedition progresses. They were quite a varied lot and she presents them fairly. She describes the need to hunt and the effort thereof honestly.

And so on, through the destruction of the ship, the grueling journey across the ice, the escape to Elephant Island, and the final voyage to South Georgia for rescue. The reader is carried along, seeing what they saw then, experiencing their struggle and their life together.

This will be an interesting introduction to the exploits of the Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition and its leader.

### SHOCKS

by Lisa

This morning I woke to the news that Medina Spirit, the colt of the controversial Derby

win earlier this year, had died of a heart attack. I stopped and put my hand to my mouth. His win was controversial, thanks to his testing positive for a forbidden substance. I wondered if the colt’s death would put a stop to the controversy and doubted it.

It was only a few days before another happening drove the colt’s death from my mind. On Friday morning the Weather Channel warned us that night would be a bumpy ride with weather. They were right with their forecasting. I sat up until three a.m. We in Louisville were spared bad stuff this time. Others were not. Before I went to bed there were reports Graves County Kentucky had been hard hit. My mother’s grandparents had lived in Graves County. I spent many wonderful days there when I was a child. Some of my cousins still live there. When I woke on Saturday afternoon I turned the TV on to almost unbelievable destruction. Mayfield, capital seat of Graves County, had been levelled. It was not alone. The tornado had left a two hundred mile path of destruction. I could only watch a few minutes before I could not stand it any longer. Our governor, Andy Beshear, said it could not be compared to a war zone because war zones looked better. Even having seen the pictures I still have trouble wrapping my head around all the destruction. It was two hundred miles with no respite from the monster. Later that morning I learned my cousins were okay and could stop worrying about them. Many others were not so lucky. Dawson Springs was also levelled.

### HUGO RESULTS

Courtesy of File770

#### BEST NOVEL

*Network Effect*, Martha Wells (Tor.com)

#### BEST NOVELLA

*The Empress of Salt and Fortune*, Nghi Vo (Tor.com)

#### BEST NOVELETTE

*Two Truths and a Lie*, Sarah Pinsker (Tor.com)

#### BEST SHORT STORY

“Metal Like Blood in the Dark”, T. Kingfisher (*Uncanny Magazine*, September/October 2020)

#### BEST SERIES

*The Murderbot Diaries*, Martha Wells (Tor.com)

#### BEST RELATED WORK

*Beowulf: A New Translation*, Maria Dahvana Headley (FSG)

**BEST GRAPHIC STORY OR COMIC**

*Parable of the Sower: A Graphic Novel Adaptation*, written by Octavia Butler, adapted by Damian Duffy, illustrated by John Jennings (Harry N. Abrams)

**BEST DRAMATIC PRESENTATION, LONG FORM**

*The Old Guard*, written by Greg Rucka, directed by Gina Prince-Bythewood (Netflix / Skydance Media)

**BEST DRAMATIC PRESENTATION, SHORT FORM**

*The Good Place: Whenever You're Ready*, written and directed by Michael Schur (Fremulon / 3 Arts Entertainment / Universal Television, a division of Universal Studio Group)

**BEST EDITOR, SHORT FORM**

Ellen Datlow

**BEST EDITOR, LONG FORM**

Diana M. Pho

**BEST PROFESSIONAL ARTIST**

Rovina Cai

**BEST SEMIPROZINE**

*FIYAH Magazine of Black Speculative Fiction*, publisher Troy L. Wiggins, executive editor DaVaun Sanders, managing editor Eboni Dunbar, poetry editor Brandon O'Brien, reviews and social media Brent Lambert, art director L. D. Lewis, and the FIYAH Team.

"Best Fanzine"

*nerds of a feather, flock together*, ed. Adri Joy, Joe Sherry, The G, and Vance Kotrla

**BEST FANCAST**

*The Coode Street Podcast*, presented by Jonathan Strahan and Gary K. Wolfe, Jonathan Strahan, producer

**BEST FAN WRITER**

Elsa Sjunneson

**BEST FAN ARTIST**

Sara Felix

**BEST VIDEO GAME**

*Hades* (Publisher and Developer:

Supergiant Games)

**LODESTAR AWARD FOR BEST YOUNG ADULT BOOK (not a Hugo)**

*A Wizard's Guide to Defensive Baking*, T. Kingfisher (Argyll Productions)

**ASTOUNDING AWARD FOR THE BEST NEW WRITER, SPONSORED BY DELL MAGAZINES (not a Hugo)**

Emily Tesh (2nd year of eligibility)

**SIDELINE AWARDS**

Courtesy of File 770

2019

Short Form: Harry Turtledove. "Christmas Truce" *Asimov's*, November 2019.

Long Form: Annalee Newitz. *The Future of Another Timeline*. Tor, 2019.

2020

Short Form: Matthew Kresal. "Moonshot". *Alternate Australias* (ed. Jared Kavanagh), Sea Lion Press, 2020.

Long Form: Adrian Tchaikovsky. *The Doors of Eden*. Pan McMillan, 2020.

**WORLDCON BIDS**

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://jeddicon.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**

2022

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

2023

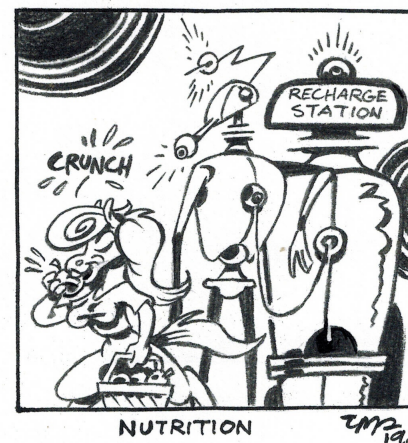
Chengdu  
Year of the Water Rabbit  
August 16-20, 2023  
<http://www.worldconinchina.com/index-e.html>

Guests of Honor:

Sergey Lukianenko  
Robert Sawyer  
Liu Cixin

Membership rates:

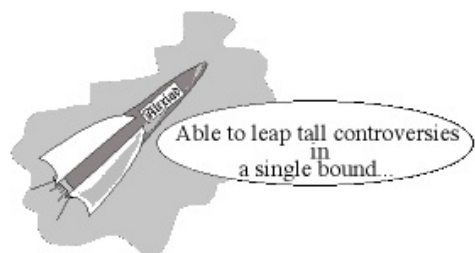
Supporting: \$50  
Virtual: \$80  
Attending: \$100



Those 1200+ Supporting Members from China who joined right before the con seem to have been remarkably consistent. There were 1950 pre-con Chengdu votes and 332 pre-con Winnipeg votes; the final totals were Chengdu: 2006; Winnipeg: 807.



## Letters, we get letters



From: **John Hertz**      October 9, 2021  
236 S. Coronado St., No. 409, Los Angeles, CA 90057-1456

Applause for Leigh Kimmel's InConJunction XL report. The dealer's perspective is too seldom given.

