

# ALEXIAD

(AΛΞΙΑΣ)

\$2.00

This has been a relatively cool July and August. There have not been many days of torturous heat and humidity. I have enjoyed walking without the feeling of suffocating in a sauna. The new priest at Assumption is from northern Ohio. His mother asked me if it was always this warm here. I told her that it was cool for August. She gave me a look of disbelief and another parishioner stepped in to confirm what I said. This is the Ohio River Valley and this is truly one of the coolest Augusts I can remember.

On the job a few days ago I became aware of how little I knew about Abraham Lincoln. When I found myself acquiring all manner of free books on Lincoln I realized I was experiencing a new reading craze. Reading crazes have always been part of my life and have left me knowing large amounts of trivia useful only for people who work in libraries. At least this reading craze I can justify on the grounds that Lincoln was such a pivotal figure in American history.

— Lisa

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Comments are by JTM, LTM, or Grant.

The 89th Running of the Hambletonian (1st leg of the Trotting Triple Crown) was **August 2, 2013** at Meadowlands Racetrack in East Rutherford, New Jersey. Trixfon, driven by his trainer Jimmy Takter, won by a half-length.

The 122nd Running of the Kentucky Futurity (2nd leg of the Trotting Triple Crown) will be **October 5, 2014** at the Red Mile in Lexington, Kentucky.

The 60th Running of the Yonkers Trot (3rd leg of the Trotting

Triple Crown) will be **October 25, 2014** at Yonkers Raceway in Yonkers, New York.

The 60th Running of the Cane Pace (1st leg of the Pacing Triple Crown) will be **September 1, 2014** at Tioga Downs in Nichols, New York.

The 69th Running of the Little Brown Jug (2nd leg of the Pacing Triple Crown) will be **September 18, 2014** at the Delaware County Fair in Delaware, Ohio.

The 59th Running of the Messenger Stakes (3rd leg of the Pacing Triple Crown) will be **October 25, 2014** at Yonkers Raceway in Yonkers, New York.

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Deadline is **October 1, 2014**

## Reviewer's Notes

My job situation is no better. The appeal was extremely painful.

Readers may have noted an emphasis on alternate history in the past few issues. There is little enough else I like. I have tried to read some of the Hugo nominees, with a distinct lack of desire to finish. I had long ago given up on the *Wheel of Time* series, because there was a lot of action but nothing really happening. Similarly, I tried to read *Neptune's Brood*, but found it had its own problems.

Once, I heard a defense of fan fiction that emphasized it as a training-ground for writers. Since the new author did not need to invent a background, she could instead focus on plot, character, and description. Fine.

What we are seeing is deeply developed and richly described background against which nothing interesting whatsoever is going on. That was the problem with *Reamde*, with *2312*, and now *Neptune's Brood*. The backgrounds are well developed, but the characters didn't do anything interesting.

But then, that was the issue I had with the *Wheel of Time*. Rigney ("Robert Jordan", pseud. of James Oliver Rigney) had this complex political and social structure that Rand al-Thor and his friends just wandered around in. Somehow it seems to have attracted the utmost devotion from a lot of people.

One factor that Bill Patterson mentioned in the Heinlein biography was his appreciation of the penal system, as viewed from an insiders perspective. He had been a defense counsel at hearings on board the *Lexington*. The conclusion he came to was that a spell in the brig, or in Portsmouth Naval Prison, never did an offender any good, while a right proper flogging might.

Now you know why Oscar Gordon could so readily give his Star a few swats across the bottom. Patterson's biography is a wonder of analysis, but the topic is uncool. Now if Heinlein had written an episode of *Doctor Who*...

— Joe

## RANDOM JOTTINGS

by Joe



Jeffrey Brown's exploration of the pains and joys of single fatherhood continue in *Goodnight, Darth Vader* (2014; Chronicle Books: ISBN 978-1452128306; \$14.95) as everybody's favorite Dark Lord of the Sith has to get his rambunctious twins to Just. Go. To. Sleep.

Another Philip K. Dick work inches closer to the screen: the Hugo-Award winning *The Man In the High Castle* (1962). It had been announced from Syfy for last year, and is now supposed to be in development by Amazon Studios, so don't expect much.

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1740299/>

And there are reports of a forthcoming television series based on the massive series by Eric Flint and associates, the *1632* stories, with the West Virginia town cast back into the middle of the Thirty Years War, and coming to dominate the affairs of Europe.

The Syfy Channel, evidently wanting to get into the race, is beginning plans to do John Scalzi's *Ghost Brigades*. How they will handle the orgy scene . . .

To top that off, the Poopy Panda Pals are said to be planning an adaptation of Madeline L'Engle's *A Wrinkle in Time*. Eek! Eek! Eek! Meg as Disney Princess!

Do you want to know what Uncle Theobald thinks about astrology, Margaret Brundage, NSA spying, why Miskatonic University should be admitted to the Ivy Leagues, or whatever other blasphemous question enters your squamous and rugose little mind? Thanks to Lovecraft scholar Leeman Kessler, this is now possible! For existing videos, check:

<https://www.youtube.com/user/lemurbouy>

Or if you have a new question, send to:

[AskLovecraft@gmail.com](mailto:AskLovecraft@gmail.com)

As always, he's Howard Phillips Lovecraft. Seriously, Kessler has been

researching HPL quite thoroughly and is trying to dispel certain attitudes.

Unseriously, there are some fun lines, like: "I assure you that my blood runs red, white, and blue. It's largely a side-effect of the reanimation process." ["Ask Lovecraft: Going South"]

Irving Kristol confronts Ursula K LeGuin!

As you know, Bob, in "From Elfland to Poughkeepsie", LeGuin denounced politics in fantasy. But now, that Neocon (snarl, gasp) has had the temerity to declare, "Science fiction, as every student of the genre knows, is a peculiar vision of power: What it is really about is politics." (*On the Democratic Idea in America*) Go to it!

## OBITS

Percy Bramlett's widow Joan has regretfully informed us that her husband died in November 2013. He was the author of *I Am in Fact a Hobbit: An Introduction to the Life and Work of J. R. R. Tolkien* (2003; reviewed in *Alexiad* V. 2 #3) and appreciated this publication. Namarië.

Film and TV star James Garner has died. I remember him chiefly from the *Rockford Files* and *Murphy's Romance*.

Bel Kaufman passed at age 103. She is noted for the classic book on schools, *Up the Down Staircase*.

— Lisa

## MONARCHIST NEWS

Wills (His Royal Highness Prince William Arthur Philip Louis, Duke of Cambridge) has become a helicopter pilot with East Anglian Air Ambulance. Harrison Ford would be proud.

The cornerstone for the rebuilt Berlinerstadtschloss was laid on **June 12** by German President Joachim Gauck. The building will recreate the facade of the original, but have a new interior, which will become an cultural and historical museum. Present was **Prinz Georg-Ferdinand, Prinz von Preussen**, heir of the former tenants.

## THE LITTLE TAILOR

Review by Joseph T Major of

**ROBERT A. HEINLEIN:**

*In Dialogue with His Century*

*Volume 2: The Man Who Learned Better 1948-1988:*

by William H. Patterson, Jr  
(2014: Tor: ISBN 978-0765319616; \$34.99; Macmillan (Kindle); \$14.44)

Volume 1 reviewed in *Alexiad* V. 9 #5

At the end of our last thrilling installment, our hero had finally escaped the clutches of his insane, drunken captor, fled to the wilderness, and restored his resolve.

Or something like that.

This is the autobiography Robert Heinlein never lived to write, the detailed study of his life formed from his correspondence and his records. It presents his own point of view in meticulous, focused narrative.

Almost too meticulous. One commentator says that it is the sort of book that tells where the subject's undershorts were laundered. Some of the details are a bit overwhelming; to take one example, the description of the aftermath of Heinlein's high-fatal peritonitis. And this is one of the many health crises that fill the pages of the work.

Another crisis problem is that some of the people who crossed up Heinlein, or were crossed up by him, are still alive. Sometimes this leads to curious results. The recounting of the events of ChiCon in 1962, for example, with its description of the elaborate preparations for Heinlein's arrival and acceptance of the Hugo, could have been written using Earl Kemp's "Heinlein Happens" as a primary source. (Perhaps not surprisingly, Heinlein's own speech of acceptance, available in *The Proceedings: Chicon III* is not quoted.) And then there is the tumultuous relationship with P\*nsh\*n . . . (The citations start off with getting his age wrong, and are generally one-sided from there.)

The book recounts how Heinlein went from famed but poverty-stricken seer to affluent, ailing, man of the world. There is a meticulous recounting of what he did and where he went and what he saw. This may not be surprising since the primary source for the work is Heinlein's own letters and archives.

At the same time, some of his interactions are presented as less than positive. The sources being as they are, some more material might be useful. As when Patterson describes how Forrest J Ackerman had declared himself Heinlein's Hollywood agent in the late forties, though Heinlein already had one, and sold or gave away rights to works. This could use some outside material; agenting, one thinks, requires a specific contract.

But Hollywood is a sink anyhow. There are long and excruciating descriptions of the creation and production of *Destination Moon* (1950). It's not surprising that Heinlein got next to no money for his efforts. Some of the other financial setups seem a little off. For example, for financial reasons the movie was part of a package with *The Great Rupert* (1950), a fantasy about a magic squirrel who revives the spirits of two families facing an emotionally bleak Christmas season. (The movie is now distributed as *A Christmas Wish*.) Patterson states that *The Great Rupert* did poorly, which meant that the total income was lessened. It's hard to say.

Another odd point is the claim that L. Ron Hubbard was involved with the competition, *Rocketship X-M* (1950). There doesn't seem to be any confirmation of this outside Elron's letters.

The entire Heinlein-Hubbard relationship

continues to mystify. Patterson tells everything about their interactions — and nothing about their motivations. It seems almost that Hubbard played Loki to Heinlein's Odin; as if there was some link they didn't want to speak of. (There are some rumors about Hubbard and Leslyn Heinlein.) And yet it persisted; Patterson makes the link between "Typewriter in the Sky" and the concept of the "World As Myth".

Other factors are Heinlein's on-again off-again relationship with fandom. He claimed not to have known that *Double Star* (1956; NHOL G.128) was up for a Hugo, supposedly was told by Sam Moskowitz prior to the Pittcon that *Starship Troopers* (1959; NHOL G.140) had won, and then there was the matter of *Stranger In a Strange Land* (1961, 1990; G.127). Not to mention the reception for the entire con at the 1961 Seacon in Seattle.

By 1976, though, he was more selective. And focused on different things; the blood drive, mainly. Thus Patterson explains the perfunctory and rambling Guest of Honor speech (that all the attendees save one noticed). He was trying to do something to make his place.

Indeed, this is a running theme, though underplayed. In the earlier parts of the book, Heinlein is trying to come to accounts with the atom bomb, writing the "world-saving" articles that went nowhere. Then, in the fifties, there was the Patrick Henry League, stressing a more forward foreign policy — that went nowhere. And finally, in the eighties, there was the Citizens Advisory Council on National Space Policy, which provided an entire sentence by Jim Baen used in a presidential speech.

That somehow does not seem like a very great accomplishment, and other observers have not seen any connection between Heinlein and Jerry Pournelle & Co. on one hand and the SDI effort on the other. So that too seems to have gone nowhere; so much for *Footfall* (1985).

In the last years of Heinlein's active life he drifted away from organized fandom as we know it, preferring to go to media conventions. There he was enthusiastically received, on his own standards.

However, that meticulous "where-he-got-his-undershorts-laundered" approach brings up some more unpleasant matters. Heinlein's health deteriorated significantly in the last few years of his life, and as said above Patterson describes in meticulous if not gruesome detail every ailment. The results of the peritonitis attack might better be skipped by the more sensitive. And his general deterioration in the late eighties is a saddening picture.

The material on the writing of the later books is somewhat perfunctory. Was he getting tired of it all? Patterson hints that there "World As Myth" cycle was working up to a final confrontation between all the heros and the ultimate black hat himself, the man in the dirty bathrobe at the typewriter (or

computer) in the sky who was responsible for all their misfortunes. That's more than six characters in search of an author.

A tendency that might indicate problems can be seen in Heinlein's habit of not going beyond an initial solution. One of the incidents that led to his increasing disillusionment if not outright distrust of the U.S. Government was his discovery that the administration had refused to pass on to the commanders in the field information related to the impending Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, as revealed in Rear-Admiral Robert Theobald's *The Final Secret of Pearl Harbor* (1954).

But Theobald's thesis was refuted by Rebecca Wohlstetter in *Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision* (1962). Wohlstetter argues that the information was never brought together because of bureaucratic problems. Nobody talked to anybody because their information was too confidential; it was bureaucratic bungling and aggrandizement. But Heinlein never seems to have read Wohlstetter.

Much of the portrayal here is of a man who was greatly successful in one field of endeavor and strove vigorously, but with little success, to repeat it in other fields. An outside perspective may be useful.

Consider, to take another example, Asimov. Asimov maintained that after his three autobiographical works (*In Memory Yet Green* (1979), *In Joy Still Felt* (1980), and *I. Asimov* (1994)) there would never be any need for a biography. Yet obviously he could not cover his final years and death. Beyond that, there are many items that are not mentioned, from his aggressive womanizing (which might these days be classified as out-and-out harassment) down to the unconfirmed report of his having publicly humiliated Elie Wiesel. An outside perspective, albeit potentially flawed (e.g., Asimov's complaint about being said to have gone to night school at Columbia, because he was enrolled in a unit of the university which came to include the night school), could address these matters. So there was *It's Been a Good Life* (2002), but Mrs. Asimov had her own interests.

