

ALEXIAD

(ΑΛΕΞΙΑΣ)

\$2.00

The Three Mulla Mulgars: I came across mention of this book in Robert Silverberg's *Reflections and Retractions*. The library did not have a copy but I found an ebook copy for free from Amazon. I was entranced from the first page and read eagerly on the Kindle tablet Joe got me for Christmas.

This issue is dedicated to the memory of

Francis R. (Dick) Scobee,
Michael J. Smith
Judith A. Resnik
Ronald E. McNair
Ellison S. Onizuka
Gregory B. Jarvis,
Sharon Christa McAuliffe,

who died trying to slip the surly bonds of Earth.

— Lisa

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Reviewer's Notes

Right now there is a controversy over the Hugo Nominations. Last year Larry Correa put forward a plank of nominees, the "Sad Puppies". His argument was that storytelling and traditional values were being discarded for an adherence to English-Lit theories.

It's possible to agree with his argument but not his proposals. I thoughtfully read last year's Nebula-winning and Hugo-nominated Short Story "If You Were a Dinosaur, My Love". It's not a story.

Yet, I didn't care for Correa's own "Sad Puppies" novel, *Warbound*. And his companions tend to come across as ready to find offense and take massive retaliation. This does not seem the best way to win friends and influence Fans.

Now, it's being mocked. And there are already two different "Puppies" planks. Must we choose between exquisitely detailed backgrounds in search of a story, and refurbished pre-Campbell pulp methods and themes? And both defended by self-righteous advocates.

The Internet, far from being the universalizing medium of nineties hopes, has become a set of pools for like-minded thinkers not wishing to confront those who do not agree. And it's somewhat disheartening that one of the most popular books and movies of the year is a slightly-retouched *Twilight* fan fiction.

After looking at the "fan" Hugo awards of the past few year, it seems that Milt Stevens's proposal to abolish them is more and more relevant. As with most of the past few years' "Best Fanwriter" winners, Kameron Hurley is not a fan writer. And the "Best Fanzine" is now a blog.

But then, I doubt seriously that any of them, on any side in this controversy, will bother to come here to respond. Printed fanzines are like so five minutes ago while blogs and Titter feeds are the going thing. Just as "con" has now become a commercial enterprise for consumers, instead of a gathering of participants.

We are still hanging on, in spite of everything. But we have had to give up so much con activity. And we appreciate the sympathy and moral support. However, there is no longer a Pharaoh to have a stone heart to soften, but a vast network of clerks, staffers, underlings, and deputies into which the pain of little people is drained, and vanishes, with no one responsible.

— Joe

RANDOM JOTTINGS

by Joe



So Tauriel did survive the Battle of Five Armies after all. Still, Peter Jackson won't be doing any more Tolkien, and the Wolvercote Cemetery in Oxford will be calm again.

Don't it always seem to go, that you don't know what you got 'til it's gone. They paved paradise and put up a parking lot. Ray Bradbury's house in Los Angeles has been demolished by the current owners. Probably for another soulless Mega McMansion, not a parking lot, but still . . .

There has finally been a biography of R. E. D. Ryder, VC: *A Reluctant Hero: The Life of Captain Robert Ryder VC* by Richard Hopton (Pen and Sword; 2012; \$35.96; Amazon Digital Services; 2015; \$8.69) who carried out three different exploits each of which would have done honor to a pulp adventure hero, and got elected to Parliament too (Merten and Morden (C)). And yet people haven't heard of him.

The Edgar Rice Burroughs lists were enthused about the release of the ultimate ERB fanfic, the meeting he wanted but never got, where Lord Greystoke goes to Barsoom. And yet, after reading the on-line excerpt from *The Martian Legion: In Quest of Xonthron* (by Jake Saunders; prices ranging from \$200 to **\$15,000**) I had my doubts. It starts at a party at Lord Greystoke's estate in Kenya. The first guest mentioned is Doc Savage. On down the list is Dr. Elbert Womug (and his protégé). And apparently Carson Napier and The Shadow are also involved. Caleb Catlum yet stalks the earth.

Saunders wrote some in the seventies, mostly with Harold Waldrop. They did *The Texas-Israeli War: 1999* (1974) and Saunders was nominated for a Nebula in 1977 for his "Back to the Stone Age" (*Lone Star Universe*, 1976).