Applause also for your printing fanart. Schirm is matchless. I'll hope for more Gilliland, and others, even.

Among the few terminological points we get right is our insistence that we sell memberships, not tickets. A ticket buys the privilege of looking at what someone else has made. With a membership you're part of it, and invited to participate.

**Which is the problem of the shift from participant to consumer.**

I share Cathy Palmer-Lister's sorrows about commercialization, but I grieve less at producers of commercial SF cons than at folk who at an SF con of ours don't notice we've told them that what they bought isn't a ticket — and at us when we then don't trouble to orient them.

I pause in memory of the late great Marty Helgesen, who once when asked to give an orientation talk said "East is that way".

To David Shea, whose participations I'm always glad to see, I shall as he invites express my opinion. The fan-category Hugos are only "a lost cause" to the extent that we abandon them. We don't trouble to nominate, so the ballot is the work of those who do. For years the published numbers have shown how few of us would have had to act in order to bring about a different result.

**In response to the "No Award" ad, it was pointed out that if the 25 signatories had all been members of the con and had nominated, they could have put a fanzine on the ballot. The cutoff for the 2020 Best Fanzine Hugo was — 25 nominations.**

— JTM

Richard Dengrove omits what made aluminum cheap. Nobody could get at it until Hall

and Heroult, and Bayer. When it could be extracted cheaply its abundance was no longer out of reach.

I thank Taras Wolansky for his agreement. It's a point on which I'd rather be wrong.

From: **George W. Price**      July 18, 2021  
4418 N. Monitor Avenue, Chicago, IL 60630-3333 USA  
[price4418@comcast.net](mailto:price4418@comcast.net)

June Alexiad:

In "The Joy of High Tech," Rodford Edmiston says, "Some things have an intrinsic value. Some things have a social value. What people are willing to pay for something is generally an amalgam . . . of these factors. Changes in either of these factors can result in a change in perceived value."

I have no quarrel with the broad point he is making, but wish to note that free-market economics recognizes that all valuation is subjective. There is no such thing as "intrinsic" (or "objective") value — no, not even for diamonds and gold.

At most, "intrinsic value" is approximated when almost everybody places a similarly high subjective value on something, such as diamonds and gold.

"Value" is the maximum you are willing to pay for something. This is entirely in your head.

"Price" is what a seller requires you to pay.

"Cost" is what you have actually paid.

If the cost of what you bought was significantly less than its value to you, then you got a really good bargain.

Free-market commerce is only possible because the seller values what he is selling less than he values the money that he is getting for it — or more precisely, the goods that he expects to buy with that money.

For an extended and very clear explanation of this, I recommend *Economics in One Lesson*, by Henry Hazlitt. At a deeper level, read the works of Ludwig von Mises. They both published their analyses many years ago, but the principles are unchanging. The laws of economics are social laws, not physical, but they resemble physical laws in that they work out the same whether one believes in them or not. Congress can't repeal them.

Von Mises earned his reputation by showing that pure socialism is impossible: A centrally-planned economy where prices are set by fiat rather than by the interplay of supply and demand in a free market cannot work at all well, because it lacks the feedback the planners need. He wrote in the early 1920s; the Soviet Union spent some seventy years (and millions of lives) proving him right.

The Chinese Communists have enjoyed much better results (once Mao was gone) with a semi-free economy overseen by a tyrannical government. The jury is still out on how well this will work in the long run.

Mr. Edmiston observes that "things like diamonds and gold rarely drop in value just

because new mining methods make them more available."

Well, so far those new methods have not increased the availability by very much, compared to how much is already on hand. It has been argued that if we were on a full gold standard, and then discovered an easily accessible asteroid of pure gold, it would collapse the economy. This may well be true, but I will risk finding that asteroid, which is very unlikely, rather than risk the politicians debauching our fiat money, which is damned near a dead certainty.

**The Spanish found a seemingly inexhaustible source of silver in Peru. It has been theorized that this ability to buy things instead of make them led to the demise of Spanish manufactures. However, most of the silver was used to pay for Philip's wars; as Will Cuppy put it in *The Decline and Fall of Practically Everybody*:**

**Philip was the budget type. He would set down pages of figures showing expected revenues for the coming year and how much of it he had already spent. Naturally, this did no good.**

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Mr. Edmiston also notes that "Today, the coal industry is failing. Not due to any sort of environmentalist plot, but simply because the demand isn't nearly what it used to be. Other fuels are cheaper and, yes, produce less pollution."

Indeed so. I spent most of my professional career as a chemist and technical information officer at the Institute of Gas Technology (since renamed the Gas Technology Institute), the research arm of the natural gas industry. We did a lot of work on the relationships between gas and coal.

One odd thing I learned was why Chicago's gas utility was named Peoples Gas Light and Coke Company. Note the name has no comma after "Gas." That's because the company was founded to make "coal gas" for use in gaslights. Coal was reacted with superheated steam to produce a highly toxic mixture of hydrogen and carbon monoxide. And coke was a useful byproduct of the process.

The slum apartment building on Chicago's South Side where I lived for most of my childhood had gas lighting when it was built in about 1880. It had long been electrified by the time we lived there, and gas was used only for cooking. But our parlor still had a disconnected gaslight fixture sticking out of the wall.

After World War II a pipeline from Texas reached Chicago and the company switched to natural gas. I'm told that all the cookstoves had to get new burners, though I didn't notice it at

the time. (Furnaces didn't have to change, because they nearly all burned coal; a few burned fuel oil.) Many years later the company finally dropped "Light and Coke" from its name and became simply Peoples Gas.

And it wasn't until the 1970s that the last coal-heated buildings switched to natural gas.

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Last issue I remarked on how surprised I was when I came across a "Shadow" pulp magazine around 1950 and discovered that its version of the Shadow had no occult power "to cloud men's minds," as in the radio program, but was simply a master of disguise.

Joe appended a note saying that in the magazine the Shadow was a World War I flying ace named Kent Allard. Now that really startled me. Not Lamont Cranston!? Why didn't I remember reading that? So I made a quick online search on "Kent Allard."

I found that when Allard became the Shadow he faked his own death, and then often masqueraded as Cranston. To add to the confusion, there was also a real Lamont Cranston, a world traveler who was usually out of the country when Allard was using his identity. Now that made more sense — apparently that difference in the backstory did not impress me enough to remember.

\*\*\*\*

South Carolina senator Tim Scott appears to be a rising star in the Republican Party (or what's left of it). Since he is both black and a conservative, he is of course vilified by the left as "Uncle Tim," a traitor to his race.