So, here is the *autobiography* of Robert A. Heinlein, by another hand. Will there be a *biography*? Or is there too much hostility for it to be done before all the potential sources die? Consider, for example, that Edward Wysocki could only find six survivors of the US Naval Academy Class of 1929 able to give him information researching *The Great Heinlein Mystery* (2012; reviewed in *Alexiad* V. 11 #6).

## HOME AGAIN

Review by Joseph T Major of  
**THE LOST FLEET:**

**BEYOND THE FRONTIER:**  
**STEADFAST**

by "Jack Campbell" [John G. Hemry]  
(Ace: 2014;

ISBN 978-0-425-26052-4; \$26.95;  
Penguin Publishing (Kindle); \$12.99)  
Sequel to *The Lost Fleet: Beyond the*

*Frontier: Dreadnaught*,  
[reviewed in *Alexiad* V. 10 #3]  
*The Lost Fleet: Beyond the Frontier:*  
*Invincible*  
[reviewed in *Alexiad* V. 11 #3], and  
*The Lost Fleet: Beyond the Frontier:*  
*Guardian*  
[reviewed in *Alexiad* V. 12 #4]

Earth is not a part of the Alliance. In this episode of Jack Geary's return to life, we see some indications as to why.

The Alliance government still doesn't quite know what to do with its miracle-hero. But they're trying. The aliens who may be allies and may be just nightmare figures want to see where humanity came from, so that's something to do with him, or for him to do.

However, there are still a few pitfalls for Geary, Desjani (his other half), and the others to deal with, including some that seem terribly familiar. At least the propaganda of the image types turn out to have the seeds of the solution to their own problem.

Their ancestors may have solutions, but they're not communicating. Geary has his own problems, and that has to do with that mysterious new construction. Most of the ships he has are facing block obsolescence, and were hastily constructed to begin with. Add to that the general post-war drawdown, and this means a series of problems.

Particularly when dealing with the refugee problem. Now that the Syndic is coming apart at the seams, a lot of people want to relocate. The relocation site has a shortage of well about everything except refugees, and Geary has to tackle that problem.

Indeed, the situation makes one think of Otto Harkaman's comment: "[Practically] everything that's happened on any of the inhabited planets happened on Terra before the first spaceship." (*Space Viking*) Come to think of it, Geary could probably use Otto Harkaman, either as advisor or as commander, to help deal with the problems when this is . . . **To Be Continued.**



## WON'T YOU WALK INTO MY PARLOUR?

Review by Joseph T Major of  
**AN INVITATION TO HITLER**  
by Bernard Neeson  
(2013: CreateSpace;  
ISBN 978-1483974034; \$15.95;

Amazon Digital Services; \$2.99)

Sun Tzu said:

17. All warfare is based on deception.
18. Therefore, when capable, feign incapacity; when active, inactivity.
19. When near, make it appear that you are far away; when far away, that you are near.
20. Offer the enemy a bait to lure him; feign disorder and strike him.

— Sun Tzu, *Ping Fa (The Art of War)*, Book I, “Estimates”

The Unmentionable Sea Mammal is the one alternate history scenario most seized upon by clueless newbies, and the one most thoroughly debunked. (People got to where they jumped through the roof, being thoroughly nauseated as they went, at the word “Sealion”, and started using that euphemism.)

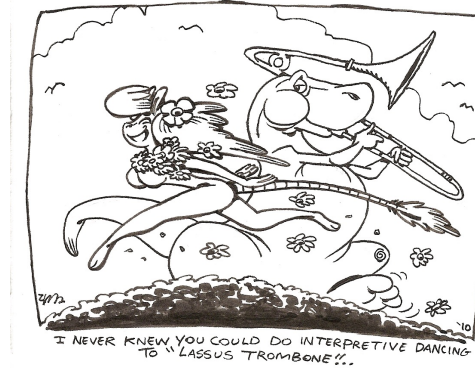
One of the matters pointed out was that the slaughter in the Channel would have been horrific, but what do you expect with barges that swamp in any sort of sea swell on one side and on the other large numbers of ship captains who don’t want to let down Sir Teddy Evans? (Look up the career of HMS *Broke* sometime. Scott may have slagged his subordinate, but did he ever have to defend a ship against a boarding party?) As Mark Twain put it, “Think what Waterloo would have been if one of the armies had been boys armed with old rusty muskets supposed not to be loaded, and the other army had been composed of their female relations. The very thought of it makes me shudder.” [“Advice to Youth”, 1882]

What if, therefore, having due recourse to the wisdom of Sun Tzu, the British decided to create a notional peace party that would to all appearances come to terms once the Germans landed? In this book, Neeson describes the elaborate preparations needed to make it look that way. The presentation of the quiet desperation of the British government, along with its surprising resources, is quite convincing. He even mentions the Chief of the Secret Intelligence Service by name (Stewart Graham Menzies), something people don’t seem able to do, and in general has historic people reacting according to character.

He doesn’t have to resort to faux collaborationism, either. There is no real group of Clivden Set collaborationists waiting to jump out of the woodwork and take power. (Michael Cronin, Murray Davies, Len Deighton, Robert Harris, C. J. Sansom, J. N. Stoyar, Jo Walton, et cetera will just have to be disappointed.) The descriptions of how the notional group is created are quietly understated, and tremble between force and patriotism.

The only problem with the book is that it

ends at a bad spot from the reader’s point of view. A cliffhanger of cliffhangers as it were. Perhaps Neeson didn’t want to describe the night of terror.



### ‘ynzl ‘yn dy ym pwn zyyat

Review by Joseph T Major of

#### THE SHIELD

by Nachman Katakzinsky

(2014; CreateSpace:

ISBN 978-1499630549; \$15.95;

Amazon Digital Services; \$3.95)

“Island in the Sea of Time” stories have shifted to a more fantastic theme, with entire countries or American states being thrown into the past, conveniently with cookie-cutter clean border differences. On an organizational level it is somewhat more workable, since there would be sufficient technicians to do the work, and supplies to sustain the population. The result of the original would be rather like the melancholic scene at the end of the latest incarnation of *Battlestar Galactica*, with the long procession of people going to their deaths while praising their wonderful chance to began anew.

Not surprisingly, Israeli author Katakzinsky has done it with his own country, plopping it down in the middle of Global Mistake, the Sequel, “This Time It’s Personal!” And it is; the dislocated Israelis must now stop the Holocaust.

The means comes across as too clever by half, if not improbable; they claim that a powerful Islamic leader has seized the Palestine Mandate and wants all the Jews of Europe for his own purposes. This is backed up by convenient precision-guided missile strikes on the *Einsatzgruppen*. And Hitler gives them over without a qualm.

On the other side, the Israelis decide to have more normal relations with the British. In spite of having their Valentines and Matildas refitted with twenty-first century artillery, somehow the British don’t do very well in Operation CRUSADER. There is a certain vagueness about his presentation of the North African campaign:

Captain John Morgan of the Second Armored Company, Third Regiment of the Second Battalion of the British Seventh Armored Division . . .

— *The Shield*

Nope. “B Squadron, 2nd Royal Tank Regiment, 7th Armoured Brigade, 7th Armoured Division” (for example) is credible. And he is generally vague about the locations of the battles. For someone as well-informed about other matters, this vagueness in a plot thread that would affect the Israelis directly is a flaw. Not to mention that although Sir Henry Maitland Wilson, a British commander in the Middle East, features prominently in the text, Katakzinsky never describes him physically. (Hint: He was called “Jumbo” for a reason.) However, he seems to have been mentally flexible enough to comprehend the situation and adjust.

And the bizarre decision to commit the not-yet existent *Waffen-Gebirgs-Division der SS „Handschar”* and *Waffen-Gebirgs-Division der SS „Kama”* to Libya has to be a joke. Even if those units had been in existence then, this deployment saddles Rommel with two formations of negative military value. His only hope is that a patrol of the Long Range Desert Group shows up, one man fires a shot, and thirty thousand Bosnians surrender and burden the British with the problem of feeding and watering them.

Beyond that one has to wonder about the security. Not a single Israeli gets out to tell the world about this wonder, and contrawise, not even a single leak from journalism, not even a rumor. This is as far out in its own way as the balancing one is where somehow the Bad Guys, knowing exactly what needs to be done, grab up the information they need and exploit it with dazzling speed, having completely comprehended this extraordinary event.

The Israelis decide to do something about the war, like keep the Americans out of Europe. Fortunately the Führer believes absolutely his mysterious Middle Eastern confidante he has never seen or even spoken with, never had anyone see or speak to, and pays no heed to the flow of Lend-Lease, the patrols of the U.S. Navy, the inability of Agent IVAN to report anything on Naval Strong Point Pearl Harbor, and the like.

Hampered with several million European Jews, dishampered with an extended war, and an enigma wrapped in a mystery, Israel proceeds to ensure a multipolar world which we will see when this is . . . [To Be Continued]

(Sorry for the Yiddish, but Google Translation doesn’t give the transliteration for Hebrew.)

### WAY DOWN SOUTH IN THE THIRD WORLD

Review by Joseph T Major of

#### STATE OF KANAWHA

by Kenneth J. Watson

(2014; Amazon Digital Services; \$6.99)



This is a gloomy portrayal of a Confederate Victory. And the original scene could have used some checking of the results of search-and-replace, too.

Watson seems to be standing *Bring the Jubilee* (1953) on its head. And unfortunately for the population of the Confederate States, he is probably more plausible. His portrayal of a corrupt, repressive, third-world Confederacy, its only exports being tobacco, liquor, and drugs, is all too plausible. Likewise the social shaming and disdain of not only Northerners but the rest of the world for the slavocrats.

Stuart Kimball sees this all round. He is a high-school student in Crawford, South Carolina, CSA, who gets offered a wrestling scholarship at the University of Kanawha. If you don't know what Kanawha is, it was the counties of the Confederate state of Virginia which seceded from the secession, forming a separate state. After Lee's victories in Pennsylvania, the Union had no choice but to let the erring brothers go, but not that part of Virginia. And Kanawha became a flashpoint between the two nations because of its coal reserves. Homer H. Hickam, Sr., of Coalwood, Kanawha, would be a key man.

Stuart doesn't deal with Homer, and his son and the other boys are deprived of rockets to fire into the October sky. Stuart does have to deal with the disdain the Confederates are held in, and being a disempowered minority does lead to further complications with the home folks, too.

Relations between the two nations deteriorate, until finally, the Confederates learn that a modern society has considerable problems sustaining chattel slavery, particularly since their opponents aren't all infected with an idiot virus that leads them to ignore human rights violations and rampant imperialism (as might be said of one other well-known AH series).

In the midst of race war and turmoil, Stuart, now of some note in his new country, is forced to fling himself into the crisis to protect all his loved ones and do his best to bring justice to all...

(Problem: If as Watson has it the CSA got Kentucky it wouldn't need Kanawha coal.)

## YOU'RE SO VAIN

by Joe

There was an annular eclipse, on **April 29, 2014**, visible in Wilkes Land of Antarctica, with the maximum totality being at 70° 36' 42" S., 131° 18' 18" E. It was part of Saros 148, which began September 21, 1653 and will end December 12, 2987. The next solar eclipse will be a partial eclipse, on **October 23**, visible in eastern Russia, Canada, and the United States. It is part of Saros 153, which began July 28, 1870 and will end August 22, 3114. Oddly enough, all the eclipses in this saros are either partial or annular.

The next total eclipse will be March 20, 2015, visible in Svalbard and the North Atlantic and Arctic oceans, ending at the North Pole at local sunrise. The maximum totality will be two minutes 47 seconds. It is part of Saros 120, which began May 27, 933 and will end July 7, 2195.

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

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

<http://eclipse.gsfc.nasa.gov/eclipse.html>

## COFFEE

by Lisa

### Vanilla Nut coffee

I came across this brew at Highland Coffee, one of Louisville's local coffee shops. Vanilla Nut is a smooth, mellow brew with very little coffee bitterness but without being sweet, which I consider an abomination in coffee.



## IN PRAISE OF FERengi

by Taral Wayne

(Reprinted From R. Graeme Cameron's *Space Cadet* 22, May 2013)

(There are numerous articles I've had published here and there, but have never been satisfied that they reached a large enough audience. I base this suspicion on a belief that nobody actually reads more than a half-dozen of their favourite zines... so nothing I have written for *Drink Tank* will be read by fans of *Trap Door*, and nothing I have had published in *Fan Stuff* will be seen by fans who stubbornly refuse to read digital publications, and so on. For whatever it's worth, then, I plan to re-run some of my favorite, possibly misplaced pieces in future, beginning with this one from a recent

issue of a Canadian fanzine. As we all know, nobody reads Canadian fanzines... not even Canadians... not even this fanzine.)

Everyone has their favourite ethnic stereotype from *STAR TREK*. For most viewers of the old series it was the Vulcans – those calm, supremely logical aliens with a touch of the Hippie guru resonated with the counterculture the 1960s. If Stephen Hawking could have been Maharishi Mahesh Yogi at the same time, he would have been Mr. Spock. With the triumphant return of the franchise in 1987, the alien race-to-be became the Klingons, who unexpectedly had developed a third, admirable dimension. No longer the swarthy, mustachioed archvillains of the original series, the warrior-race now had a well developed sense of ethics, honour and – even more intriguing – disgrace. An undercurrent in *Star Trek: The Next Generation* was that Klingons had badly degenerated from their original warrior values by the time they came in contact with the Federation, having absorbed some of the treacherous and arrogant habits of the Romulans.