I don't think this is going to do very well.

<http://www.themartianlegion.com>

Edward J. Saylor, Lieutenant-Colonel (Ret) U.S.A.F., died at his home in Sumner,

Washington on **January 28, 2015**. Born **March 15, 1920** in Brusett, Montana, Saylor enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Corps on December 7, 1939, becoming a flight engineer in the 89th Reconnaissance Squadron of the 17th Bombardment Group.

He was flight engineer on Lt. Donald G. Smith's *TNT*, which was fifteenth to launch, bombed Kobe and ditched off Shangchow. After the war, Saylor remained in the Air Force, having accepted a commission, and retired in 1967. He was present with two other of the four then-surviving Doolittle Raiders at the Final Reunion in April 17-20, 2013 in Fort Walton Beach, Florida, and at the Final Toast at the National Museum of the U.S. Air Force on November 9, 2013.

Toujours au Danger

Mithrandir got bored in Valinor, snuck back on a fishing boat, and set up shop in London. But his magic ran down . . . oh never mind, the forthcoming movie *Mr Holmes* features Sir Ian McKellen as an aged retired Sherlock Holmes in 1947 (William S. Baring-Gould would have been pleased) taking up a half-century-old case.

Mr Holmes

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt3168230/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eL-TAqJBxqE>

Nicolaos and Diotima are in trouble again. Gary Corby's tale of the finest private detective in Periclean Athens (also the *only* p.i.) is getting a new installment, *Death Ex Machina* (May 19, 2015). Chaire!

<http://www.garycorby.com/p/death-ex-machina.html>

MONARCHIST NEWS

We regret to report the death of Sir **Arthur Valerian Wellesley, Duke of Wellington**, KG, LVO, OBE, MC [also Marquess of Wellington, Marquess of Douro, Earl of Mornington, Earl of Wellington, Viscount Wellesley, Viscount Wellington, Baron Mornington, and Baron Douro], also Prins van Waterloo, Duque da Victoria, Marquês de Torres Vedras, Conde de Vimiero, Grandee of Spain, and until 2010 Duque de Ciudad Rodrigo, on **December 31, 2014**, at home, Straford Saye Estate. His Grace was the eighth holder of the title and the great-great-grandson of the first, the victor of Waterloo.

Born **July 2, 1915**, the Duke served in the Royal Horse Guards of the British Army, rising to the rank of Brigadier, and being awarded the Military Cross for action in Syria. He succeeded his father in the titles on **January 4, 1972**. As one commentator said, after his retirement he turned his interest from the spear to the ploughshare, beoming a director of Massey-Ferguson and a supporter of the World Wildlife Fund. He was the only nonroyal Colonel-in-Chief of a British regiment, being Colonel-in-Chief of the Duke of Wellington's Regiment (West Riding) until its amalgamation

into the Yorkshire Regiment. (Nine soldiers of the Dukes were awarded the Victoria Cross, including Private Henry Tandey VC, the man who didn't shoot *Stabsgefreiter* Adolf Hitler.)

He was succeeded in his titles by his eldest son **Arthur Charles Valerian Wellesley**, OBE, DL, who had already been advanced to the Dukedom of Ciudad Rodrigo by the grant of King Juan Carlos. His Grace is married to Princess Antonia von Preussen, by whom he has a son and four daughters (and five grandchildren). The current Duke is scheduled to meet the Prince Napoléon and the Fürst von Blücher during the bicentennial celebration of the Battle of Waterloo.

The War Doctor is now Sir War Doctor; **John Hurt** was granted a knighthood in the New Years Honours. (Somehow "Milites Gaius Caesar Augustus" doesn't have the same panache and besides, *he* would be a *milites ordo periscelidis*, since he was a head of state, and the *Solis* would have along with its *Pagina iii puellis* a headline about CALIGULA KG.)