The allusion to "Uncle Tom" is cute word-play, but also a telling display of ignorance. Those who use "Uncle Tom" to mean a black who sucks up to whites obviously know hardly anything about Uncle Tom's Cabin. In the famous book, Uncle Tom is a long-suffering and heroic character who sacrifices his life to help other slaves escape.

Perhaps I will get a chance to vote for "Uncle Tim" in 2024.

November 23, 2021

October *Alexiad* (#119)

On page 8, Taras Wolansky's "Where Does Uhura Come From" is enjoyable, but slightly marred by a typographical horror that grossly offends my compositor's eye.

The words "successor, Vincent, is played by" are stretched way out to fill an entire line, with absurdly wide spaces between words and also extra space between letters. There's plenty of room to include the next word and maybe part of another word on that line. So why wasn't that done?

Because "Cuban-American" are those next two words, and there's a hyphen between them, that's why. *Alexiad*'s hyphenation and justifica-

tion (h&j) program obviously will not break a line on a hard hyphen — that is, a hyphen which is part of the text, not just inserted to break a line.

This is to ensure that if the printed passage is ever computer-scanned, the scan program will not mistake the hard hyphen for a soft hyphen that was only inserted to break the line and which therefore should not be recorded. For the same reason, the h&j program refuses to hyphenate any words in the hyphenated phrase — in this case, "Cuban" and "American" — even if there is ample space to do so.

How to fix this? The editor must check all the hyphenations the h&j program gives him, and when he sees such a monstrosity he goes back and inserts a space after that hard hyphen. Then the program will feel free to break the line there.

Or, to get a little fancier, and if there is room, he can change "American" to "Ameri-#" (where # indicates a space); that should make the line break there. And then he checks again to see if it all comes out the way he wants.

In my own letter, "nation-building" met the same dreadful fate. The moral is that we just can't trust h&j programs to always get it right.

\*\*\*\*\*

Richard Dengrove discusses Galileo's woes with the Catholic Church. A minor coincidence of no significance whatever is that my late wife was a parishioner of Saint Robert Bellarmine Church in Chicago. (She was Catholic; I am not religious, and went with her mainly to push her wheelchair.) The coincidence is that Cardinal Bellarmine was active in the prosecution of Galileo, though I doubt if that was related to his canonization in 1930.

\*\*\*\*\*

Lloyd Penney and Darrell Schweitzer have little patience with those who think requiring masks is an infringement on their freedom. My own position is a little more middle of the road.

I put on a mask without complaint when expected to, even though it is uncomfortable to breathe through, and — much worse — it interferes with my hearing aids.

I wear aids in both ears. The speaker buds fitting into my ears are each connected to a small pod containing circuitry and a battery. Each pod is tucked between the top of the ear and my skull. Alas, that's also right where the ear loops for the mask go.

All too often the loops get tangled with those connecting wires. Then when I take off the mask I have to be extremely careful that the tangles do not pull the hearing aids out of my ears and let them fall. My eyesight is so bad that finding them on the ground is a miserable task. Now that's a real nuisance. But wearing the mask is socially necessary, so I do it.

\*\*\*\*\*

I see some correlation between ideology and resistance to wearing masks and getting vaccinated. The more politically progressive one is, the more likely one is to vehemently insist on everyone being masked and vaccinated, even when it may not seem really necessary.

I attribute this to the progressive mindset that says, in effect, "I know better than you do what is good for you and for everyone else, and that entitles me to rule over you." (This used to be called "paternalism"; now it's "government by experts.") It can be hard to tell the difference between someone deeply and selflessly concerned and one who merely loves to tell other people what to do.

At the opposite extreme is the fellow who imagines that his personal liberty overrides any considerations of harm to others.

I can suggest a possible middle ground. Let those free spirits refuse to be vaccinated or wear masks. But when they get sick, and ICU beds or other medical treatments are in short supply (perhaps because people like them have made disease more rampant), they must go straight to the back end of the line.

\*\*\*\*\*

One of the more serious raps against the last Administration is that He Who Must Not Be Named did not take the Covid pandemic seriously enough soon enough, and at first just sloughed it off.

This is true. But would you really prefer that he had eagerly jumped in to micromanage the nation's medical and economic response? Really? I suspect not.

We should count our blessings: Leaving the crisis response mostly to the governors and mayors has worked out fairly well for us — even though accomplished more by neglect than design.

To be sure, that Administration does deserve full credit for Operation Warp Speed. Sometimes the buggers actually do get it right.

From: **Mike Glyer** October 20, 2021  
[mikeglyer@cs.com](mailto:mikeglyer@cs.com)  
<http://file770.com/>

"The Unpleasant Profession of Nero Wolfe" is a master stroke. It so happens I read the whole Wolfe series for the first time during the past year — a little late to the party, despite knowing how much store Bruce Pelz set by it.

As always you have a fine eye for all the little motifs and details that frame popular characters. And a clever matchup with the Heinlein story. Well done!

I've got them on Kindle. I also have Robert Gouldsborough's continuations, which aren't as good, but they have their own interest.

—JTM

From: **Richard A. Dengrove** Nov. 3, 2021



2651 Arlington Drive, #302, Alexandria, VA 22306-3626 USA  
[RichD22426@aol.com](mailto:RichD22426@aol.com)

Here are my comments for *Alexiad* October 2021.

First, in your "Reviewer's Notes," You talk about the 2001 Worldcon's problems and you wonder if Worldcon is coming to the last roundup. I was going to say Worldcon's problems are local problems. However, for the biggest mess, they had to listen to a crazy leftwing radical. The kind who believes ideology is everything and literature nothing. That has been happening a lot recently at cons. A radical will complain and the con's heads act without knowing what the actual problem is – or whether it exists. That's what happened to Toni.

Consider for example Jeanette Ng's Hugo-nominated rant about how unwoke Jack Campbell, the editor of *Amazing Stories*, had been.

So much for the "Reviewer's Notes." Now we go on to the articles. With "This Earth of Hours", I'm not certain Blish was serious about the society he created. I think he was trying to be weird and succeeded. In "This Earth", a society arises where women are rare. Because of that, women take over. Commentators who take Blish serious should watch out. Maybe taking Blish's works seriously is why an acquaintance of mine believes Blish was a Nazi. Of course, an imagination should not be confused with totalitarianism.

Now we go on with the articles. With the *Nature of Middle Earth*, it struck me that Middle Earth could not have happened in our past even though, I suspect, Tolkien tries to convince us of that. It sounds more like the past of another world.

With *The Consequences of an Errant Shell Part 1 and 2*, alternate history has reached a higher point: it is a logical alternative history rather than, as you say, grotesque and outré. People have tired of the Nazis winning World War II. They want an alternate history where more liberal people win. More logical leaders you could be more logical about.

For a meticulous (almost too meticulous) working out of a POD, see *The Romanov Rescue*, reviewed in this. Oh, and *The Consequences of an Errant Shell* has been rereleased in a single volume.