But even the Romulans developed a little depth over time, becoming conscious of their selfless duty to the Empire. In one rare episode we were even allowed to see how a defecting Romulan admiral was so devoted to his family that he divulged state secrets in order to protect them and serve the Greater Good.

By the end of *Deep Space Nine*, we had even learned to show a degree of compassion toward the Cardassians, who had not always been militarized, and who suffered massive loss of life when double-crossed by their "allies" in the Dominion War.

There is one race in *STAR TREK* that almost nobody has any respect for, however. The Ferengi.

To begin with, the name itself is loaded. It is a Farsi word, from the language of the ancient Persians, meaning "stranger." The Greek word for it is "barbarian."

Our first sight of the Ferengi is in a season-one episode of *The New Generation*, in which Picard's "Away Team" beams down to a planet to investigate the ancient computer guardian of a vanished empire, then clashes with a similar scouting team of Ferengi. Before this incident, the Ferengi are supposedly known to the Federation only by rumour. Data describes their species as resembling ancient "Yankees" – implying they are highly commercial-minded, selfish, unprincipled and unrelenting in the pursuit of a profit. To say the least, it isn't a very flattering comment on the society that nurtured *STAR TREK*'s creator.

Curiously, in later seasons we've seen hints that if we hadn't met the Ferengi before, they had met us. While commanding the U.S.S. *Stargazer*, earlier in his career, Picard destroyed an unknown vessel that later turned out to belong to a rogue Daimon of a Ferengi ship. Many seasons later we also discover that the aliens at the bottom of the Roswell UFO event were time-traveling Ferengi. They were also

the villains in at least one episode of *Enterprise*, during events that supposedly took place in the 22nd century.

Throughout the STAR TREK franchise, there are signs that Earth and the Federation had by and large developed beyond a strictly pay-as-you-go economy, and had perhaps even become an outright social-democracy. It is a little hard to be dogmatic about what life is like on 24th century Earth, however, as we only see what life is like in Starfleet. If we judged the present day by how life is lived in the U.S. Army, could we be sure that early 21st century America isn't actually a socialist society? Also, as both TNG and DS9 progressed, season by season, the concept of "money" seemed to creep slowly back into the picture, until we see Starfleet personnel actually using the technologically retro stuff in Quark's bar.

Incidentally, money returned to STAR TREK at approximately the same rate that weapons grew bigger and more macho-looking, the political conduct of Starfleet grew more corrupt, and an unaccustomed reverence was shown to organized religion. This could be coincidence ... but I suspect not. Likely, these changes in attitudes represents the more conventional thinking of the heirs of Gene Roddenberry's creation, as applied to the posthumous production of the franchise.

The first glimpse we have of the Ferengi is rather appalling, I have to admit. Apart from their rodent-like facial features, they hunch over as though afflicted from early age by a degenerative spinal condition. Worse, they hiss... and rub their hands incessantly.

"Gold. Look, he wearssss gold!" says one no-name Ferengi, pointing at Commander Riker's communicator badge.

"Ahhh, he isss dessecrating it! He wearssss gold on his uniform!" says one of the others.

"And they let their women wear clothesssss too ... " titters a third, obviously undresssing Tasha Yar in his mind. Ferengi are not just gold-crazy, they are dirty-minded perverts as well.

Never mind allusions to Yankees. What does this really remind you of?

If you guessed a particularly juicy passage from *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, you're thinking just about what everybody else was thinking at the time – that Ferengi are a race of nasty little buggers who bear too great a resemblance to anti-Semitic stereotypes to be mere happenstance.

Wait a moment . . . Isn't Gene Roddenberry Jewish?

Actually, no. I thought he was, but apparently he was born a Southern Baptist, and as an adult he professed humanism and agnosticism. All the same, I'm reluctant to accuse Roddenberry of intentional anti-Semitism because the general trend of the entire series, first to the last, has been free of malicious racism. Nor has it been hostile to

religion in general.

Whether or not there was any conscious expression of anti-Jewish stereotypes in the creation of the Ferengi, it has blighted their existence ever since.

True, as a race they rapidly shed their worst attributes – the hand wringing and furtive mannerisms were first to go. Later, the lust for gold was given a more abstract form. They were hot for profits, measured in the fictitious medium of Gold Pressed Latinum.

What is Gold Pressed Latinum, anyway? From slender evidence, it appears to be a non-toxic liquid. In one episode, a small fortune of the stuff was drunk by one of Quark's customers. Normally, it is circulated in the form of a small gold wafer, in sizes of different value. Presumably, the Latinum itself is bound inside the wafer chemically, or simply fills the interior somewhat like the whiskey in a hip flask. Somehow, this arrangement makes it impossible to replicate Gold Pressed Latinum.

One wonders if anyone had tried replicating the Latinum separately, and then gold-pressing it later ... One thing for certain, anyone who solved the technical problem of replicating this stuff would be Ferengi Enemy Number One. They would also, no doubt, be overwhelmed with shady business offers by just about every Ferengi who could warp to his doorstep.

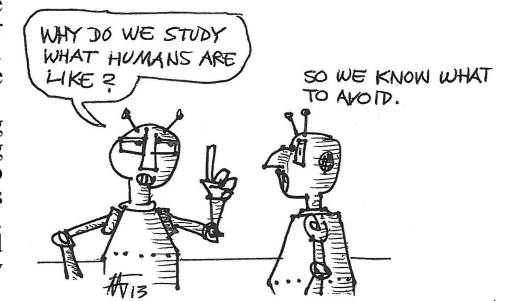
Regardless of smoothing off some of some of their rougher edges, the Ferengi remained a sort of cartoon Jew. It was only very slowly that they developed anything like a rounded character and more admirable qualities. In an early episode of *Deep Space Nine*, we see Quark and his brother Rom in a bout of deadly backstabbing to see which of them will succeed the late Grand Nagus. At the climax of their rivalry, Rom maneuvers Quark into an airlock and hits the button to evict his brother into the vacuum of space. The real Nagus, who had not died after all, prevents it in the nick of time. What is Quark's reaction to his near-murder at his brother's hands? A slap on the back, a cut in wages (of course), and a brotherly, "I didn't realize you had the lobes to do it!"

Whether or not this is brotherly affection among Ferengi is a moot point.

The Ferengi are also misogynists in grand style. Women don't have the lobes ... that is, they are not credited for having any instinct for business. They are baby machines, live-in maids and sex-toys who do not even have a legal right to wear clothes. Quark is deeply disgusted that his own mother is so sexually perverted as to wear clothing in private. Yet Ferengi family life cannot be entirely as selfish and cut-throat as their business life appears to be. Both Quark and Rom are as deeply attached to their mother, Ishka, as she is to them. Typically, she brought both boys up by masticating their food herself, before it was fed to them.

We also see that the Ferengi are not necessarily set in their ways, biologically. In one amusing scene at Quark's bar, he laments the influence that Hew-mons (as he calls us)

have over his own kin. Quark tells an inattentive customer to be especially wary of root beer – "so bubbly, and cloying, and happy. Just like the Federation." That he protests too much reveals that Quark feels the attraction, too. DS9's barkeep has also had to accept that his employees can form a union, and that he might have to pay them a salary set by negotiation rather than fiat. He has learned to tolerate his brother's strange desire to follow his dream by working as a civilian engineer for Deep Space Nine, even if he cannot understand it. If that weren't enough to drive a decent, profit-seeking Ferengi to distraction, his nephew Nog actually wants to join Starfleet Academy! Quark is quite right, you see . . . we are corrupting his people!



Nor are Ferengi "fee-males" in any way inferior, it seems. As we see in the case of Quark's mother, the Ferengi attitude toward women is clearly cultural. Ishka is every bit as smart as her boys, and maybe more so. She not only wears the pants around the family home, she secretly engages in business – supposedly an all male preserve. She runs an illegal business empire and does extraordinarily well at it, making so much money that it becomes a matter of state security when her profiteering is discovered. When he discovers Ishka's "perversions," the Grand Nagus Zek is initially shocked – his cultural values have been turned upside-down. Once he has grown used to the idea of a woman as a business equal, however, he finds he is strangely aroused. They become partners in business ... and in "monkey business" as well.

In another episode, a Ferengi woman named Pel disguises herself with false, larger ears to pass as a male and enter a business arrangement with Quark.

You have to hand it to poor Quark ... the guy had to deal with more culture shock and showed more resilience than I suspect most of us would in the same circumstances.

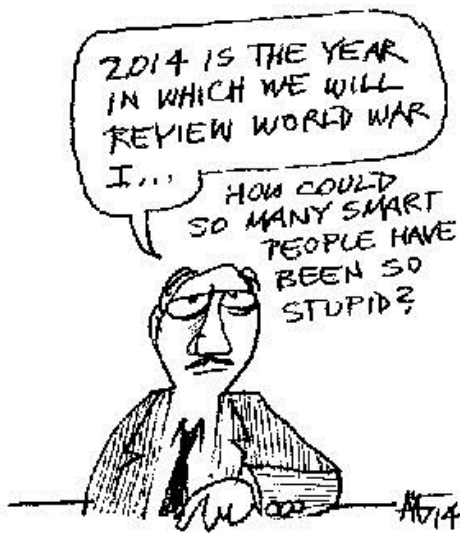
But the Ferengi are not merely a backward race, only capable of catching up with our own lofty civilization if given time and a good example. In some respects, they have shown themselves to be superior species.

There is one episode in which Quark is challenged to a duel by a Klingon. He cannot weasel out of, yet it is certain death to show up at the designated time and place – nevertheless,

he summons the courage to do it. Defeated in moments, with the bat'leth poised over him, Quark stares death in the face with unexpected defiance. His enemy, completely victorious, prepares to deliver the death thrust ... and loses the duel. His fellow Klingons were so impressed by the example of a brave Ferengi that to strike him down appears cowardly. They turn their backs on the bewildered victor in a show of "discommendation," suddenly rendering him persona non grata.

Dax, one of the members of Benjamin Sisko's crew on Deep Space Nine, is a rather unconventional Starfleet officer – she actually likes Ferengi, and joins them in Dabo, Tongo and other forms of gambling. Unashamed of how she spends her time off, she explains that Ferengi are "fun-loving."

It's in serious matters that the Ferengi show their real moral fiber. Trapped by Jem'Hadar shock troops in a cave, Sisko and Quark quarrel over each other's failings as species. Quark is incensed that the Federation commander regards his people as a race of greedy, unscrupulous shopkeepers, and reminds the Hew-mon that while Ferengi are fiercely acquisitive, they have had no world wars, and have never sold each other into slavery. Considering that Sisko is himself black, this is a cutting reminder of humanity's dark side.



But perhaps the most interesting evidence of the Ferengi's higher nature is found in the office of Grand Nagus. Zek is as greedy as the next Ferengi, but clearly regards his office as much more than an opportunity to enrich himself at everyone else's expense. (That too is a "perk" of the position, but only if he has

done his job well.) In one episode it appears likely that Brunt, an ambitious Ferengi from the Board of Commerce, may force Zek from office and succeed him. Quark and the other Ferengi on DS9 are concerned because Brunt is not merely acquisitive – as all his good Ferengi are – but actually selfish and without scruple. If he becomes Grand Nagus there is the danger that he will neglect his duties and enrich himself without limit ... and, more importantly, without regard for the well-being of the Ferengi Alliance as a whole.

Zek said it best: "A Grand Nagus has to think of more than just his own profit. He must act for the good of all Feringar and the profit of all Ferengi." Now, isn't that a standard of integrity that we, as Hew-mons, could wish for more often from our leaders? And rarely get?

As a species, I believe we have little right to look down our noses at the practical and principled Ferengi.

## THE JOY OF HIGH TECH

by Rodford Edmiston

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

### Time Capsules

Territorial animals like to mark their territory. With humans, this can be something as simple as scratching initials and date in fresh concrete. Or it can be as complicated as the Great Pyramid.

One of the more interesting ways to mark territory is with a time capsule. There are approximately ten thousand intentional time capsules in the world (the joke being that nine thousand have been forgotten or simply lost). By making one, you not only prove you were there in that place, it proves you were there in that time.

There are official time capsules and unofficial ones. The unofficial ones are often accidental. They can be a forgotten box of mementos found by heirs, a room sealed after a tragedy and rediscovered by new owners, and so forth. These can be some of the most interesting, because they offer an insight into the person or persons who gathered the items inside. Instead of a deliberately chosen public face, we see something more intimate.

Among official, deliberate time capsules, the oldest are likely foundation deposits. You see these in cultures all over the world, from great antiquity to the present. These are usually intended to have symbolic purpose, such as to ward off evil or promote success. They get their name from the fact that the items are placed in a hollow in the foundation as a structure is built. In a sense, such deposits are not true time capsules – though they may be described as such even by archeologists – since they were not really intended to be seen again.

In ancient Egypt, foundation deposits took the form of ritual mud brick lined pits or holes dug at specific points under temples or tombs.

They were filled with ceremonial objects, such as amulets, scarabs, food or ritual miniature tools. Those associated with tombs will also have items which identify the intended occupant.

Archeological excavations of prehistoric homes often uncover items placed in a hollow under a heavy stone at the entrance. Charms. Small personal items. Locks of hair. Things which protected the home and marked who lived there.