'**Abdullāh bin 'Abd al-Azīz al-Sa'ūd**, King of Saudi Arabia and Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, died on January 23, 2015 in Riyadh. Born August 1, 1924 in Riyadh, he succeeded his half-brother **Fahd bin 'Abd al-Azīz al-Sa'ūd** on August 1, 2005. The King was succeeded by his half-brother **Sulaymān bin 'Abd al-Azīz al-Sa'ūd**. Sulaymān is the father of **Prince Sultan bin Sulaymān al-Sa'ūd**, the first royal in space (STS-51G, *Discovery*, June 17-24, 1985), and of the late **Prince Fahd bin Sulaymān al-Sa'ūd**, who died before he could finance David Irving's libel suit.

(This also makes Queen Elizabeth the oldest monarch in the world.)

SARANG

2002-February 7, 2015



God, I know it's not late for You, Though it is for us. This is one of your lesser servants. He had been in a cage. They didn't want him any more. So Lisa brought him home.

She named him after one of his cousins.
 "Sarang" was a helper, a guide.
 Well, he was a tiger, a seeing-eye tiger.

He took his place, neither high nor low.
 Except under my feet, when I wrote.
 And so it went on for years.

Then one day we saw he was bleeding.
 And he'd lost weight. So to the vet.

He had cancer.
 The vet gave him a little more time.
 We wanted him to have a little time.

But that night, not even a week later,
 We came home. There was more blood.
 So much more. And pain.
 We had to let him go.
 And it was hard on us.

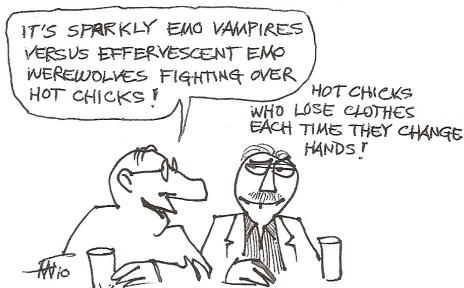
He won't need much.
 A warm place to sleep, good food,
 Clean water, friends to play with.

Please let him be happy again.

On Monday the vet said Sarang had untreatable cancer and had perhaps three months left. On Saturday night I found him in the tub. We called our regular vet but they were short staffed that night. Fortunately there is an emergency clinic here that is open 24/7. Joe called them and they graciously agreed to help us. We bundled Sarang into the carrier and drove out to Jeffersontown Animal Hospital. The staff member who greets us takes one look and agrees with our assessment of his condition. She escorts us to a private room and moments later the vet is with us. We answer her questions. She takes Sarang and preps him then brings him back to us. She goes to get the fatal dose. Sarang begins to purr. I bend my head to his, knowing that I cannot save his life, that I am about to end it. In less than two minutes it is over. Eleven years of companionship over in just a few seconds.

— Lisa

THE FUTURE OF MOVIES



My cousin Wade Major has inherited a place in the movie industry. His father was there, not quite at the ultimate beginning, but

even before talkies; I have a brochure from his acting school from the twenties. And yet Wade is younger than me.

But what Wade cited was commentary on the movie *Birdman* that led to a wider realization; The article cited production plans for the next six years from major studios; there are planned **thirty-four** movies based on comic books.

People will greet this with varying degrees of enthusiasm. I'll just point out a complementary trend, one cited frequently by Robert Jennings in *Fadeaway*; comic book sales are declining.

What we get, then, are all these franchises, based on source material that is fading away. The movie franchises draw from a vast conceptual background developed over the past seventy-five years or so. But now this background is fading away.

There will be no ideas left to make movies from. I suppose we can look forward to an unending succession of videos from whatever succeeds YouTube, with people sticking their faces into the lens and grimacing grotesquely.

Wade's commentary was succinct:

That is an absolutely fascinating dynamic... one I don't believe anyone in my business, at least, has ascertained.

We've all been saying the comic book adaptation trend will run dry, or at least plateau at a certain point — but this underlines it.

Bob was a little more sanguine:

I don't think film makers are going to run out of material to draw on for future movies. Sales of comic books are indeed declining at a steady pace. The number of comic stores, which in this day and age are about the only place somebody can actually purchase a new comic book, is also declining. Diamond Comics, the distributor for almost all comic books produced in the world, recently admitted that their customer base is now down to 2538 'accounts' world-wide as of Sep 2013. That number is likely even lower today.