With "Animadversionism" by David Shea, I'm glad the brokerage firm where he worked was understanding. I wouldn't have complained about a nonsensical birthday card coming to my house. As is, an investment firm sends me awful chocolates as my Christmas present. Not being an employee, I'm in a far better situation to complain; but I don't care enough.

With "Where does Uhura come from," Taras Wolansky certainly did enough research on Star Trek and associated matters. He has convinced me Uhura doesn't come from Africa. While she claimed to speak Swahili, Taras pointed out it is a lingua franca not a native language.

With "Khan-Cave 2021," I would have wanted to be there. I realize, of course, they usually prefer people who are willing to work on their cons. I went to a brother con, ConCave, in 2018. That year Concave piggybacked on DeepSouthCon, of which I am a veteran. From ConCave, I get the impression ConCave and KhanCave are both relaxacons with interesting people. Only ConCave only lacked the Star Trek band that year.

With "Archon 44," Leigh Kimmel continues her description of conventions from the point of view of a dealer. There may have been other articles like hers; but, in all my years in fandom, I don't remember any. Dealers are a part of the convention fans don't normally think of, but they are there and ready to make money.

Now we come to the letters of comment on other issues. As always in my missives, your comments on my letter come first. I had discussed Ed Meskys. For that reason, you told a story which included him. At a con, he asked whether he could sit in a particular place; and you asked David Kyle. He said it was OK. So, remembering events of the first Worldcon, you told Ed that David Kyle said he could sit there. I presume it was Dave Kyle who had figurative daggers in his his eyes aimed at you.

NyCon 2. For those who don't get it, "Dave Kyle says you can't sit here." Though he didn't say it, the New York Fire Marshal did.

—JTM

That's it for your comment about my letter, Joe. Next, Sable Jak. I did a little googling about the *Bright Morn of Issareth*, Fiction he or she wanted to read. It is on Amazon as he or she said. However, it needs Sable's email address and Amazon password. It's not hard to get. In the upper hand corner, click Account and List, and Sign In is there.

That ends it for Sable's letter. Next, George Price. He said, in his September 24th letter, that he stopped going to cons because of old age. A good reason. At some point, I may have to stop too.

Also, George complains about ranked choice. I agree with him that it would be terrible to be met with a ranked choice choice in an election. However, it wouldn't be so bad for judging books and works of art. The reason is it takes into account how arbitrary and capricious we are in judging them.

Next, Lloyd Penney. He advocates the Covid vaccine. I think I beat him. I got three shots. The third one as a booster for the other two. I think I was supposed to get an appointment but that fact never reached me. Instead, I entered Kaiser Permanente and saw a line. The

nurse was angry I didn't make an appointment but she gave me a shot anyway.

Next still, David M. Shea. He points out that, in Cherryh's *Chanur*, both gold and jewels are used as currency. However, not silver. I had wondered whether gold, silver and gems had been used as currency. At least, gold and gems have been – if only in a fantasy place.

Next still, Taras Wolansky wonders how I knew about the con ConGigate. My usual convention, DeepSouthCon, was piggy backing on ConGigate this year.

Finally, Al du Pisani. He was wondering whether the British Labor Party will go out of business because people have increasingly been thinking in terms of their nation and not their locality. For instance, the Scots have been associated with the Labor Party. However, I think its current problems are due to being too far out in left field. At least the wrong part of left field.

I guess that's it.

From: **David M. Shea** November 1, 2021  
 4716 Dorsey Hall Drive Unit 506,  
 Ellicott City, MD 21042-5988

You once told the anecdote about how, at the wedding, the pastor regularly called Lisa by her middle name. What is Lisa's middle name? Mine is Michael. Don't know why. Never asked.

"Dianne".

I have no idea why I had a first name derived from the Biblical Elizabeth and a middle name which came from a pagan goddess.

—LTM

In Elizabeth Moon's *Sporting Chance*: The scheme by which Brun and Ronnie bust Lady Cecilia out of the nursing home is, militarily speaking, a high risk plan. It's complicated. Every aspect has to work right in a very narrow time frame. There is no contingency plan, no flexibility. The exercise depends on variables over which they have no control (e.g. weather). Its only redeeming virtue is, it's so crazy no one would think to defend against it!

The libraries reopened in June. Still have not resumed having periodicals. I asked for the third and last time, and was told there is "no progress" on the question. I told the librarian it was a "bad decision" but that I would not bring it up again.

Rodford Edmiston: Another use of lighter-than-air for military purposes, was as tethered obstructions: "barrage balloons". The main idea was just to force enemy aircraft to divert around them. I am not aware these were used as observation posts, though S.M. Stirling did use the notion fictionally in *Against the Tide of Years*. I do note two aerial photography platforms you failed to mention. A staple was the RF-4C, a modification of the F-4 "Phantom" fighter, from the early 1960's through the

Vietnam era. There was also the O-2, a small propeller-driven plane flown by the Army, not the Air Force, for low-altitude photography. You can find the specifications in *Warbirds* if your library has it.

Tom Feller: I was never asked what my favorite "alienspecies" was. Had I been asked, I would probably have replied, "Human, humanoid, or otherwise?"

George Price: I hope you were not misled by my remark about dismissing the Hugo Awards as a "lost cause". Though I am sure others share this view, I was stating a personal opinion.

Taras Wolansky: I accept your right not to have enjoyed *Dhalgren*. I have certainly given up on books without finishing them. (Joseph, you've told that joke before.)

As late as the 1950's, there was a terrible disease: poliomyelitis. It is now virtually unknown in civilized countries. The reason? Vaccines.

When they had the Salk (killed-virus) shots Mother took us boys down for them. Then the Sabin (weakened-virus) oral vaccine came out and we had those.

—JTM

From: **Lloyd Penney** November 21, 2021  
1706-24 Eva Road, Etobicoke, ON  
M9C 2B2 CANADA  
[penneys@bell.net](mailto:penneys@bell.net)  
<http://lloydpenney.livejournal.com/>

Many thanks for issue 119 of *Alexiad*, and once again, I am so far behind. There's a ton of zines to respond to, so I guess a dreary, rainy evening is the best place to start, hm? I hope it will be sunny soon, and I will be caught up.

Fall has definitely begun, for it is rainy and dreary out, with falling temperatures. All the summer clothes are regretfully put away for another season. Good thing we have good shirts and sweaters galore. Kinda comes with the territory up here. We are ready for whatever winter we get. We have no plans to go to Worldcon, either. Our local cons are yet to come about, but it does seem our literary convention, Ad Astra, will not restart in 2022...not sure if it is a lack of money or volunteers, and I suspect it's both. Soon, we may have no SF cons to go to, unless someone has a lot of cash, and time on their hands. We do have an event to go to at the beginning of December, though, a fannish market produced by one of our local small anime cons, and we thought there's people who have not had the chance to shop in a dealers' room in a long time, so we bought a table. Let's see how we do.