Moving into more modern times, many large buildings have something similar to a foundation deposit. These may be called cornerstones, foundation stones or dedication stones. Originally, the cornerstone was the reference from which the rest of the construction was measured. Over time, the cornerstone became more symbolic than practical. Today they mark the formal beginning of construction or the dedication. They have such information as the name of the building, when it was built and so forth carved on the outside, or perhaps on one or more bronze plaques. In most instances, various items are put inside as part of the public ceremony involved in placing the monument, and the cornerstone then sealed. Popular items are a newspaper from the day of the ceremony, coins minted in that year, and other things referring to the specific time the cornerstone is installed.

There is a fascinating and long history behind cornerstones, with traditions which vary through time and place and purpose of structure. However, this column is intended to discuss them in the context of time capsules. Hence, I reluctantly put that diversion aside to focus on the actual topic.

Most regular cornerstones are not planned to be opened on a specific date. Of course, those who place them usually realize that all buildings eventually fall, even if it takes thousands of years. Despite that awareness, the more common cornerstones are not intended to protect materials for future examination. Like the ancient foundation deposits, they are symbolic. Though, hopefully, not as superstitious in their symbolism.

Some cornerstones do contain actual time capsules. The date when they are intended to be opened will be included with the more traditional information on the outside. While cornerstones are as a rule rather small for time capsules, they are much less likely to be lost, since they are physically connected to an entire building. (Yes, many time capsules have been lost. Some should have been opened decades ago, but could not be found!)

Those cornerstones which are intended to be opened at a particular time may simply be a hollow block, or could contain an actual, separate, sealed capsule. There have been cases where a building was demolished before a planned opening date of the time capsule in the cornerstone, due to economic failure, fire, earthquake or whatever. Having a separate time capsule inside the cornerstone then becomes handy for more than the increased preservation

provided. There have been a few cases of a cornerstone time capsule from a building demolished before the scheduled opening date simply being incorporated into whatever new structure was built on that location.

Time capsules range in sophistication from a simple shoebox to special alloy canisters filled with dry nitrogen inserted inside another special alloy canister filled with dry nitrogen which is then encased in a special, high-strength concrete. One time capsule under the floor of a shopping mall has a cap with a digital clock counting down to the opening date. (I assume they have remote access to the clock at least, to reset it after a power failure.) They range in size from a cocktail shaker to an entire room. Their locations run the gamut from basements to mountaintop monuments. There are even some in space! (A number of satellites and space probes have had time capsules on board. The Voyager golden records might be the best examples.) Contents range from selections of actual objects to information stored in various ways. (Even now, microfilm is popular. All you need to view it is a light source and magnifier.)

A time capsule is not the same thing as a repository. Those are accessible, either to monitor the contents (in the case of things such as canisters of nuclear waste or vials of dangerous microorganisms) or to use (there are many records repositories of many types in many sorts of locations, including old salt mines).

Despite how long such caches have been part of human culture, the term "time capsule" apparently dates to no earlier than 1937. As noted above, there were plenty of other names for such sealed collections. The term "Time Capsule I" was invented for a project by Westinghouse to create a cache of items to be interred at the 1939 New York World's Fair. "Time Capsule II" was created for the 1964 New York World's Fair. Both are buried 17 meters below Meadows Park, three meters apart. They are meant to be opened at the same time in the year 6939, five thousand years after the first capsule was sealed.

In a way, time capsules - especially those with open dates thousands of years in the future - are the ultimate form of hubris. The people who create them are essentially shouting to the future "We were important!" and expect the future to care. Considering how many have been lost or destroyed or simply turned out to be inane, time capsules might be dismissed by the pragmatic as sheer folly.

However, many do provide useful information about the time and place where they were sealed. For example, in the Valley of the Kings foundation deposits have been used to identify who was buried in a now empty tomb, as mentioned above.

There is also the "buried treasure" element of time capsules. Several have been looted, and a few stolen entire. Even honest people with no intention of committing theft feel an

odd excitement at the idea of digging up and unsealing a time capsule.

So, the next time you see a building with a cornerstone engraved with pertinent information, take a moment to wonder just what might be inside.

## LESS THAN THE SUM OF THE PARTS

Review by Taral Wayne of  
*The Lego Movie* (2014)

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1490017/>



NOTHING AS RELAXING AS "MR. TAMBOURINE MAN" PLAYED ON A TENOR SOUSAPHONE...

While it has many interesting pieces, "less than the sum of the parts" would be how I describe *The Lego Movie* that I recently watched with a friend. I had already seen the pre-viewed copy only a few days earlier ... and it didn't improve on a second viewing.

From scuttlebutt I'd heard, it wasn't supposed to be a bad film. *The Lego Movie* had been described as funny, clever, and - if not exactly memorable - certainly worth seeing once. The movie review site, *Rotten Tomatoes*, gave it a very favorable rating of 96%. That's the sort of figure that the site awards to cinema blockbusters like *Finding Nemo*, *Iron Man*, *Braveheart*, *Pirates of the Caribbean*, *Men in Black* or *Casino Royale*, so I would have been in my rights to have high expectations. Maybe so, but my inner skeptic kept telling me, "It's a movie about building blocks, so how fucking good could it be?"

Then I read a bad review of the film that really piqued my interest. Was it possible that this one lone voice in the wilderness was right - and incidentally in agreement with my instincts - while the rest of the entire world was wrong? Read on...

*The Lego Movie* was certainly clever. The level of inventiveness and the full-immersion sense of reality impressed me for easily ten or fifteen minutes. At that point, this viewer simply began to accept what I saw at face value, and the magic was no longer visible. The joke had been told and ceased to be funny. What I began to be more and more aware of was that

the hero, Emmet, lacked *any* likeable qualities. He was plastic on more levels than one. In fact, his party-style personality was darn right *irritating*. At the point this realization sank in, the pace of the action went into hyper gear, never really slowing down so that you could savor a moment, or reflect on an idea. Instead, things whizzed by in blurs, gyrated around at blinding speed, exploded or ricocheted all around the camera frame. I suddenly realized that this wasn't "live action speed," it was "video game speed" - an artificial creation of sophisticated software that carefully guides the player as he evades dangers or fires laser beams at a speed and accuracy impossible without an artificial intelligence surreptitiously enhancing his play. The action of *The Lego Movie* was set at this impossible pace from one end to the other... a video game whose precise moves no eye could follow.

I don't know about you, but I'm sick and tired of movies filmed like video games. No wonder that adult viewers are going back to television to watch realistic fare like *Mad Men* or *Breaking Bad*!

Admittedly, throughout the movie there was a sprinkling of compelling, subtle humour. Everybody will have their own favourites they like to repeat, of course - I like the silent movie title card that appears in a Wild West scene to indicate a ten-second transition to the next scene. But while the intermittent humour might provoke a chuckle or two, the sight gags and one-liners don't add up to a worthwhile narrative.

In a nutshell, the mad ruler of Lego Land wants to glue everything (and everyone) together, to remain forever in perfection. Emmet, the Special arises in response to a prophecy to prevent this by re-uniting the Kragle (Krazy Glue with some of the letters scraped off the tube) with The Piece of Resistance (the tube's cap). The twist is that the prophecy is totally bogus, made up on the spot by the wizard voiced by Morgan Freeman, (whose staff is a chewed on Tootsie Roll stem, by the way). When the Special learns the prophecy was fake, he delivers a heart-warming speech about *everyone* actually being special, and how the have to believe in themselves, and somehow avoids being liquidated on the spot ... which is what you would happen in a believable story.

As if that weren't predictable enough, there is totally unnecessary half hour of the film in which Emmet spends time in *our* world, learning that Lego Land is the plaything of Will Farrell, who learns in heavy handed parallel that Lego is to play with, and not to create a static perfection to last forever. Emmet then space warps back to Lego Land to apply this lacquered-on moral lesson to his own level of reality. The movie, already overlong, would have been far better without a single second of this live-action preachifying.

The one negative review I read complained that *The Lego Movie* lacked heart. For certain, there were no characters that were more than



decal deep. But, much as I disliked the hero, Emmet – and thought the heroine was little more than an interchangeable part from the Matrix Lego set – Some of the characters took on a bit of life *despite* having very little to go on. The somewhat daft Vitruvius, a Gandalf-like mentor and sage, was amusingly aware of his own pretensions, and wasn't above breaking character. My personal favourite, Batman, seemed to have more fun with his brooding and darkness than a Dark Knight should. Bad Cop/Good Cop's abrupt change of persona, from good-natured milquetoast to Hunter Tompionesque inquisitor with a violent temper, also managed to register as a living presence. Those three seemed to be more the exception than the rule, though. It was hard to like, much less care, about Unikitty, Metal Beard Superman, President Business or any of the other characters who stalk stiltedly across the brightly colored, knobby plastic stage.

Let's step back from the details and look at the whole picture again. *The Lego Movie* is excessively long (even though only 100 minutes), ridiculously fast-paced in the chase scenes, burdened by a spurious moral lesson awkwardly tacked on the end like a fig leaf on a statue, deficient in characters you can believe in and lacking issues that have any relevance to reality. I'd say you have no reason to see *The Lego Movie* unless it was cheap and you were in a very tolerant mood for light amusement.

Yet 96% of the reviewers raved about *The Lego Movie*. The unlikely success of a movie about building blocks follows practically in the footsteps of a routine Disney Princess movie that also inexplicably stunned audiences and reviewers, and paved the way for toy sales in the mega-million dollar range. One wonders how many hundreds of dumpsters full of coloured plastic blocks will be sold in the aftermath of *The Lego Movie*? Maybe this is finally the time for the Mr. Potato Head script I have been working on all my life. Sure, it's not perfect, but there's nothing wrong with it that a little Kragle can't fix up ... which is more than I think I could say about *The Lego Movie*.

And don't put that tube away! There's a sequel coming...

## INCONJUNCTION

Con Report by Leigh Kimmel

InConJunction is the longest-running science fiction convention in Central Indiana, held over the Fourth of July weekend. This year it was held over the weekend of July 4-6, 2014 at the Marriott Indianapolis East, just a few miles down the road from us.

This year it wasn't quite as brutally hot as it had been in 2012, but it was still hot enough to make it preferable to load the van in the evening rather than the heat of the day. As it turned out, it was just as well we planned for an evening load-up, since we spent most of the

afternoon dealing with the plumber who was fixing a broken bathroom sink.

On Thursday we headed over to the hotel and got the van into position near the loading dock. I had to run some errands in the car, so it was almost time to begin load-in when I got back. At least by getting positioned by the door, we were able to get loaded in fairly fast.

However, it still took enough time to set up that we weren't finished when the dealers' room closed for the evening. We headed over to the con suite for the ice cream social, then headed home for the night.

On Friday we finished setting up, and then took a look around the dealers' room before settling in to do business. Sales came at a fairly good pace, and by the end of the day I was pretty sure we were in better shape than we had been at the same point at IndyPopCon, which was supposed to be much larger. However, we were also getting a lot of requests for ramune and pocky, which I'd left out because I ran out of room in the van.

After the dealers' room closed for the night, we went to the con suite to hang out for a while with friends. Then I went up to the storage unit to retrieve some merchandise. I also picked out some ramune and pocky to take with us, as result of all the requests.

On Saturday we headed back to the hotel and got set up for the day's sales. We added the additional merchandise in and actually sold a decent amount of it. So that trip up to the storage unit was definitely worth it.

After the dealers' room closed for the night, we headed over to the con suite and hung out for a while. Then we looked around in search of any parties. The only one we found was Barfleet, and we really weren't interested in a drinking party, so we headed home and turned in for the night.

On Sunday we headed back to the hotel for the final day of sales. We went to the con suite to get some breakfast food, then headed over to the dealers' room and got our tables opened. We had some pretty good sales, and I felt like we'd done well for a small con. However, I was really disappointed at how poorly the books had done, and decided we probably wouldn't bring nearly as many in future years.

Then we packed up and loaded out. It actually went fairly quickly, although the heat was a nuisance. Because the weather forecast was not promising, we went ahead and unloaded everything back into the storage unit that evening so we wouldn't have to worry about it later.

Guide for the Perplexed:  
"ramune" is a Japanese soft drink,  
usually citrus, in a bottle that is  
sealed by a marble, and "pocky" is  
a chocolate-coated snack.

## WORLDCON BIDS

2016  
Year of the Fire Monkey

Beijing  
<http://www.guokr.com/zone/worldcon/>

Kansas City  
<http://kansascityin2016.org/>

Proposed Dates: August 18-22.

2017  
Helsinki  
<http://helsinkiin2017.org/>

Japan  
<http://nippon2017.org/>

Proposed Dates: sometime in August

Montréal

Washington DC  
<http://dc17.org/>

Proposed Dates: August 16-20

2018  
New Orleans  
<http://neworleansin2018.org>

San José  
<http://www.sjin2018.org/>  
Proposed Dates: August 16-20

2019  
Dublin  
<http://dublin2019.com/>

2020  
New Zealand  
<http://nzin2020.org/>

2023  
Paris  
<https://sites.google.com/site/parisin2019/>

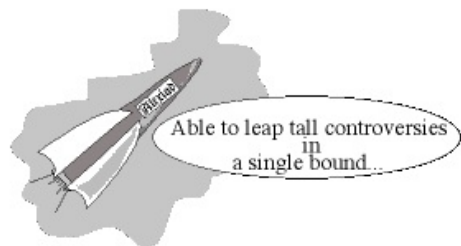
Bids under consideration include:

2021  
North Texas

2022  
Chicago



## Letters, we get letters



From: **R-Laurraine Tutihasi** June 15, 2014  
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Your review of the movie *Gladiator* covers all the areas I probably didn't pay much attention to. I was almost totally character focussed.