It remains to be seen if e-comics can revitalize the biz. So far the answer has been no, but there is hope for the future as competition actually sets in and companies decide to sell digital comics at a price lower than the cover prices of new comics. The big advantage is that e-comics are available to anybody anywhere on the planet who has access to a computer and a credit card to buy the produce with. Brick and mortar comic shops are not needed to support e-comics.

Even if comic books drop dead tomorrow morning I think movie studios can continue to mine the comic hero

vaults for years to come. People who haven't read a single comic book in decades are still aware of the mythology and back-stories of characters such as Superman, Batman, Spider-Man, Wonder Woman, Incredible Hulk and many other costumed super heroes.

In addition it takes very little to bring a non-comic reading movie audience up to speed on most super heroes. Once you get the fifteen second intro about Green Lantern and his power ring/power battery and his (supposed) vulnerability to yellow objects, you are ready to roll with the newest Green Lantern movie. How much back-story do you need to figure out slam-bam action morality plays such as were presented in the recent summer hit "Guardians of the Galaxy"? Or The Flash, or Iron Man? Answer: not too damn much.

The other factor here is that comic book franchises bring in big money to the companies producing the comic books. There is usually very little or no actual increase in sales of the physical comics, but on the other hand, every time a super-hero comic movie hits the screen, the merchandising opportunities, from T-shirts and under-roos to sloppy straws and branded sneakers and everything inbetween boom. That's where the real money is in producing comics these days, and that's the real reason Disney Corp bought out Marvel a few years ago and why some other comic companies are still in business despite anemic print sales.

It is easier for movie companies to draw on an established product to create movies that are essentially pre-sold in the minds of their consumers — the movie goer willing to spend money to buy theater tickets or DVD copies of the movies based on those established memories. As long as the market potential is there some companies will continue to produce comic books no matter how low sales go, hoping to capitalize on the merchandising potential media exposure brings. It is also worth noting that film companies, including Disney, have been trying to create their own costumed-super heroes direct on screen for years, with varying degrees of success.

But back to the core point of the article; I don't think movie studios and film producers would be greatly inconvenienced if the comic book well suddenly went dry and the movie going public decided in mass that they no longer were willing to pay good money to see comic characters on the big screen. Since their very beginning,

movies have been happy to draw on whatever was trendy in popular culture and snatch up these fads to turn into hit movies. Think of all the movies, many successful movies at that, which have been based on dead television shows, or out of print books, or legend lore, mythology, fairy tales, religion, current newspaper stories. I don't think the people who make movies will ever run out of material to steal from, er, "creatively enhance for the cinematic experience," no matter what happens with comic book characters.

It's hard to say. I'm reminded of the intro Spider Robinson put into one of his more recent Callahan's Place collections, where he deplored his declining sales.

Did he consider that maybe he had run out of ideas in that series, and should consider doing other work for a while? It is possible to exhaust the potentials of a concept. Or, to go in a more and more divergent path until there is only the same names by way of resemblance.

Graeme Cameron once listed a number of supporting characters in the STAR TREK movies who were unceremoniously killed off. They could have had a great variety of adventures in a rich and varied universe with a diverse cast. Instead it was Kirk/Spock/McCoy again and again, until the concept was exhausted (and the actors too).

ARISTOTLE AND THE FALL

Review by Joseph T Major of
11/22/63

by Stephen King
(Simon & Schuster Digital Sales; 2011;
ISBN 978-1-4516-2730-5; \$2.99)

L. Sprague de Camp gave both sides of the theory about bettering the past. *Lest Darkness Fall* (Unknown, December 1939; 1941) is about trying to make a change for the better. "Aristotle and the Gun" (*Astounding*, February 1958) has a less successful protagonist.

Jake Epping of Lisbon High School in Maine (write what you know) is confronted with the choice to make things better. A student writes an essay on "The Day that Changed My Life"; in this case, the day his father murdered his mother.

Jake has occasion to refer to this when he meets the keeper of the local eatery, and evokes a surprising response. Because, you see, Al of Al's Diner knows where there is a time portal.

This might be the delusion of a dying man, but Jake nevertheless tests it — and if it's a delusion, it's a shared one. He finds himself in 1957.