The Winnipeg Worldcon bid...we have heard very little about it, although I guess I could go to their website and find something out. I doubt we could afford it, though...we did enjoy the Worldcon in 1994, and it was good not to have to worry about exchange rates. I will say maybe...

It was organized very quickly.  
I hope things work out.

—JTM

My letter in the local...more bad weather, using the term atmospheric river, to describe the massive flooding in the lower mainland of British Columbia, just north of Washington state. Damages will probably be in the hundreds of millions of dollars, if not billions. We are still waiting for our COVID booster shot, although we did get our annual flu shots a few days ago. I did say I wouldn't go to any of the big Fan eXpo conventions...the whole thing is just part of conference megacorp Informa. I do occasional work for a local conference staffing agency, and I have worked on several Informa conventions already. If I am going to go, I might as well be paid to go, and do work I would have done voluntarily at the conventions that may never come back. I usually work these shows at registration, exhibitor registration, information desk, or these days, vaccination clerk at the main entry.

I fear I may not have anything to add...I do find it more difficult to have anything to add to any letter. Some zines are read and enjoyed, but if I can't say anything more than that, I don't write a letter. No one wants to see RAE, BNC. It is close to dinner time, so we shall see what we can cobble together. Many thanks for this issue, and I always will look for more.

From: **Robert S. Kennedy** Nov. 29, 2021  
The Terraces of Boise, 5301 East Warm Springs Ave., Apt. B306, Boise, ID 83716-6205  
[robertk@cipcug.org](mailto:robertk@cipcug.org)

Thanks for Vol. 20 No.5 (October 2021, Whole Number 119).

I can't believe that it has been so long since I've written. I must be getting lazy in my old age. So I am writing now to let you know that I am still here.

Things are going reasonably well here under the circumstances. It's hard to get people to work here despite our paying complete wages, benefits, and a signing bonus. The economy is a mess. And how come so many people don't seem to need a job? Meals on Sunday and Monday are no longer available so as to give the hard working employees two days off. I am King of the Microwave.

I've had three Wuhan Virus shots and a Flu shot. But we still wear masks in common areas unless we are eating. Also, when I go out in public I wear a mask.

I have been collecting memes with people using the same sort of arguments against vaccination to justify not stopping at stoplights, using headlights at night, dressing up in snowsuits, and so on.

—JTM

A few weeks ago they took several of us out

to a Chinese restaurant for dinner (at our expense obviously). It was great and there was excellent Hot & Sour Soup.

**Richard A. Dengrove:** I agree with you concerning people who refuse to get vaccinated.

**Darrell Schweitzer:** Your comments too.

**Taras Wolansky:** Brad Cozzens (the husband of my niece Sheilah Kennedy) set me up to receive all those nice channels like NETFLEX, PRIME, Peacock, HBO Max, etc. He put me on to *For All Mankind*.

Well, that's it for now. Life goes on.

From: **Taras Wolansky** December 1, 2021  
Post Office Box 698, Kerhonkson, NY 12446-0698 USA  
[twolansky@yahoo.com](mailto:twolansky@yahoo.com)

Thanks for the October 2021 *Alexiad*.

Reading about Mel Korshak and Bob Madle, I wonder: does fandom keep you young?

Discon 3 has a total of only 13 members from China? A hopeful sign, perhaps, that the Chinese Communist government decided not to promote Chengdu. Perhaps it considers a local Worldcon too much of a risk, whether from COVID-19 or from naive Western fans who think they can, you know, just go ahead and say what they really think about China, and Tibet — and where COVID-19 came from in the first place.

Something to consider in voting for Jeddicon.

**Rodford Edmiston:** Excellent piece on reconnaissance aircraft.

The discussion of the relative merits of dirigibles vs. planes in the early years of World War II reminded me of the Amazon streampunk series, *Carnival Row*.

Evidently inspired by the Irish diaspora, this gives us faerie refugees, some of them winged, in a sort of alternative 19th-century London. In flashbacks, we see how the fae folk were rendered refugees by the invasion and occupation of their country by the brutal "Pact". (Any similarity to the Warsaw Pact is probably not coincidental.)

But the oddity here is that the storyline requires that the fae ability to fly be *useless*. So when the Pact drops bombs on a fae town from crude balloons, in a flashback, the fairies never do the obvious, like fly above the balloons and drop incendiary bombs on them. Similarly, in some of the first scenes of the series, fae refugees fleeing through a forest are massacred by Pact ground forces, but somehow never think of flying up into the foliage where they would be invisible.

Idiot plot, anyone?

**Lloyd Penney:** "how is this vaccination any different?" Well, the common childhood vaccinations are intended to protect the children getting the vaccinations. The COVID-19 vacci-

nations of children seem to be primarily intended to protect older adults at the expense of children.

I was not particularly sympathetic with anti-vaxxers when I got my Covid vaccines. My right shoulder was sore for a couple days; then my left was sore for a single day. But then I got a flu vaccine a couple weeks ago, and it felt like I had been stung by a yellow jacket three feet long. They should have issued a sling with the vaccine, so I could immobilize my arm.

If we conceive of vaccination as a form of torture, the reluctance of some people to get vaccinated may be easier to understand. Particularly if we are torturing children for the hypothetical benefit of old people.

**David M. Shea:** CNN medic Sanjay Gupta was on Joe Rogan's enormously popular podcast when Rogan forced him to admit that his CNN colleagues had lied when they said Rogan was using "horse dewormer". In fact, Rogan was prescribed a human dose of ivermectin.

Ivermectin won the Nobel Prize in Medicine in 2015 because it is a miracle drug in humans, having brought about the near eradication of river blindness, one of the most horrible of African diseases.

That an anti-parasitic drug might turn out to have other activity would be no more surprising than when the heart medication, finasteride, turned out to grow hair.

**George W. Price:** "The central problem is that 'nation-building' just plain does not work in a place like ... Afghanistan".

*Au contraire.* Our brain-dead pullout from Afghanistan has left the country more unified than ever before. Unified under the Taliban, to be sure. Aside from helping disarm the people, we collapsed the government so quickly that anti-Taliban forces like the Northern Alliance had no chance to regroup.

In an ironic note, many of those tens of thousands of Afghan allies we abandoned to their deaths have been forced to join the only opposing force that exists in Afghanistan today: ISIS. Which will, no doubt, appreciate the special forces training many of them will be able to contribute.

**Darrell Schweitzer:** Reading a book on the French and Indian War, I was struck by how outnumbered the French were. The French government had treated colonization in the New World as a privilege to be granted only to the religiously orthodox. While the Brits let in any old riffraff that could pay their way.