I'll use the Nebula Award nominee list as a guide for my future reading.

I think you and all your readers who poo poo Corflu are looking at it from the wrong angle. I didn't even discover fandom until the mid-1970s, and I've enjoyed the Corflus that I've attended. I'm not big into fannish history, but I don't mind and even welcome the small dose I get at Corflu. I don't get along with all the attendees, but there are always enough people I can socialize with. And I think that's what Corflu is about, socializing with other fans that you only usually read. And getting to see some fans you just don't see enough of.

It's not so much that scooter drivers at conventions are careless, at least not most of us. Many of us are not used to driving those contraptions. The only time I've used a scooter is at conventions. This means a lot of us are driving like unlicensed car drivers. I have driven over the feet of some of my friends, and I've apologized profusely. Anyway those scooters are equipped with horns.

From: **Milt Stevens** June 24, 2014  
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Before reading Taral's article in *Alexiad* V13 #3, I hadn't known any of the background on Tucker's Smoooth ritual. I'd seen it in action but thought it was rather dumb. I've never been a drinker of hard liquor, so I didn't participate. However, if Tucker was doing it, it was definitely fannish.

In the letter column, the topic of a litmus test for fans drifted by. It reminded me of an incident at LASFS a few years ago. A young man wandered in and talked to various people. He said he wanted to write a novel. That

sounded promising. Then he said something that revealed him as an infidel. He said "You know what I mean?" Fans don't say things like that. We will tell you what we mean in tens of thousands of words if necessary. It's what we do.

More recently, some people were lamenting that the Hugo voter packet this year wouldn't include all of the novel nominees. This might mean they would have to buy some books. Oh woe!!! There should be reprisals against publishers for such an outrage. It occurred to me that it doesn't take much coaxing to get real fans to buy books. The mere smell of book paper drives many fans into an acquisitive frenzy. It's sort of like yelling PIZZA at a Weight Watchers meeting.

**The Hugo Voter Packet had the entire Wheel of Time series in one huge file. It was a cheap way to get them for the Kindle.**

— JTM

There are some true/false questions that might be used to identify real fans.

There are things man was not meant to know? (False)

There are at least three sides to every question? (True)

You can have too many books in your house? (False)

Space travel is cool? (True)

Fans always agree among themselves? (False)

People in the year 3000 will not use chewing gum? (Huh!)

From: **Richard A. Dengrove** June 29, 2014  
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These comments on the April *Alexiad* are very late. I am afraid I allowed my LOC time to be cut into by a project too tempting not to bite. All I hope is the June issue isn't out yet, but I wouldn't blame you if I found it in my mail box tomorrow.

If you can finish your writing in a decent amount of time, which I can't, for a book, I think self-publication is the answer. Of course, it is not the answer to what most writers crave, fame and fortune. Unfortunately, they are blessings that never accrue to more than a precious few. Instead, for me, writing should be a tool of personal fulfillment and personal satisfaction. We have the satisfaction of expressing our thoughts and feelings.

One criticism of self-published works is they are poorly edited. However, they cannot be held to the same standards block busters and

deep philosophical works are. If someone reads your masterpiece, and criticizes your spelling, punctuation, word usage, etc., you can tell him to shove it.

In short, I am telling everyone that their dream is wrong. You point out Ridley Scott's *Gladiator* doesn't quite do that. He only tells us that our idea of the Emperor Commodus as a vicious degenerate is wrong. An issue few give a fig about.

Of course, I am going to contradict Ridley to a lesser extent. There was something strange about Commodus. I hear that he considered himself astrologically Hercules; in short, Commodus was more than a little bonkers.

If I am bringing Commodus back to the stereotype, it's no sin. Sometimes, it's great to deal in stereotypes. The Steel series with a new improved Aneka Jansen seems to. In how many SF series does a heroine gallivant around space and have sex on the side?

It certainly reminds me of the pulp novel "The Time Trap" by Henry Kuttner in a 1938 *Marvel Science Fiction*. In the spicy tradition, the princess heroine keeps losing her clothes in one situation after another. This was the '30s, a more prudish time. It upset the authorities so much they swore to shut the magazine down if another issue was as sexy as that one.

That was not the attitude of a person who read it in the 21st Century. He found it a lot of fun. It sounds like fun to me too.

Even faker as erotica was the novel *Sin in Space* by Judith Merrill and Cyril Kornbluth. Taral Wayne mentions it. I remember the MIT Science Fiction Society Library stocked it. I was told that, actually, it was not even erotic but dealt with the topic of drug addiction. Nonetheless, the marketers marketed it as erotica.

As long as I am traveling the wrong side of the shibboleths, I have a comment, along that line, about Rodney Leighton's summary of Caroline Carver's *Beneath the Snow*. At one point, Rodney tells how an evil, fat, woman scientist steals a heroine's energy saving machine, the MEG.

A friend of mine is uncomfortable with that such ideas. She suspects, with the current attitude toward overweight, people would presume the evil woman scientist did it because she was fat.

I disagree with George Price. Maybe no one has proposed a Constitutional Amendment for the decimation of Congress if the budget isn't balance. However, a Constitutional Amendment to balance the budget has come pretty far. Of course, knowing George, that would not suffice.

In my view, there is another problem with decimating the Congress. When you decimate the Congress, you better hope the next elections don't bring in even bigger spenders. I know politicians are presumed to be self-interested loners, and the decimation law would keep them in line. However, my experience in Washington has been that politicians find ways to reward their friends. A

seat in Congress isn't the only reward. Trust me.

While I agree and disagree with George in this missive, I agree with Sue Burke on this one point: the nationalities of comic characters have to be changed to make the same show humorous in other countries. For instance, she gives Pepe Le Pew as an Italian in France and Manuel the Fawty Towers' Barcelonian as an Italian in most of Spain, or non-Catalonian Spaniard in Catalonia.

However, I heard no nationalities were changed in the German version of *Hogan's Heroes*. The producers just substituted dialogue that was wacky in German. Supposedly the show was very popular.

Though they probably didn't get the originals to dub them; Werner Klemperer (Klink), John Banner (Schultz), and Leon Askin (Burkhalter) were all Yekkes, and Howard Caine (Hochstetter) was Jewish as well (but he was born in Nashville).

— JTM

Should we substitute the Canadian Lloyd Penney for a US Lloyd Penney. Never! However, my fingers are crossed he gets a decent and permanent job soon.

While Lloyd's problem is lack of a permanent job, Dale Speirs' problem is the high cost of mailing his zine. The solution will come when everyone gets a decent printer. Recently, I have received zines in PDF via email attachments. Having a decent two sided color laserprinter, I just print them out. It's no different for me than receiving them in the mail.

With *Hogan's Heroes*, a job for Lloyd and emailing zines, I end this missive. Have I broken my vow against commenting on political comments not aimed at me? Hell yes. Have I made a lot of people mad? Probably. I guess it will feel good until the comments flood in.

August 1, 2014

These comments on *Alexiad* June 2014 aren't quite as late as for April. However, I have to sweat over my letters so much that I can't be the first one to scrawl mine off, typos and all. Or to rush mine out and it's perfect. About perfection in the first draft, I hate people like that.

Aging is like LOCs. Just as some send in the first LOC and others later LOCs, some age and some don't. In your review of *The Marathon Conspiracy*, you mention a short story called "The Return of William Proxmire." Believe it or not that Senator from the '60s is still around. At ninety-two, I was told that he may have some physical problems but his mind doesn't miss a trick. Thus, he outdoes his reputation because everyone believes he is dead.

Not only is there a matter of humans aging but whiskey aging too. I have to thank Taral Wayne. I had long wondered about Bob Tucker and his ritual of having his guests say "Smmmmooottthhh!" Now I have a satisfactory answer. According to Taral, it started as a vaudeville routine by Red Skeleton. That is unless we find, in the ruins of some Roman villa, a script by Plautus, perhaps a fragment of Dyscolus, which gives the smooottthhh routine.

Maybe eternal youth, or whiskey, is a chimera. However, there remain attempts to render certain things ageless. One is the place in London Rodney Leighton mentions, the Leighton House. However, it was named not after a relative of Rodney's but Frederic, Lord Leighton. In the main, the house is devoted to his art works. In addition, there is a small collection of the art of his contemporaries. <http://www.rbkc.gov.uk/subsites/museums/leightonhousemuseum/archive.aspx>.

I could explain that relatively easily because I got to one point, and did not attempt a hundred points. I just read the part of my letter replying to George Price. I was trying to make a hundred points, and it was bewildering. It would probably have sufficed to say that I need factual proof to believe the Community Reinvestment Act of 1977 had anything to do with the Financial Meltdown. Otherwise, George hasn't a chance in hell of convincing me.

Having argued with George Price, I am going to argue about Tim Bolgeo. I don't disagree with Beth Willinger that Archon was wrong to give in to the provocateur and the lynch mob, and withdraw the invitation for Tim to be fan guest.

However, I come at it from a different direction. In my one experience with Tim, he was a great guy. For me, that, like other personal interactions, trumps whatever political opinions he expressed, or didn't express in, Humpday.

While Beth wants to know what we should do about Tim Bolgeo, Robert Kennedy wishes to know what we should do about solar plants. I know someone who is employed by the Navy to look into them. He believes they could satisfy our energy needs in a geostationary orbit, 22,300 miles up, with the energy beamed down as microwaves. It would just take a little more research and development. With a lot more, we wouldn't have to meter the energy.

Having found the perfect energy source (?), how about George Price's perfect monetary standard, gold? It is perfect because George claims that, unlike greenbacks, gold's price has basically been stable. The reason is there is relatively little demand for gold otherwise.

That was once the case. However, the price of gold has exploded in the last century and this. From about \$20 an ounce in 1914 to about \$1,600 in 2014. Although no longer used as a monetary standard, with inflation factored out, its price has increased three times faster than the dollar.

This is partially because gold's uses are no longer restricted to jewelry and a medium of exchange. Recently, it has played an important part in electronics, computers and aerospace.

Going from gold to another smellier substance, Sue Burke mentions reading "Opera Vita Aeterna" by Vox Day, AKA Theodore Beale. She pans it. All I can say is what he lacks in literary talent, he makes up for in complete chutzpah. The diatribes by him I have read go beyond racist to how naughty you can be.

Another person I have to agree with, maybe reluctantly, is Taras Wolansky. So far the number of jobs in the economy has not dropped commensurate with automation. The farm sector automated so the industrial sector grew. The industrial sector automated so the service sector grew. As long as some functions exist that a human does more cheaply, automation will not increase unemployment.

With automation, I end my missive and send it to you. Once again it is filled with high philosophy and misdemeanors. I hope you and your readers find it a cornucopia to support or oppose.

From: **John Thiel** July 2, 2014  
30 N. 19th Street, Lafayette, Indiana  
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Gregg Trend's letter makes it appear to me that there are rifts in fandom; I don't hear of the fan doings in which he is involved, and until this issue of *Alexiad* I had not seen letters by him in any of the zines I read, nor seen mention of his name. Yet he mentions a lot of involvement in fandom, and here I had been thinking that he was inactive. He calls this "core fandom"; I suppose here he means that he is a bit behind the scenes to the rest of us, and not doing his thing via fanzines very much. In which case I'm glad to see him here, because I was acquainted with him in earlier days.

George Price seems not to agree with the view "what man can imagine, man can accomplish". Thereby I think he takes a dim view of things, which does not really nullify the concept of a utopia. I think in view of how bad things are, a utopia would be a bare minimum, a social necessity. At least positive utopian thought leads to improvement, though a lot of sf satires say it does not if put into action. Here we have his statement that human nature has limitations. I agree that utopian improvements require good intentions.

A nice pavement, too.

— JTM

From: **Joy V. Smith** July 12, 2014  
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I watched several D Day documentaries, and today on TCM, they're running WWI movies.

I enjoy your varied selection of book reviews; *The Marathon Conspiracy* sounds intriguing. I like historical mysteries, though I don't think I've read any that historical; it predates Cadfael.

I think that there are difficulties to getting historical novels published these days. It seems to me they just about have to be either mysteries (i.e. Corby, John Maddox Roberts's SPQR series, or Lindsey Davis's Roma sub Rosa series) or romances.

— JTM

I loved Pratchett's *Raising Steam* and enjoyed your review of it. And thanks for the con reports and other SF news. Btw, I Tuckerized David Lee Summers in my post-apocalyptic novel, *Strike Three* — and mentioned Kitt Peak National Observatory. (I'm still trying to figure out if I Tuckerized Kitt Peak too.)

LOCs: Thanks to Darrell Schweitzer for the background on Roman armor, etc. I also appreciated the background on fandom, current fanzines, cons, ... Thanks to Sue Burke for the info on the megacenser or botafumeiro and bullfighting. Congrats on your upcoming story in *Asimov's*, Sue; and it's great that you're translating all those stories so more people can read them.

From: **Alexis A. Gilliland** July 9, 2014  
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Thank you for *Alexiad*#13.3 which arrived about the time Hurricane Arthur blew through on July 3<sup>rd</sup>. We have seen worse, losing some twigs from the oaks in the front yard, as the park down the street lost a couple of branches, while to the north a couple of trees were blown down, but there were only minor power outages, and those quickly repaired. Happily the weather was seasonally cool for the 4<sup>th</sup> of July celebration on the mall, even though we chose to watch it on TV. From past experience, one gets a better view of the concert, but the experience of the fireworks is seriously lacking. On the other hand, you pay for the "free" entertainment in the coin of aggravation and stress, and as you get older, that price seems to get higher.