Being a careful would-be Martin Padway, Jake tries first to avert the murder that affected his student's life. He succeeds, and returns to his present, to find that the student is better off. Only, as Al warns him, another trip to the past would undo the previous one.

After some more experimentation, Jake tries the ultimate effort — prevent the assassination of John F. Kennedy. (He seems not to have read *Camelot and the Cultural Revolution* (2007), but he has the idea.)

King's portrayal of life in the fifties and sixties is incisive and striking. "The past is a foreign country" and Jake Epping is an illegal immigrant there. He takes on a dangerous plan to earn a living; making bets on sports events, which are for him sure things.

And he stalks Lee Harvey Oswald. (King accepts the Lone Nut theory. Oswald is absolutely linked to the fatal shot, and he did not play well with others, so being a conspirator is improbable.) Al left as his dying gift (he committed suicide to avoid the final ravages of cancer) not only money but a detailed timeline of Oswald's life.

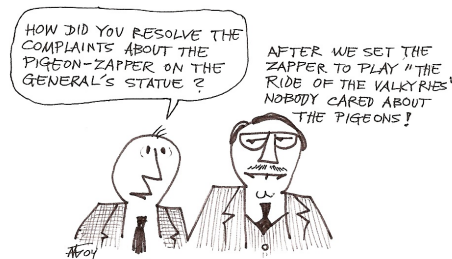
Gradually, Epping drifts to Texas, back into teaching. Which in turn gets him embroiled in not only personal but political attachments.

At this time we begin to see a problematic point. Epping had made a large bet with a bookie and of course won, and the bookie became threatening. In Texas, he tries again — and the bookie, having followed him there, has him badly beaten, causing among other things amnesia, and immobilizing him at a crucial moment.

And on the crucial day, the battered Jake sets out for Dallas on a desperate journey. Nothing seems to work, his car breaks down, he has bus problems . . . but he finally gets to the Texas School Book Depository, and history is broken.

Then, he persuades the president that he will disappear. How he will disappear is more than they know. And so, the anonymous hero returns to his present.

Which is a mess. Earthquakes, wars, collapse of the U.S. (Maine is now a province of Canada), and worse ensued. Sadly, like the hero of "Aristotle and the Gun", Jake decides he should have left well enough alone, but he can at least do so.



The story begins to break down when King gets melodramatic. The entire bookie subplot depends on a bookie so dumb he can't lay off a big bet, and so nasty he doesn't encourage the mark to keep on doubling down, since he'd lose eventually. Not to mention Jake being so slipshod as to patronize only one bookie, or not

deliberately lose a few bets as cover.

The magical terrors that mark the disruption of the time line are familiar; J. Neil Schulman, no less, had the same sort of thing in his *Twilight Zone* episode "Profile in Silver" (March 7, 1986 — this was the first revival series). And there are other mystical elements, including the man with the card with the colored spot who seems to be some sort of harbinger of the results of a time trip.

The idea that the efforts of the protagonist are canceled out and mean nothing is a recurring theme in fiction. See, for example, Michael Crichton's *Sphere* (1987). Jake doesn't quite go that far, and manages to save some things, but it's still a dismal setup. Like so much alternate history, it's Panglossian; our time line is the best of all possible worlds.

THE LAST LEGION

Review by Joseph T Major of
THE RED FIST OF ROME

by John Caliguri

(Amazon Digital Services; 2014;
ISBN 978-0991558209; \$5.99)

Roman alternate histories are rare, which is somewhat surprising since the very first alternate history was written by a Roman. [Oh, all right; Livy (T. Livius Patavinus).] John Maddox Roberts seems to be one of the few who could do it right, and his *Children of Hannibal* series never came to a conclusion.

The fifth century of the Christian Era was one of decline and degradation in the Western Roman Empire. In a Spelengian mode, the Augustii were incompetent puppets (Honorius, Valentinian) for powerful but insecure *magistri militum* such as Ricimer, Stilicho (see Wallace Breen's *Eagle in the Snow* (1970; reviewed in *Alexiad* V. 7 #3) for a portrayal of Stilicho's efforts and career), and Aëtius. The *magistri militum* were generally Romanized Germans, commanding armies that were mainly composed of German warbands.