The only thing that kept the war going so long was that the British commanders were incompetent. One, at least, had a good judgment to get knocked on the head at the beginning of a battle, permitting the American second in command, Sir William Johnson, to lead British and American troops to victory at Fort Niagara.

Joe, your comment about Eddie Rickenbacker moved me to look up his biography. It's like a whole series of improbable adventure novels, full of death-defying feats and astonish-

ing achievements.

Like the two plane crashes. Did the bio you read mention that he never got a driver's license or a pilot's license? (The way the NSA couldn't pull William F. Friedman's security clearance, because he never got one.)

—JTM

Finally, I stopped watching the *Foundation* TV series, streaming on Apple+, when it was announced that the fifth episode would explore the religious background of one of the main characters.

Even aside from my dislike of flashbacks: religious background? What does that have to do with Asimov's story? While I never read Asimov's "Foundation" prequels, that sure doesn't sound like something he would write.

From: **AL du Pisani** December 5, 2021  
945 Grand Prix Street, Weltevredenpark  
1709, REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA  
[du.pisani@kilos40.co.za](mailto:du.pisani@kilos40.co.za)

Greetings all

So, we had our local government elections on 1 November. For myself it was a really pleasant experience: I drove to the voting place, stood in the queue for a while, had my ID scanned and pointed to the right voting point (except it was the wrong point), voted and left. In and out in about an hour. Even with waiting at the wrong voting point and then going to the correct one. The best voting experience I had in about twenty years. I did not see any new equipment – the ID scanner was the same as in previous elections.

Then I got home, and started to read up about all the difficulties there was with voting. Had a co-worker complain about having to queue for 5 hours to vote. And having the IEC moan about only having 42 days to arrange the election. And that they really want us to switch away from the paper based system to an electronic voting system.

Participation was low, at about 45%. The major loser was the ANC, with a combined total of less than 50% of the vote. The DA remained steady, and the EFF seems to have hit peak voter support. There was a lot of minor parties which have appeared in the last couple of years which did OK.

So what tended to happen is that in about a quarter of all local governments there was nobody with a clear majority, resulting in coalitions. The ANC managed to outright win or get coalitions together in 4 of the 8 major metro-poles, with the DA taking the remainder, also mostly by coalition.

In Johannesburg there was the best part of a month before it all came together for the DA coalition. One of the parties involved in the coalition is Herman Mashaba's Action SA, which he formed about two years ago, after the

last national elections. Now Herman Mashaba was the DA mayor of Johannesburg after the previous round of local government elections. And he quit after the national elections when the DA lost a lot of support, and replaced their (black) leader. (This swung Johannesburg back to the ANC control, by the way.) Herman Mashaba seemed to have been shocked that there were any white people that voted for him in the previous election, and that the DA would replace a black leader with a white leader, and went off on his own. Herman Mashaba was originally mooted as the coalition's candidate for mayor, but during the negotiations that fell flat, and the DA candidate eventually became mayor.

My mother mentions that her local town had no ANC members in the government structure for the first time in a good 25 years. So it appears that in a lot of places the coalitions that formed excluded the ANC deliberately.

We had loadshedding the week before the elections, and then once again once the elections was over. There have been speculation that there are some Escom employees that sabotage equipment, get overtime fixing things using spares bought from their friends. Still supposed to be speculation, but from the tone of articles being written now, it looks as if there are significant proof.

And then there was one incident that is really difficult to see as anything but deliberate sabotage. Police are investigating – but quite a lot of people have given up on the Police. I get a feeling that some of the loadshedding is deliberately caused by people who wants the current big boss of Escom fired – He is white, he is reducing debt, he is pushing for cushy corruption rings to be prosecuted – probably also trying to get rid of employees, but the unions are not for that, and it was a condition of employment that he do not fire people.

Because of all the bad publicity Ivermectin has been getting, I read the press release the Nobel Prize committee did in 2015, where the discoverers of Ivermectin received half of that year's prize. (The other half went to a woman who delved into traditional Chinese herbals, and found a treatment for Malaria.) In both cases the prize was more because of the relief of suffering each discovery brought to millions of people.

There is actually a train of thought that the reason a lot of African countries have been doing very well during Wuhan Pneumonia is because Ivermectin is available over the counter in those countries, and used to treat things like hookworm and river blindness, and probably a lot of other things.

It is utterly depressing to have to deal with friends and family who seems to mainline traditional news, and bitch and moan about how dangerous it is out there, and the uptick in the dreaded FOURTH WAVE. One good thing about this is that my company has put their plans to get all workers back into the office a postponement. I hope that they rethink mandatory vaccinations. The government also want to



enforce mandatory vaccinations for people who enter public spaces – which seems to include airports. I do not know how much of that is because they committed to buying a large number of doses of the COVID stuff for a large number of years.

My nephew in the US recently got married to a foreign girl. And achieved a Ph.D. I do not know if he'll ever come back – another bright young man lost. My sister took a week off work and flew to New York to attend the wedding. Once again getting in and out of the USA before they started blocking flights.

To Rodford Edmiston: I recently reread Dr R.V. Jones's *Most Secret War*. In it he had some chapters which dealt with the early days of photo recon to look at Radar sites, and some of the people involved. And then just some mentions that afterwards the job got done. I find that in this case most of the stuff he tells about the early war years are detailed, and then get a lot less detailed as the war progresses.

He provides one of the three refutations of the claim that the German attack on Coventry was permitted to go ahead to cover up the secrecy of ULTRA (the other two being by Sir Martin Gilbert and Rupert "Nigel West" Allason).

—JTM

I have recently discovered that there appears to be a serious lack of information about electronic warfare in the late war years, especially in the Pacific. Where the Japanese destroyed all their records regarding electronic warfare during the month between the announcement of their surrender until the formal surrender ceremonies and the occupation of Japan. And that the USA never did a post war assessment of electronic warfare. The Japanese had pockets of excellence, and managed to do things that the Germans and Italians never managed.

Taras Wolansky: It is surprising how many people see Africa as a small country. Quite often a South African travelling overseas would meet somebody, tell him you're from South Africa, and then be asked if you know Joe who is in Nairobi (or Lagos or Addis Abeba). The fact that each of those cities are in different countries, three to five thousand kilometres away from where you live does not seem to matter. It is almost as bad as asking an American if you know Roberto who lives in Sao Paulo, and then be annoyed that you does not often go to South America.

David M Shea: I wish our local politicians had the same attitude towards liquor sales as yours. But the one thing that happens every time a more restricted level of interaction is announced, there is a change on when or if you can buy alcohol. Usually with the excuse that if people don't drink, they don't get into trouble and need to visit the hospital's emergency wards. With an anecdote of how during last Christmas's ban, there were no people seeking

treatment for alcohol related injuries in the emergency ward of (famous) hospital.