Of course aggravation and stress come in many guises, and this spring their guise manifested itself as an infestation of bedbugs. Where did they come from? The last two conventions where we might have picked them up were Lunacon in March 2014, at the Rye Town Hilton in NY, and Philcon at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Cherry Hill, NJ, in November 2013. A check on the Internet showed the former to be relatively free from complaints, while the latter was listed among

the ten worst on the east coast, so probably these bedbugs are from New Jersey. Sigh. So far we have had four sprayings of insecticide, the last on June 30, which helped considerably but may, or may not (Lee is not optimistic) take care of the problem. We have plenty of company, however, Windsor and Balmoral Castles, Buckingham Palace, and Blair House here in DC, are also infested. Not to mention any number of elite hotels catering to what used to be called the jet set. It is a shame to waste a good crisis, and since our house was in an uproar anyway, we redid the bedroom, stripping off the old wall cloth to paint it, and having wall to wall carpeting installed. (More aggravation; our carpet was supposed to go down June 15<sup>th</sup>, but had been loaded on the wrong truck and sent to Florida, so it didn't get installed until two weeks later.) We also cleaned out the little 4x8 foot closet that had been roughed in as a bathroom, to make a half bath with a washer/dryer, something else that took longer and cost more than had been expected. Still on the list of things to do, replacing the black vinyl tiles on the ground level with wood flooring, and having an 8 x 8 foot shed installed to store the junk and clutter we need to keep. We have already got rid of a lot of junk and clutter, but we have way too much stuff, and more will surely be going, as for instance, the six-foot bookcase full of old and unread paperbacks.

Lisa has been doing as much,  
and we haven't even been to New  
Jersey.

— JTM

George Price continues to uphold the gold standard, and if, for the sake of argument we concede the points he makes in its defense, we may ask who would benefit from the rigorous imposition of such a standard? The answer: creditors, who are generally the richest of the rich. In 1910, in Europe, the top ten% of the population controlled 90% of the wealth, although currently the figure is only 63%. Debtors, a much larger percent of the population, would be at a disadvantage, and to the extent that governments need to borrow money for useful purposes, they would also be at a disadvantage. Indeed, ensuring that money kept its value might ensure other things as well, such as slower economic growth and social instability. Instability? The eventual formation of a privileged (privilege = private law) nobility, such as existed in pre-revolutionary France, led to just such an instability after a long series of wars with England. So if the government imagines itself faced with the choice of a stable currency or a stable society (i.e. one in which the incumbents get reelected) it will generally go for the latter or be replaced by a government that will. From which we may conclude that the gold standard is a policy more suited to angels than politicians who are merely human. Poor, weak, fool politicians who, "when the discipline of the gold standard aims

to prevent" them from getting reelected, chuck the gold standard out the window. However, if our governing angels had to be elected—instead of being appointed by God, would they do any better?

Regarding unemployment Taras Wolansky writes that "the historical record is on my side; your unsupported belief is on the other!" Might a little support be in order, here? Historically, we did indeed go from a nation of farmers to a nation of mechanics, and more recently to a nation of clerks, but increasingly unskilled and less skilled jobs are being automated. Those robot welding arms on the auto assembly lines are an example. Yes, servicing those robots provides some jobs, but those jobs are highly skilled and far fewer than the jobs being replaced. The computer with spell check eliminated the clerk-typist who would type up and neaten your hand written draft. Consider the gas pump, at which you, the driver, now swipe your credit card and pump your own gas. There used to be servicemen to pump it for you, wash your windows, and check your oil, but no more. Ditch diggers used to be a team of men with picks and shovels. Now a backhoe does the job. I said the times are changing, and those changes mean there is not only less and less use for unskilled labor, but even skilled labor is being displaced by cunningly designed machines. Taras's example of the widget industry ignores an essential point, which is that demand for widgets is finite and limited. If the industry automated, it would still only produce x widgets, x being what the market can absorb, and if the cost of production goes down, the profit goes up, but not without limit. Automation makes goods cheaper but does not necessarily make them less scarce. Unless, of course, the state intervenes to keep a widget factory producing unwanted and therefore unsalable widgets so the widget workers can keep their jobs. Later, Taras reminds us that Sarah Palin predicted what Putin would do in the Ukraine if the US elected a weak president such as Obama. Given the lack of a compelling national interest and local allies, it seems unlikely that a McCain presidency could have done any different. For the US, there are some fights it is better not to have, even if some of us are willing to have them.

From: **Robert S. Kennedy** July 18, 2014  
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Thank you for Vol. 13, No. 3 (June 2014), Whole Number 75.

The date indicated for my previous letter (March 18, 2014) was actually the date of my letter prior to it. (How you did that I have no idea.) This may have caused confusion as some comments in my letter were subsequent to that date. The correct date for my letter was May 29, 2014, which would agree with my wishing myself a Happy Birthday.

I hope very much that your appeal from



losing your job (because the job description was changed) has been upheld and you again have your job. To lose a job in this manner is obviously purposeful by an employer. (Age discrimination?)

To read that William H. "Bill" Paterson, Jr. died was terrible. It is a great loss. He was only 62!

For the first time since attending my first WorldCon in 1996 (L.A.con III) and nominating and voting for the Hugo's, this year I did not bother nominating and probably will not bother voting (if I have not already missed it anyway).

It's an uninspiring selection.  
And the pro Hugos aren't so hot,  
either.

— JTM

**Jim Stumm:** Thanks for another shipment of books. Your shipments are very much appreciated.

**Sue Burke:** Thank you for your description about what it is like to view scenery while traveling on a train at 190mph. Well, that's it. Not much to say this time.

From: **Lloyd Penney** July 19, 2014  
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Thanks you kindly for the newest *Alexiad*, whole number 75, and that's definitely a milestone to admire. Lisa, in your editorial, you found out something about comics fandom. As far as I know, it's an offshoot from from SF fandom, but today, there are fandoms everywhere, not just us. More once I break to the next paragraph...

The simple joys of a bookstore. The musty smell, the sense of adventure in seeing what treasures you could find, the friendly bookseller, often with a dog or cat resident. I remember an old Basset hound named Charlotte who would accompany me on my searches with the occasional pause for a skritch on the head. We have sacrificed that past for an uncertain future, made more uncertain by dropping literacy rates. (I like steampunk, but have not caught on to the steampunk novels, preferring their reference works.) What we want is not popular enough to provide, so we get stuck with the sparkly vampire and zombie drek. I rarely buy new books (perhaps I am part of the problem, not really wanting to drop \$45 on a good hardcover), preferring to rely on my overstocked Books To Be Read shelf. I expect it will keep me going for a long time, as long as it need be.

Juan Carlos has all those titles? Must have looked good on the resume. Queen Victoria's formal title before her death...Her Majesty Victoria, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, Queen,

Defender of the Faith, and Empress of India. Short and sweet in comparison.

Taral might know my own Bob Tucker story...it's not much, but at one Worldcon, can't remember which one, might have been Chicon V, I was placed on a panel with Tucker on Fannish Traditions. With Tucker, we knew what was to come . . . as we started, he bade one of his many 'granddaughters' to go to his room, and bring the bottle. Of course, that was a bottle of Jim Beam, and all on the panel was given two fingers. On command, we all downed it, and declared, "SMOOOOOOOOTH!" For a relative non-drinker like me, it was more scorching than smooth, but I did feel like I'd finally been admitted to the inner sanctums of fandom.

Mine was at a party at a Kubla Khan. Tucker loved Kublas. I miss them, and him.

The Hugos...I am not a competent nominator or voter, and we sold our Loncon 3 memberships, so we have no franchise there anyway. I only recognize a few names on the list, and these days, they aren't likely to win, unfortunately. In many ways, the awards have been taken over by newer fans and interests, which is fair. Do we feel entitled in that we feel there should be awards for what we like or approve of as fannish? That's okay, SF and fandom has passed me by, and I am finding other things to invest time and effort in.

The local...Canadian fanzines on paper. No, Rodney, there aren't many of those left. BCSFAzine in Vancouver does have some paper copies, and I get one because I write regular letters of comment for editor Felicity Walker. I am looking at a big stack of zines in a Banker's Box by my desk...nope, this might be the last Canadian paper zine left. All the rest of Canadian zines, like *Opuntia*, *Warp*, *Ecdysis*, Graeme Cameron's zines, etc., are now electronic, to the best of my knowledge. To be honest, and it's only happened over the last few months, I don't think I have mailed anything in all that time. Bills are paid electronically, locs are e-mailed out, even with paperzines . . . the world has certainly changed, and it's not done yet.

I certainly do not like our current government in Canada, and I eagerly await the next federal election, but to be honest, their decision to extend retirement age from 65 to 67 is smart, given that we generally now live longer. We need to work a few more years to build up enough money to retire and live longer. I haven't been able to build up much in my retirement plan over the years, so as later retirement year will probably mean a slightly better retirement time for me.

Any word yet on your old job, any satisfaction? I hope there is a decision in your favour. It's difficult enough to hold a job these days without being illegally (IMHO) pushed out of your job. Arbitrarily changing the job description shouldn't be allowed. Some may

disagree with my statement that fandom is drifting apart, but I can state that I am drifting away from it, and I will miss it. We did well at Anime North, with over \$1k of sales. I can with relief say that both Yvonne and I have found new jobs, and we have started our financial recovery, while still having a little fun.

Hello, Sheryl . . . nope, no Loncon or Detcon for us, but a more financially secure future makes missing those conventions a lot easier to take.

I can see I have gone on at length, which is better than the half-pagers I have been producing lately. Maybe I am losing my touch, but I do try my best. Many thanks for this issue, and we hope your summer has been warm and sunny.

As a matter of fact, it's been cool and cloudy. We're not sure it's July.

— JTM

From: **George W. Price** July 25, 2014  
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June Alexiad:

I thank Richard A. Dengrove for pointing out a serious mistake in my arguments putting much of the blame for the Great Financial Meltdown on the Community Reinvestment Act. I have long believed that the CRA required banks to make excessively risky housing loans on pain of losing Federal Deposit Insurance coverage. Mr. Dengrove checked with a lawyer, and found "that is not the case . . . Loans to minorities are but one factor out of five that banks are to be judged on. In addition, [the CRA] explicitly says that nothing in the Act should require unsound financial practices."

I went online to check, and the very first article I found showed that he is quite right, and I had misunderstood several basic facts. How embarrassing! My apologies to anyone I misled. The CRA still deserves a generous heaping of blame for the meltdown, but not in the way I had thought. (Not all the blame, of course; there's plenty to go around.)

The 1992 Federal Housing Enterprises Financial Safety and Soundness Act required that when a lender resold mortgages to Fannie Mae or Freddie Mac, a certain percentage of the total loan amount must be CRA-eligible (i.e., to low- and moderate-income borrowers). The percentage was set at 42% in 1996, and then raised to 50% in 2000 and 52% in 2005.

The rule did not actually punish banks for not making at least 52% of their lending to CRA-eligible borrowers (as I had mistakenly thought). But if the banks didn't, they couldn't resell to Fan and Freddie all the loans that they did make. This put serious pressure on the banks. Some independent mortgage lenders, such as Countrywide, made CRA-eligible loans and then sold them to banks needing CRA

credits to reach the required percentage.

I'll make up an example: A bank made \$10.00 million in loans, of which \$3.20 million was CRA-eligible. Fannie Mae would accept only \$6.15 million of that (3.20 = 52% of 6.15), leaving the bank still holding \$3.85 million in loans it could not lay off to Fan. So the bank bought \$4.17 million of CRA-eligible loans from Countrywide, giving it a total \$7.37 million in CRA-eligible loans, and \$14.17 million in total loans. \$7.37 million is 52% of \$14.17 million, so the bank could then sell Fannie Mae the whole \$14.17 million. And if that \$4.17 million from Countrywide turned out to be toxic, so what? They met the target.

Where the dirty work came in was that, while the CRA specifically said that banks did not have to make unsound loans, in practice the banks did have to do exactly that if they were to meet the percentage target. And apparently the regulators very carefully looked the other way (as they tend to do when political correctness collides with reality). Or maybe it just never occurred to them that banks might cheat, so they never thought to scrutinize the loans. Believe that if you wish.

As previously said, the basic flaw was the politically correct assumption that banks held back from lending to minorities — “red-lining” — only because of racism rather than a realistic fear of defaulting. If in fact there were not enough qualified CRA-eligible borrowers to make the 52% quota, what were the banks to do? Well, we know what they did do.

Once it became apparent that lenders could make toxic loans and get away with it by reselling them to Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac (who checked only for CRA compliance), then the floodgates swung wide and the crooks came swarming out of the woodwork. (How's that for a mixed metaphor?) So, yes, the meltdown was still primarily the government's fault, for putting great pressure on banks to make unsound loans, and looking the other way when they did.

\*\*\*\*\*

Mr. Dengrove offers an alternative argument he thinks I might use instead of blaming the CRA: “[L]aissez-faire economics says that business cannot cause recessions and depressions. Business men are too rational. It has to be the government doing it; the government is totally irrational.” He would much prefer to debate that one with me.

This is of course a gigantic straw man. I have never seen any laissez-faire economists arguing any such thing. However, there is indeed a grain of truth buried in there, so I accept the challenge. Let me restate the argument without the straw stuffing:

Businessmen are no more rational than government officials. But when a businessman makes a bad decision, he is the one who takes the fall. He loses money, and either changes

his ways or goes out of business and is replaced by others with better judgment.