Unfortunately, Caliguri's portrayal of Patrician Rome is not very good; an Augustan Rome with some names shuffled around, more or less. It can be done better. There's Breen, and David Drake had shown how to do a somewhat earlier era in *Birds of Prey* (1984). Anyhow, he has Aëtius defeating the Vandals and restoring the res publica.

I WILL BE STRONG

Review by Joseph T Major of
*BEATING PLOWSHARES INTO
SWORDS:*

An Alternate History of the Vietnam War
by F. C. Schaefer
(Amazon Digital Services; 2014; \$2.99)

ukithutu harbortam laitim
wahanitowtehem Imazmerowt

— Isaiah 2:4

kottu ittekem laharabowt
umazmerowt lirmahim

— Joel 3:10

Everyone cites Isaiah but how many cite Joel, who provides for the alternate eventuality? Oh all right, "They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks" and contrawise.

Schaefer has put forward an interesting idea of national government. Namely, in 1964, when to the immense joy of the professional military Robert McNamara is released from the Secretaryship of Defense to go ruin the World Bank a few years earlier than in our time line, President Johnson makes a bold, daring step in appointing a replacement. Let me make one thing perfectly clear, the new SecDef is not a crook.

Schaefer's style is also interesting; he has four distinct and different narrators, and no they do not interact directly, ranging from a middle-ranked officer who oversees the Vietnam buildup to an antiwar protestor. And he tries to give each a fair perspective.

The results may be disappointing; there's no nuclear confrontation followed by the breakup of the United States into fascist dictatorships run by motorcycle gangs followed by a sharing loving multicultural community. But then, there is also not a White Christian 100% American for America victorious and triumphant nation, either.

ALL IN THE FAMILY

Review by Joseph T Major of

ROG PHILLIPS' THE CLUB HOUSE:
Edited and with Annotations by Earl Terry Kemp

(The Last Stand; 2014; \$35.00)

What is a community? A community has connectivity. It may be possible for the majority of its members to know everyone; at the very least, any two members who don't know each other know someone who knows them both.

The nineteen-fifties were an in-between era; the heady days of youth, when teenagers (mostly boys) discovered that someone else also actually read that stuff had come and gone, the great flood of people who shared an interest with members of the group, but nothing beyond that interest was to come.

The foundation and origin of this group would be deeply argued, but the most prominent candidate was the publication that also begun its initial topic, the magazine *Amazing Stories*. As the group grew beyond this publication, as the field grew beyond it, there was still a core of interest. And, in the March issue for 1948 (available, in theory, the month before), fan Roger Phillips Graham, writing as "Rog Phillips", began a column for *Amazing* that reviewed the little amateur magazines by and for and about the group who read this stuff.

I spoke of community and connectivity. The editor responsible for bringing this view of the past to present view, Earl Terry Kemp, was the godson of Rog Phillips, and this labor of love stems from that time.

The fanzines reviewed here are long-gone. Most of the fans who published them have followed; or are the elder statesmen of the group, revered by the few who still remember, we who dwell . .

It was a community, if not a family, and yet there were those who were not known. It had its quarrels and its compassions. It had its gatherings and its separations. And in these reviews, there is a picture of that time that is so close and yet so lost, separated from us by the gulfs of time. The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there.

COFFEE

by Lisa

African Plains coffee. This is fine stuff. Deep, rich and smooth. Both Wal*mart and Valu Market carry this. It is the best of the store bought coffees I have had so far.

Lauren's Blend from Day's Coffee. An excellent blend.

French Roast Decaf from Trader Joe's. Nice coffee, deep and smooth. Not as good as African Plains but it comes close.

Chocolate Mint. Too much peppermint, not enough chocolate.

THE JOY OF HIGH TECH

by Rodford Edmiston

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

Mors Ab Alto

Many people don't realize that in addition to making beer, Coors has long been a laboratory ceramics manufacturer. In 1958 this led to them taking a contract to produce pneumatic actuators and control systems designed to operate while glowing white hot. Though today this technology is used in places such as steel mills, originally it had a military application. A very deadly military application.