Other people think it is all to break the power of the wine farm owning class – If they cannot sell wine, they cannot generate income.

I am looking forward to the Summer holiday, and hope to see most of my family. Just waiting for Cyril to hold a family meeting and tell me what I cannot do. I had 4 planned holidays that the government tried to ruin for me – some of which I could postpone and fit in later, and some where they severely restricted what I was allowed to do.

I am tired. It looks as if I will finally, after 15 months on a project, be allowed to release it to production, and move on. And I need to interact face to face with some humans again.

From: **Darrell Schweitzer** Dec. 16, 2021  
[darrels@comcast.net](mailto:darrels@comcast.net)

I write this as word is coming in on Facebook about a bumpy start to Discon III. Multi-hour lines at registration. Complaints about Christian hymns as Christmas music at the opening ceremonies. (Surely something more fanciful would have been appropriate, like Handel's "Messiah" with Lovecraft Historical Society lyrics: "Oh Cthulhu! R'leyh! Cthulhu! . . . and he shall reign abhorrent and ancient! Cthulhu!")

I am not there because after forty years of being on Worldcon programming (I was on in 1980) I am apparently too insignificant or otherwise demographically undesirable. I got one of those "Go away and get lost" letters that have alienated a lot of the older pros.

This is a far, far cry from Discon II, where no one would have dreamed of turning away people who were the living history of the field. Murray Leinster was there, the only time I ever saw him. I remember that Ted Cogswell, admittedly a minor writer, was a well-known curmudgeon and popular personality in those days. I went on an interviewing binge in at the 1974 and came away with interviews with Robert Silverberg, Jack Williamson, Poul Anderson, James Gunn, and a couple of others. I can't actually remember who, now. I think there were six of them.

I will not claim that American society of the 1960s and '70s was necessarily more tolerant and welcoming, but fandom certainly was. That was one of the big attractions, particularly when you were young. Everyone was welcome. You met people who were really very different from yourself. It was a lot more broadening than college, where I at least mostly met middle class kids like myself.

As for whether Worldcons will continue (a question you raise in your Notes on page 1 of the October issue), well, maybe. I fear they may be much diminished in the future. They may become little pocket universes of Wokeness. They become forums where self-important and sometimes self-published writers demand attention. The last few Hugo ceremonies have been train wrecks of one sort or

another.

I think if I had not dropped out of this year's con, I might have sought the Hugo Ranquet instead. There are some worthy contenders on the awards ballots, but also some things that just don't belong there and degrade the whole process. Surely some of the winners must begin to suspect that theirs is a smaller accomplishment than in the past, before demographic considerations wiped out large amount of potentially eligible works. If you won a Hugo in 1974 it meant you had competed against the whole field. I am not sure that is true today.

Your review of *the Consequences of an Errant Shell* pretty closely defines why a lot of fans don't like alternate histories. (I have a friend who refuses to read them at all.) If there are too many arbitrary changes, then the reader has a sense that anything can happen, and ceases to care what does. The author is too obviously pulling the strings. So, 1) The Russians win at Port Arthur because Admiral Togo was hit by a shell. 2) Nicholas is less of an autocrat and allows a functional Duma. 3) Lenin is hanged. 4) Benito Mussolini is killed by a bullet in his journalism days. 5) The Russian revolution never happens. 6) A large meteor lands on Berlin in 1933. . . . Well, I am making this last one up, but you see the point. Too many independent divergences.

A good alternate history should all stem from ONE divergence from the history we know and everything else a logical outgrowth of that. The alternate history story I have always admired the most is Sprague de Camp's "Aristotle and the Gun" in which a time traveler has a conversation with Aristotle so horrifies him with a 20th century notion of science that Aristotle comes out against the experimental method, and the whole intellectual history of the world takes another course. One change, not many. The de Camp story would have been wrecked if, at the same time, Alexander the Great survived his fever, the Egyptians had thrown the Ptolemies out of Egypt, and the first emperor of China had invented flying machines. Unlike my friend, I don't dismiss all alternate histories out of hand, but I do like them to show a certain amount of restraint. I'm also quite fond of Stephen Vincent Benet's "The Curfew Tolls," which uses alternate history (Napoleon Bonaparte born a generation too early) for an elegiac character study.

#### WAHF:

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

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

**Jerry Kaufman, Lacy Thomas**, with thanks.

**Garu & Cora Flispart, Guy Lillian, Marc Schirmeister**, with Christmas cards.

## A PROPOSAL

Darkness.

A flash of light illuminates a familiar masked figure, brooding over the City.

BATMAN: I am vengeance.

I am the night.

I am alone.

I am *Batman!*

Abruptly, the scene cuts to a cave. Batman sits down, heaves a sigh, and pulls back his mask.

BATMAN: Except I'm not. Alone, I mean.

He pauses.

I was left alive, an orphan, when my parents . . . were killed.

The boy, standing in Crime Alley, stunned, unbelieving, them dead behind him.

A police detective came to me to investigate: Jim Gordon.

He's been there, ever since, my connection, my rock.

GORDON progresses from detective to Commissioner.

My parents' butler Alfred Pennyworth took over for them.

He's been sustaining me.

When I'm wounded, he patches me up.

When I'm helpless, he helps.

And he knows how to keep a secret.

ALFRED enters, carrying a tray.

ALFRED: I have prepared you a small repast.

Do try to eat it all.

He puts down the tray and leaves.

BATMAN: You see.

When I came to begin my work, I needed tools.

There was a master technician who made them.

He knows how to make them . . . and lose the cost in the paperwork.

LUCIUS FOX and Batman inspect a new Batmobile.

LUCIUS: Don't wreck it right away.

BATMAN: I trained myself for my purpose.

I learned investigative skills, I learned martial arts.

But I needed someone to watch my back.

And one day, I needed some rest, so I went to the circus.

That was where it happened.

At the circus. The Flying Greysons are showing their art and then . . . they fall.

Their boy is standing watching, and the look on his face is familiar.

BATMAN: Dick Greyson had the skills of his

parents. Now he wanted justice.

I took him in, trained him, and he became Robin.

BATMAN and ROBIN on patrol in the Batmobile.

BATMAN: He grew older, though, and struck out on his own.

He didn't want to be Robin any longer.

Now he is Nightwing. Same task, different image.

BATMAN and NIGHTWING on a rooftop.

BATMAN: While he was away, I did without a Robin. Until one found me.

Night in the alley. A boy is removing a tire from the Batmobile.

Suddenly, a dark figure looms over him.

BATMAN: Answer one question.

The boy, interrupted, looks terrified. He nods.

BATMAN: Are you hungry?

Jason Todd was a street thief, on his own.

He was strong, and self-reliant, and wanted a life.

He became Robin, the second Robin.