When government officials — legislators, administrators, or regulators — make bad judgments, the taxpayers take the fall. The officials do not lose their jobs. Indeed, the more usual reaction when a government scheme goes bad is to blame it on “market failure” or some such, and then double down on the failed policy. It only failed because it wasn't enforced strictly enough and we didn't spend enough on it, right?

(Under so-called “crony capitalism” the failing businessman does not take the fall; he gets the government to bail him out. As we might say, socialism by other means.)

Another consideration is that the failure of a private business usually has little effect on the economy as a whole. One business collapses and others take its place. There is a constant churning as some succeed and grow and others fail and disappear. And there aren't really very many (if any) enterprises “too big to fail” — though crony capitalists like to pretend there are, so they can get taxpayer bailouts. Perhaps most important, a private business cannot inflict its wrongheaded policies on other businesses and force them to make the same mistakes.

But government policies affect everybody. The government can and does require everyone to make the same mistakes. For obvious example, when the government inflates the currency (the most common cause of booms and recessions), the inflation is imposed on the entire economy. Likewise, misguided regulations apply to everybody, not just to those who believe in them. That's why a widespread economic collapse usually has bad government policies behind it. It's not that private businessmen are any smarter or wiser than officials; they're just not in a position to inflict their bad ideas on the whole economy.

To be sure, there are occasional episodes of economic madness — “bubbles” — that grip almost everyone, private and governmental alike. Bubbles can't always be blamed on governments — but governments usually make them worse. First, since officials are rarely any smarter or better informed than private investors, the regulators don't recognize that we're in a bubble, so they do nothing to prick it, or at least dampen its effects. Second and worse, since the regulators are just as deluded as everybody else, they will scoff at the few who do recognize that we're in a bubble, and will use government power to thwart efforts to get out of it. That prolongs the bubble and makes the eventual crash all the worse when it does come.

I wonder if it has ever happened that government officials did recognize that some proposed scheme would create a bubble, and quietly squelched it, thus saving us from the bubble. We would never know that we had been saved, would we?

\*\*\*\*\*

AL du Pisani describes a long delay voting in South Africa because voters had to have their ID books checked; the editor comments on the controversy in the U.S. about requiring picture ID for voters. Democrats claim that's really intended as “vote suppression” because many poor people find it difficult to get picture IDs. They may be right, since the kind of people who don't want to go to all the trouble of getting picture IDs would nearly all vote Democratic, wouldn't they?

However, the Democrats are overlooking a good strategy: instead of opposing picture IDs, they should conduct drives making it easy for the poor to sign up. They could bring in busloads of new voters to have their pictures taken. And most of them would vote Democratic.

(Having spent a long life observing Chicago politics, of course I can't take seriously the Democratic argument that vote fraud is not a real problem.)

And Kentucky politics, too. — JTM

\*\*\*\*\*

I will conclude on a lighter note. Sue Burke recounts how three bullfighters got gored one after another, which reminds me of an evil story.

As you may know, “prairie oysters” (also called “mountain oysters”) are what get removed to convert young bulls into steers. Many cowboys like to fry them up for chow, and there are those who regard them as delicacies. One such fellow, a real connoisseur of prairie oysters, heard that a restaurant in Mexico City served them, obtaining the raw oysters from bulls killed in the arena. He went there and soon got a steaming platter heaped high. As he was about to dig in, he noticed that two of the oysters were much smaller than the others. He asked the waiter, “Are they killing calves in the arena now?” The waiter replied, “Oh no, sir. It is just that, you understand, every once in a while the bull wins.”

From: **Rodney Leighton** July 4, 2014  
11 Branch Road, R. R. #3,  
Tatmagouche, Nova Scotia B0K 1V0  
CANADA

*Alexiad* #75 appeared today. I was kind of amazed to discover that I am prophetic. Well, maybe not. Currently in the midst of a bloody heat wave which started June 30. Afternoon temperatures are hovering around 32 to 34. Of course that's nothing to folks in Texas and such places.

Robert Lichtman likely thinks that is comfortable. I was surprised to read that someone as intelligent as Robert didn't understand “loose sheets”. In spite of my lack of computer knowledge I understood his explanation for why *Trap Door* loose wouldn't

fold into readability. In case he or anyone else is interested: my friend Chuck is a computer expert. He does whatever is required to have his computer extract copies of fanzines from efanazines and put them onto paper. The things come out in loose sheets, just like in the old days of photocopying or even older days of mimeo. If you are having trouble with this concept take this issue of *Alexiad* and a knife or something and pop the staple out of the corner. You now have 12 or 13 loose sheets of paper which when put together constitute a fanzine. I have no idea how he does it but I suspect that Chuck directs his computer to print a list of fanzines. Latest bundle had *Broken Toys* 27, *The Drink Tank* 363 and 364 . . . I forget exactly, the one in which he handicaps the Hugos . . . *Spartacus* #3, *Askance* #31, *Claptrap* #3, *The Reluctant Famulus* . . . no, that was the previous bundle. Anyway the things come bagged up like that, no staples, nothing to separate them except they are usually back to back, upside down or something. Sometimes I sort through them and put in a staple; sometimes I just read them page to page as I come to them.

The larger much more expensive postal services apparently managed to lose or destroy the originals for *The Life of Rodney Year 65* #2. So it's history.

I don't know about the U.S. postal services but CANADA POST bureaucrats and bosses are on a course in which they are trying to kill their lettermail services entirely. I heard that the head guy is paid half a million bucks a year. A long time Canada Post employee has just retired. She said to me: "I can't see myself ever coming back here, not even part time. A lot of things are changing. I don't like them." I said, yeah, I have been losing quite a bit of mail. No one cares. Except good employees and people who use postal services a lot. I did send you a copy of *Rodney's Fanac* #1 didn't I?

My friend Chuck has been suggesting to me that I should loc the zines he sends, at least those that have real mail addresses. I have been resisting, mostly because I like the idea of reading as much as I wish and then tossing the thing. He says that any letter would be welcome, a sign of support. So I wrote him reasons I didn't want to . . . varied. But I don't know, maybe I should.

RF is intended as primarily a reviewzine and will be sporadic, 2 or 3 a year. I have been telling folks that I am not thinking in terms of trades but if they wish to receive a paper copy I need at least one issue of a zine or something to write about. Trying to write some sort of letter to everyone who sends me zines. Not sure if they would be considered locs. Thank you letters, mostly.

To Mr. Trend I will just say this: I wasn't really talking about Corflu per se. But I'll tell you Gregg: I don't recall any contact with you. But there are people central to Corflu cons who will bite. But also: no way could I afford to attend one of the things. Even if one were

held in Halifax and someone paid for my fees I still couldn't afford to go. Perhaps more importantly: I can't stand crowds. Any amount of time spent with more than a dozen people turns me into a gibbering moron. Yes, I know, some people think that is true all the time. I have serious psychological problems with crowds of people. I am very shy in person and a lousy conversationalist.

That loc is generating some interesting things. I was intrigued to learn that some folks have a derogatory term for fans who read, Readerfans. Gosh! First time I ever heard of that one. Might well apply to Joe although I don't think the part about not socializing with "mere fans" applies at all. Neither applies to me: I have read about 4 science fiction books in my life. And the suggestion that I might consider anyone to be a "mere fan" is diametrically opposite to what I was saying.

This is July 5. Tropical Storm Arthur is making his way across the region.

There is a lot of intriguing things in life and in fandom. Murray Moore who is perhaps the only Canadian fan with money to burn once, not that long ago, threatened to burn once, not that long ago, threatened to invade my home if ever he came to N.S. I wouldn't mind seeing him, as long as they didn't expect too much. I am quite sure I would get along with Murray should I ever appear at one of those Corflu things although I do wonder how it came to be that someone who has stated not that long ago that he does not read digital fanzines composed a "fanthology" of what he deemed the best fanwriting of 2013 and then put it on the web. I would ask why he didn't send me a paper copy. But I will request a copy printed off efanazines. Might have something to say about it.

Milt says there are 3 people out of 90 that he can't stand. I don't know who all was at the last one but based on the list that Murray provided for the previous one there are more than that for me. But equally there are folks who don't like me.

Mike and Pat Meara flew over to the U.S., visited various places, consumed lots of wine, dropped in to Corflu long enough the drink more and take a few photos and then visited some other places. Produced a fanzine in a long poem plus copious footnotes. Sent me a copy. I wrote and told him that it sucked. Also that one thing I hate about some zines is people boasting about the amount of booze they consume as though it is something to be proud of. I probably would get along with Mike; well, at least until he got that letter. Except I dislike wine and hate beer.

Mind you, if they happened to visit N.S. and came to Tatamagouche, they could visit the microbrewery which recently opened on main street, straight across from the post office. The owner of Jost Vineyards, which is world famous I believe, sold the business. The county had built a new library and sold the old one, which is not very big. Jost and his recently graduated daughter bought it as well as the meat shop which had just gone out of business.

The old library is supposed to be a cafeteria of sorts, with booze. Old meat shop is now a place where folks can brew their own booze. I have never been in it and doubt I ever will. I have been to the winery a time or two, not for myself. I could, if necessary, probably find some weed. Not that I would be able to. But, hey, we have almost all of the ingredients for a Corflu right here.

No hotels but there is a motel. 6 or so restaurants. Lots of sources for booze. That's enough of that.

Mike Glycer was pushing for a Hopkinsville 2017 NASFiC. Unfortunately, every hotel room in the area is booked up for the eclipse. It may cramp Little Green Men Day, which is also that week.

— JTM

Hope something good happens about work, Joe.

From: **Jim Stumm** July 26, 2014  
Post Office Box 29, Buffalo, NY  
14223-0029 USA

Richard A. Dengrove: I don't know anything about the German court system. SCOTUS: In USA, Constitutional interpretation is not a matter of common sense but rather of each Justice's intention, based on his or her subjective values. Liberal Justices are more intent on promoting their own political convictions rather than figuring out what the Constitution really means, despite the fact that they have taken an oath to uphold the Constitution. In this they are improperly acting as legislators, rather than as judges.

Conservative Justices also do this to some degree, but not as much. And they are just as wrong when they try to promote their own views rather than ask the proper judicial question, which is whether the Constitution allows the legislative or executive action that is under consideration in the case at hand. But Conservatives have an easier time because they mostly favor a limited role for the Federal Govt, which is in accordance with what the Constitution actually says.

Liberals seem to want a Federal Govt with no limits, able to legislate and regulate on any issue at all. But the Constitution strictly limits what the Federal Govt may do, giving the Federal Govt only about 40 powers, mostly concerning interstate or international matters, and leaving all the rest, mostly domestic and intrastate matters, to State Govts. So for liberals, the Constitution is very often an obstacle to be overcome, which liberal Justices attempt to do by devising some plainly bogus arguments to justify measures that they probably know, are in violation of the Constitution.

As a libertarian, I sometimes agree with one faction or the other, depending on which side is acting to strike down an oppressive law or

Executive action and uphold personal liberty. The Justice whose views on Constitutional issues I most often agree with is Clarence Thomas.

From: **Martin Morse Wooster** 7/25/2014  
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Many thanks for *Alexiad*. Yes, the Hugo awards are a mess, aren't they? As for the "best fan writer" ballot: goodness knows, I spend enough time reading blogs as it is. The bloggers have failed to convince me why I should read them. They have made no attempt to reach out to me, probably because they think people like me are old fogies..

But I also think the reaction of Larry Correia and his friends will also backfire. Who elected Correia the leader of conservative sf writers? Who got to vote? Where was the election held—Donetsk? I did dutifully look at Correia's blog, and it seemed to me like the traditional right-wing pity party. We're supposed to celebrate *the middle volume* of a *Baen Books* trilogy making the Hugo ballot? That's supposed to be exciting? As for "Vox Day" he seemed to be someone who desperately wanted to be expelled from SFWA so he could revel in his persecution. I don't feel sorry for him for five seconds.

Beth Willinger: I never heard of "Uncle Timmy" Bolgeo until this particular kerfuffle was made public on the File 770 blog, but your account seems plausible to me. What bothers me is that Bolgeo got the boot based on the accusations of an anonymous accuser who, as far as I know, has never been publicly identified. I'm also a First Amendment nut, and free speech must be defended. So shame on the Archon committee.

The attitudes of Correia and Beale are the result of the development of the Internet, where like-minded groups meet and reinforce each others' beliefs. As are their opponents, like Timmy Bolgeo's accuser. Or the Archon people who put their shoulders out of joint patting themselves on the back for how justly and rightly they had acted.

— JTM

You bring up the subject of voter ID. We don't have voter ID in Maryland because the voters have done a fine job of "suppressing" themselves; turnout in the primary was around 23 percent and turnout in the general election can't be much higher because of the general feebleness of the Republican party here. (The guy who won the Republican primary for governor decided to take government subsidies for his election, which makes his calls for limited government feeble.) But to liberals who think voter ID at the polls is

unnecessary, let me ask this: do you support the security requirements that you have to show ID to board a bus or a plane or enter a federal office building? If you do, does this mean you favor the creation of a permanent underclass who can never fly or take a bus and who is barred from federal services? Why is this a good thing?