As the nuclear strike force began to shift emphasis from bombers to missiles in the late Fifties many options were evaluated. The biggest objection to ballistic missiles — at least in the minds of some planners — was that once you lit the fuse that was that. With bombers — before aerial refueling mainly the very long endurance B-36, with most military aircraft from the mid-Fifties on being capable of refueling without landing — you could launch, move into a waiting position, and hold. Then return if the situation cooled.

One option explored to extend the wait time — as well as the range — was the nuclear powered bomber, which would have an endurance aloft similar to that of nuclear submarines below. However, exploration of the idea revealed some then — and in some cases still — insurmountable problems. Though one very heavily modified B-36 flew with a test reactor on board (it did not power the plane,

which used its conventional engines) this option turned out to be infeasible. One of the biggest problems was that a crash would likely render the area for a good distance around the wreck uninhabitable. Another problem was that the weight of the shielding required to protect the crew created a major penalty to performance. So, what if there were no crew to protect, and what if there were enemy lands you wanted to render uninhabitable?

Drones were nothing new, even in the Fifties. Radio controlled aircraft had been around since the teens, with a few being experimented with for the Great War (WWI). Autonomous cruise missiles entered warfare with the V1 Buzz Bomb. Shielding a small package of electronics from a reactor would be much easier than protecting a human crew compartment. So, research began on an atomic-powered, long-range cruise missile.



Of course, as long as you're making the thing nuclear powered you might as well make it Nuclear Powered! Make it supersonic, at least in the final dash to target. Oh, and make it expendable, but not too expendable. There is a minimum size for a true reactor, which produces much more power than you need for just a cruise missile, even one with long range. So make the thing a delivery vehicle, with nuclear submunitions it applies to multiple targets. Once those are expended, crash the delivery vehicle into an enemy facility.

To keep the weight low and improve

reliability make the propulsion system as simple as possible. A ramjet (or athodyd) is about as simple as a heat engine can get. Cold air in + hot air out = thrust. The higher the temperature of the heat source the better the thing works.

Ramjets aren't all that new, either. At least one ramjet powered plane flew in the late Thirties. Marquardt made chemical powered ramjets from the late Forties into the Sixties. They were used in a number of experimental vehicles, including the X-10 research drone. That vehicle was so successful Lockheed went on to make a target drone based on it. The only problem with that product is that it flew so high and fast it often outperformed the missiles used against it.

Hence the SLAM concept began evaluation and development. On January 1, 1957, the U.S. Air Force and the Atomic Energy Commission picked the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory to do the job. SLAM stands for Supersonic Low-Altitude Missile. The vehicle was planned to use a half gigawatt reactor, with the undertaking to develop that being named Project Pluto. Later that name also came to refer to the overall project.

Building the reactor was a major project all by itself. Ramjets work better the more energy they can supply to the working medium (that is, air). That meant the hotter they could run the reactor, the better. Achieving the thrust required for the planned top speed meant running the reactor very hot. Hot enough to produce 513 Megawatts from an object the size of a large desk. So hot no metal would retain enough strength to resist the pressures from the flowing air hitting the front of it. The planners decided to use ceramics, instead. Coors was contracted to make the reactor fuel elements and the pneumatic control systems from advanced ceramics. Marquardt built everything in the engine except the reactor itself.

The reactor prototype was called TORY-IIA and ran for the first time in May 1961. TORY-IIA was a proof-of-concept power plant not intended for an actual flight-rated ramjet. Instead, it was run on the ground, just to test the design for power output and durability. It was followed by the larger and more powerful TORY-IIC. The latter was run-up on the ground to full power on 20 May 1964. The TORY-IIC consisted of 465000 tightly packed small fuel rods of hexagonal cross-section, with about 27000 channels between them for the high-pressure airflow. Normally, a ramjet needs to move through the air to force air into the inlet. For the ground tests, the airflow was provided by a huge reservoir of compressed air, made from an enormous length of drilling pipe. TORY-IIC produced a thrust of about 170,000 Newtons (38000 lb) at a simulated airspeed of Mach 2.8. TORY-IIC was originally intended for use in the first flight tests, but operational missiles would probably have used a further

improved model called TORY-III. The latter was still in the design phase when the whole program was cancelled.

The structure of this extraordinary craft was — of necessity — so rugged the vehicle was sometimes called "The flying crowbar." One project member liked to say the propulsion system was about as durable as a bucket of rocks.