Until . . .

ROBIN lying on the ground, battered. A bomb is inches from his face.

Deranged laughter can be heard as the bomb ticks down.

BATMAN: I thought he was dead.

I was wrong.

For whatever reason, Ra's al-Ghul sent Jason to his Lazarus Pit.

When he came back he was . . . different.

RED HOOD stands there, hands on guns.

BATMAN: He was more forceful, and more than a little strange.

The next Robin found me.

He had been watching us and he figured it out.

BATMAN snickers at himself.

The world's greatest detective had been detected.

There I was, at my task, and he came to me.

He said, "You're Bruce Wayne."

I had to take him in.

He became Robin, the third Robin.

To maintain the distinction, he became Red Robin.

[Pause]

Yes, he likes to eat at that restaurant.

There was a fourth Robin, but I will get back to that later.

VOICE: A-hem!

BATMAN: I said I would get back to that.

A woman came to me, a woman I knew.

She said, "They are trying to kill us."

She was Talia, the daughter of Ra's al-Ghul.

It was not him "they" were trying to kill.

TALIA pushes forward a little boy. BATMAN is

puzzled.

TALIA: This is *our* son, Damian.

BATMAN: I had to take him in. Damian

Wayne is old for his years.

He is Robin, the fifth Robin.

Some of his habits are interesting.

DAMIAN with his menagerie; a cow, a dog, and a cat.

VOICE: Yes, he is a good boy. You were going to mention the ladies.

BATMAN: All right.

Jim Gordon has a daughter, Barbara.

She admired the Caped Crusader — and she longed to be like me.

So she was.

BATGIRL on a rooftop.

BATMAN: She fought crime with us. At first there were problems.

BATGIRL and ROBIN screaming at each other, "**I hate you!**"

We see them moving from that to friendship, as they age.

BATMAN: All was well for Barbara. Until . . .

Barbara has been shot, standing in the door of her apartment.

BATMAN: She became a target, a way of attacking her father.

She was paraplegic, confined to a wheelchair.

Her *mind* had not been shot, and she became Oracle.

She sees crime all over Gotham, analyzes it, and sends us there.

ORACLE in her chair, surrounded by screens. She is busy.

BATMAN: And then, Dick could finally say what was in his heart.

NIGHTWING lifting ORACLE out of her chair; they look into each other's eyes.

They say, simultaneously, "I love you."

BATMAN: And now they're married.

Dick Grayson carrying Barbara down the aisle, as the wedding march sounds.

BATMAN: So there was no Batgirl.

But there was someone in a purple veil and mask, the Spoiler.

She stalked criminals, and stopped them before they could act.

Then we found out who she was.

Her father was one of the criminals she stopped, so it was personal.

Her name was Stephanie Brown.

She became Robin, the fourth Robin.

Stephanie as SPOILER, then ROBIN.

BATMAN: When Barbara was paralyzed, she became the second Batgirl.

Stephanie as BATGIRL.

BATMAN: It frustrates people.

Also, she's getting sweet on Tim. He's

a little embarrassed.

BATGIRL (Stephanie) kissing RED ROBIN (Tim).  
Yes he is.

BATMAN: And then . . . there was a martial  
artist in the streets of Gotham.  
Barbara took her under her wing.  
She couldn't talk or write.

(Pauses)  
Eventually, we got her sorted out.  
She had been a bodyguard for Ra's al-

Ghul.  
She was the greatest martial artist ever,  
but it was at a price.

Barbara sorted her out, and she became  
the third Batgirl.  
She calls herself Cassandra Cain.

BATGIRL (Cassandra) on patrol.

BATMAN: Then there was . . . an indiscretion.  
Before Dick and Babs got married . . .  
he had an "encounter".

Starfire is an alien, but she could still  
have children by humans.

Dick comes into their bedroom, looking embar-  
rassed. Mar'i Greyson, his daughter, floats  
behind him.

DICK: Er . . . Barbara . . . I have to confess  
something.

BARBARA: She's . . . she's beautiful. *I*  
*won't let Dick Greyson have*  
*you!*

Mar'i smiles.

BATMAN: And that's the ladies.

VOICE: A-hem!

Batman looks embarrassed.

BATMAN: It's a hard time to remember. Well

(Pauses, gathers memories)  
There was a witness to my parents'  
murder.

The murder scene again. The view sweeps  
upwards.

There are a pair of bright eyes — all that can be  
seen — on a landing.

She was a street thief. Her name was  
Selena Kyle.

We had to keep her somewhere. It was  
jail — or Wayne Manor.

She quickly gained a liking for better  
things and higher goals.

A precious jewel on a holder; a hand descends  
from above and lifts it.

BATMAN: They called her "The Cat". Or  
"Catwoman".

Selena in various CATWOMAN outfits.

BATMAN: But . . . But I thought, she wasn't  
evil. There were ways.

And she did have a heart.

BATMAN lying on the ground in Crime Alley.  
There is a rose on the pavement.

CATWOMAN is holding him, with a concerned  
look on her face.

BATMAN: I think she always knew.

She was attacked. A man I had known  
all my life cut out her heart.

She was on life support. They managed  
to restore her heart.

Selina lying in the hospital bed, unconscious.

Bruce: There has been only one woman who  
held my heart.

(Pauses)

Selina, I love you.

Her eyes open and she smiles.

Selina: Good girl doesn't quite fit me.

Bruce: Selina . . .

Selina: I will be good.

CATWOMAN walks in.

CATWOMAN: It still doesn't.

But I only steal from bad guys now.  
She pauses.

Starfire wasn't the only one who  
slipped up.

A little girl holding a stuffed cat comes up to  
them.

Damian was put out that he had a  
sister.

CATWOMAN Helena, your brother is really a  
nice boy.

HELENA: Of course he is.

BATMAN standing alone again.

NIGHTWING, RED HOOD, RED ROBIN, and  
ROBIN join him.

Then it becomes crowded, as ORACLE,  
SPOILER, and BATGIRL join in.

CATWOMAN stands to one side, an amused  
smile on her lips. She is holding HELENA.

After a moment, MAR'I drifts in above their  
heads.

Then, LUCIUS FOX and JIM GORDON appear at  
the side.

Finally, ALFRED shows up, holding a tray.

ALFRED: Shall I serve dinner now, sir?

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Co-Editors:	Lisa & Joseph Major
Co-Publishers:	Joseph & Lisa Major
Writers, Staff:	Major, Joseph, Major, Lisa

This is issue **Whole Number One Hundred and Twenty (120)**.

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## ALEXIAD

c/o Lisa & Joseph Major

1409 Christy Avenue

Louisville, KY 40204-2040 USA

[jtmajor@iglou.com](mailto:jtmajor@iglou.com)

<http://efanzines.com/Alexiad/index.htm>