I'm sorry that Bill Patterson passed away. I met him twice; at the 2006 Worldcon and when he talked about Heinlein at Cato in 2010. It is a shame that he will not know the reaction to the second volume of his biography. But my sense in talking to him was that he was a fundamentally decent guy. You can—and should—quarrel with many of Patterson's arguments, but he deserves credit for completing the most significant biography of a sf writer since Julie Phillips's biography of James Tiptree.

Yours in fandom.

From: **Dainis Bisenieks** July 28, 2014  
921 S. St. Bernard Street, Philadelphia,  
PA 19143-3310 USA

How can one comfortably read a bug-crusher? Anything up to two pounds, I prefer to lie back in the day bed with some pillows behind my shoulders and head. The elbows rest on the bed, and the book is held in my two hands. A small cushion beneath at least one elbow eases the pressure on the funny bone. In my case, we begin with five minutes of feline choreography on my chest, after which a well-stroked cat settles down alongside.

One of the bug-crushers in question is *Peter the Great* by Robert K. Massie; another, for future reference, is *The Wise Man's Fear* by Patrick Rothfuss, all of three pounds. *The Name of the Wind*, which I got not long ago, was a bearable two pounds. There are lots more bloated epics out there, but Rothfuss had been personally recommended by Frank Denton and has in general good notices.

Both the Rothfuss books were gifts of fortune, indeed freebies. There are so many old books in the world; the trouble is, there's no ongoing exchange of views. At most, I can name and briefly describe what has caught my interest. The best and most startling thing recently was *Lady Gregory* by Elizabeth Coxhead (1981), which ought to lead me to at least read *Gods and Fighting Men*, which has been on the shelf for a few years. Of course you all know who Lady Gregory was, a leading light of the Irish Literary Revival, to Yeats in particular she offered a home from home. A charming fragment from the book:

"But the want of tact is undeniable, and . . . later transferred itself to the trunk of a large copper-beech tree . . . at Coole, upon which only those secure of immortality were invited to carve their initials . . . One can easily picture the mounting chagrin of the not quite sufficiently eminent guest, waiting,

penknife at the ready, for the invitation which never came."

So it doesn't have "SH" on it.

A mention in *TLS* led me to *Three Bags Full* by Leonie Swann, "a sheep detective story" — *Ein Schafskrimi* in the original. In the 2007 tp, it is stated that the book has been translated into twenty languages. How could I resist? The narrative is not as sharp as I had hoped, not up to the Nursery Crime standard.

You can ruffle the bottom corner and get a moving picture.

From: **John Hertz** July 25, 2014  
236 S. Coronado Street No. 409, Los  
Angeles, CA 90057-1456 USA

Just as I was wondering if I'd see you at the NASFiC, a messenger came and told me you couldn't attend. It would've been more fun with you, but we did our best.

Geri Sullivan hosted a good Fanzine Lounge by Day in the exhibit hall; her Fanzine Lounge at Night was a first-rate suite on the party floor of the hotel, called a Slan Shack with photos and maps of the original Slan Shack of Battle Creek only 125 miles from the con site, blow-ups of contemporary fanzines, therewith refreshments, toys, conversation.

Leah Zeldes and Dick Smith staged a hectograph demonstration, which drew both old and young possibly because of entitling it Slime Printing. I moderated. Kurt Erichsen drew on hecto masters, and Roger Sims, who'd brought a 1950 Fantasy Scope, drew on gel. Zeldes and Smith had made the gel, the anti-freeze kind, and brought a handout reprinting Mae Strelkov's famous write-up. Sims told how once leaving a tray of gel out to cool, he found it cut into squares by unwise family members, whom he stopped from serving it up as Jell-O and poisoning themselves. Mundane artists have now discovered hecto can be cool and are doing it with whiteboard markers. Rebels in jungles use it because it's low tech and if they make the non-poisonous kind they can in emergency eat the evidence.

My book talk on *The Little Prince* led some to discover why I thought it wasn't at all a children's book. One teenager asked brilliantly if there were seven visitations. Sure enough — I judged the Masquerade, in which a Novice won Best in Show; also, as Chief Hall Costume Judge, I had to do the Reno ribbon rebuild all over again. The NASFiC was vital and friendly but there was a lot of what Dean Gahlon calls re-inventing the square wheel.

About the Hugo ballot I keep saying the real sorrow is knowledgeable fans' not even nominating. The spade's in our hands, folks.

From: **Taras Wolansky** August 1, 2014  
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By now you will probably have heard that Detcon was quite entertaining, more so than the previous NASFiC. The only unusual security I saw was, at night, the policeman checking my room card before I could enter my hotel's elevator lobby. This was at the main overflow hotel, where I ended up with all the other procrastinators.

Hugo nominees: The novella category is usually the strongest, and so it is this year. Charles Stross' Cthulhu jape, "Equoid", in which a Lovecraft manuscript helps foil a Lovecraftian horror, is the likely winner. "The Chaplain's Legacy" is also very good. "Wakulla Springs" is a wonderful evocation of a Southern community over several generations, but has minimal speculative content. The only bad story is "Six-Gun Snow White", which was nominated for its politically correct contents.

The graphic novel category is usually weak. This time, the only good one is the stomach-turning *The Meathouse Man*, based on the story by George R.R. Martin. Original graphic stories tend to be on the simple-minded side. BTW, I had never read any of the "Girl Genius" books until now. Well, actually, I still haven't: I found vol. 13 unreadable.

Gold Standard: In the 19th century the population grew faster than the gold supply, putting downward pressure on all prices — which, of course, include wages. This created the illusion of the "progressive impoverishment of the working class", which Marx made a central tenet of his economic cult. In reality the lower nominal wages bought progressively more and more goods — but rioting workers didn't really care that the "one step back" had been preceded by "two steps forward". One advantage of inflationary money is that you can give people a pay cut merely by giving them nominal raises below the inflation rate.

Actually that 19th century population explosion should itself have clued in leftists that living standards were going up. Modern Marxians, belatedly recognizing the reality that capitalism makes workers richer, have switched to the issue of "inequality" (a euphemism for envy).

The downside of inflationary money, of course, is that, when nominal prices inevitably go up, the general public blames "greedy businessmen". Virtually no one knows, for example, that the real (inflation-adjusted) price of a gallon of gas fell for 80 years after World War I; so much for "greedy oil companies"!

*ConGlomeration Report*: "In the world of *Avatar*, everyone here would be dead." — Les Johnson. I like to tell people, "Remember that time when you went to the hospital? That's when you died [in pre-technological society]."

*Richard A. Dengrove*: You're quite right to point out that the price system lets people

know when a resource is running out. Unless the government intervenes: I've read that, at an early stage of the Irish potato famine, with the best of intentions, the British government announced that the price of grain would not be permitted to rise. As a result, whole fleets of grain vessels bound for Ireland and high profits went elsewhere, and hardship was turned into famine.

*Darrell Schweitzer*: Before I can call you a Patrician of Thxoio, I need to know how to pronounce "Thxoio"!

"Lizzie Borden took an axe/And gave her mother forty thxoio ..."

On ancient armor, I watched an SCA-type combat demonstration at a con, and the battlers were wearing all kinds of protective *junk* strapped to their bodies. It occurred to me, that was what ancient armies may often really have looked like. Proper armor was expensive.

*Alexis Gilliland*: "Ukraine's government has been a kleptocracy, as bad as Russia's if not worse". As an explanation of what has been happening lately, that gets things kind of backwards. It was the overthrow of the Kleptocrat in Chief by a democratic movement that led to the "pro-Russian insurgency" (i.e., Russian invasion).

Remember, when Africans rebelled over the slave trade in the 19th century, they rebelled precisely because Europeans were trying to shut it down. To the extent that the insurgency has any real support among Russians living in Ukraine, it is among the people who fear that their corrupt perquisites are coming to an end.

Think of turbulent Ukraine as Weimar Germany, and fascist Russia as Nazi Germany (though that may be unfair to Nazi Germany in some respects).

*Jim Stumm*: DNA surveys strongly indicate that Greenland Eskimos are not related to Icelanders. Evidently the "blond Eskimos" are a myth.

You mean that Vilhajalmur Steffansson told a lie? Oh, where has my youthful idealism gone?

*Sue Burke*: I'm not a big fan of Ted Chiang's Hugo-nominated "The Truth of Fact, the Truth of Feeling". It made me think too much of the long, boring *New Yorker*-style essay the main character tries (and fails) to write. Also, James Tiptree, Jr. covered similar ground decades ago — and more profoundly — in "The Milk of Paradise". Tiptree understood that remembering accurately can kill you.

The story of Castrillo Matajudios reminded me of a classic short story by Robert Sheckley. The colonists of the planet Mezzorow send an agent to Earth to correct the official name of their planet from "Messy Row", which has caused a severe shortage of female immigrants. He is told he will have to wait 20 years for an appointment but, through a happenstance, is able to get a correction request into the system — and his planet is now officially known as "Misery Row". Fortunately by that time the

protagonist had encountered the girl gangs of Earth, and the female immigrant shortage was solved.

*Dainis Bisenieks*: The new *Cosmos* series was a major disappointment in every way, though it really helped me appreciate Carl Sagan's achievement in the original. Especially because the National Geographic channel ran a marathon of the original series, and I had the good luck to catch several episodes.

The original was subtitled "A Personal Voyage" because the words of Sagan's powerful narration were his own. In the new series, Neil deGrasse Tyson is blandly reciting uninspired prose written by others. The original had dramatizations of important moments in the history of science; the new one has limited-animation cartoons.

Take the hour spent on Giordano Bruno, who was not a scientist but a fringe theologian who wrote a book attacking science. (I looked him up in my old Britannica: the *Cosmos* version is so tendentious and selective as to be barely recognizable.) But he was burned as a heretic (for denying the divinity of Christ, not his interstellar speculations) so his story was useful as an attack on Christianity — which the show's producers thought more important than teaching the history of science.

Did they even mention his career as Secret Agent Henri Fagot, Licensed to Blaspheme?

— JTM

Then there was the full hour spent on — leaded gasoline. Even a fan of the new series I spoke to had to admit this was an absurd waste of time. The script read by Tyson never explained what engine knock was or why people would want to prevent it; and the use of lead additives was presented as if it were some kind of scam.

I mentioned the primitive cartoons that replaced the historical re-enactments of the original series. In a particularly odd example, Enheduanna, daughter of King Sargon and high priestess of Ur, is depicted as "black and beautiful" (as the cliché goes). Yet, elsewhere in the same episode, her countryman, Gilgamesh, is given the Semitic appearance befitting a Sumerian.

What does Enheduanna have to do with science? Absolutely nothing: she is known for her hymns to the Sumerian mother goddess. Evidently the show had not filled its quota of women; or (as we have seen) imaginary women of color.

**WAFH:**

Lloyd Daub, with various items of interest.

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## THE CROCKFORD FILES

ANSWERING MACHINE: "This is Jim Rockford. At the tone, leave your name and message. I'll get back to you." [Beep]

VOICE ON TELEPHONE: "Hello, Mr. Rockford, this is Penelope Peterson from Pottstown, Pennsylvania, and you're the **one thousandth** private detective I've successfully sued in small claims court for refusing to investigate my abduction by aliens! If you'll provide me with the name and address of the county sheriff, and your address, so I can have your assets seized to pay the judgment . . ."

[Credits and Commercial Break]

JIM ROCKFORD enters the trailer door, he turns and speaks to someone outside:

ROCKFORD: "Goodbye, Rocky. Thanks for the drive."

He turns back. Two thugs appear out of frame and proceed to beat him senseless. They start leaving.

FIRST THUG: "What did we beat that guy up for?"

SECOND THUG: "I thought you knew!"

They exit. BEEMER enters.

BEEMER: "Hi, Jim, I came by yesterday and got a whole bunch of jobs, so I gotta borrow the car and a suit, okay?"

BEEMER exits. ANGEL enters.

ANGEL: "Hey, Jimmy, I got me a line on a really hot deal that'll get me a half-mil, a million even. There's this Nigerian prince who needs help getting his dough out of the country. I just need five hundred to cover the costs. I'll pay you back when the deal comes off."

ANGEL rifles ROCKFORD's pockets and removes some money, then leaves.

BEEMER enters. He is wearing a suit clearly too big for him.

BEEMER: "Got the car keys, Jim? You're a really great guy!"

BEEMER goes through ROCKFORD's pockets, removes keys, and exits. We hear the car start up, screech off, and then there is a horrendous sound of crunching metal and and shattering glass . . .

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## STAR WARS EPISODE III A: BRING ME THE HEAD OF JAR JAR BINKS

Washed-up bounty hunter Repro Vaghn (Brad Pitt) is approached by renegade fugitive Jedi Barak Bel-Ged (Bruce Willis) with a offer of a contract. The unwittingly treacherous Gungan who unwittingly let then-Senator Palaptine set in motion the forces that created the Empire and destroyed the Jedi Order has become a nexus of the Dark Side. Only Master Yoda can break his power, but even alive, he might draw the Dark Side down upon Yoda's hiding place. Therefore, someone must kill the renegade Gungan and bring his head to Dagobah, where the link to the Dark Side can be broken.

Repro visits his girlfriend, Damna (Angelina Jolie). She agrees to be Repro's cover during his quest to find the renegade. In an excursion through the seedy bars and low venues of Tatooine, the two, and a strange cadre of low-lives from the Galaxy, search for their target . . .

(They had pictures of the guys at Comic-Con doing it, so . . .)

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|-----------------|--|
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This is issue **Whole Number Seventy-Six (76)**.

**Art:** What we are mainly looking for is small fillos. Your fillo will probably be scanned in (by Grant) 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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