As with the SR-71, entire new ways of making equipment resistant to the high operating temperatures had to be developed. As well, some old reliables from other uses were repurposed. After a number of exotic materials had been tried and found wanting as a coating for electric motor armatures, engineers found that exhaust manifold paint — obtained through an ad in Hot Rod magazine — worked perfectly.

Interestingly, the exhaust turned out to be not particularly radioactive. In fact, chemical poisoning from erosion of the beryllium oxide ceramic used would have been about as toxic in the exhaust as the radiation. Of course, the exhaust didn't need to be particularly dangerous, since the vehicle had an essentially unshielded half-Gigawatt reactor as the power source. The flight plan was to launch with solid rocket boosters to ramjet speed then climb and

ballistic missiles came into service there was worry about anti-ballistic missile systems, while aircraft and standard cruise missiles would be vulnerable to the more conventional anti-aircraft systems. SLAM would have been nearly impossible to intercept, even though it was the opposite of stealthy.

Despite what some have said and written about SLAM, it did not have infinite range. Within a couple of weeks the daughter products of the fission occurring in that hyperactive reactor would have begun reducing output. However, with a cruising range at 9000 meters of 182,000 kilometers and at 300 meters of 21,300 kilometers — at Mach 4.2 and 3.5 respectively — this thing could go anywhere on Earth in under six hours... and keep on going! It could be launched to a holding area, orbit there for a few days, then either bring armageddon or fly into the deepest part of the ocean.

SLAM was effectively a lifting body, with tiny canard "wings" which were all-moving control surfaces, plus a Y tail. As planned, the vehicle was 26.8 meters long and 1.5 meters in diameter through the widest part of the body. The nose, leading edges and the body around the reactor would all have glowed bright orange during the attack phase, with the exhaust nozzle glowing yellow-white. The engine area and exhaust nozzle from the heat of the reactor, and the rest from air friction.

Pluto benefited from the nuclear rocket programs underway during roughly the same period, and they benefitted from it. Both required a very compact, very high-energy, very hot reactor. One of the interesting things about the nuclear rockets which used hydrogen as a working medium (not as a fuel) was that under operating temperatures the graphite reactor moderator would combine with the working mass to produce methane. This would not only erode the core but lower performance by adding mass of a greater molecular weight than the hydrogen to the exhaust stream.

Pluto/SLAM was cancelled on July 1, 1964, and even those working on it weren't really sad to see it go. However, many of the technologies live on. Besides the ceramic pneumatic systems mentioned above, the project developed terrain following radar. This is today used for both manned aircraft, and drones and cruise missiles.

There might actually be a use for the concept of a nuclear ramjet. The propulsion system can't be used in space, because it requires an atmosphere to work. However, that doesn't need to be our atmosphere. If we can make sure there's no life in the clouds of Venus or the gas giants we could use something similar to SLAM to explore them. Trust me, if you want to explore much of Jupiter, you need something fast just to get around Papa Jove in a reasonably timely manner.

I'll close with a bit of a digression. In what may be entirely coincidence, in 1958 the movie *The Lost Missile* debuted. The titular object



accelerate to cruise conditions. It would move to a Go/No Go position and wait to be sent into battle, or to the bottom of the deep ocean. If it did go on the attack, it would dive to barely above treetop height to avoid radar, while flying to its targets at about Mach 3. The sonic boom alone would have pulped most living things under its path, while the radiation and heat from the reactor would sterilize everything.

Note the attack flight plan. Even after

was a huge, fusion powered rocket, protected from atmospheric heating by a magnetic sheath. It was discovered flying over the Arctic above a Soviet Bloc country. Unfortunately, the Soviets try to shoot it down, and cause it to begin flying around the Earth at an altitude of five miles. Researchers in the US speculate it is an alien craft, damaged by the Soviet attack and sent out of control. If it isn't stopped, it will eventually fly over all the Earth. Was the ball-of-twine flight path planned from the beginning, or an accident? Is there even anyone left alive aboard after the attack?

One of the more laudable features of the story is that the rocket's origin is speculated, with no way to know for certain where it came from or what it was doing before being struck by that missile.

Between the sonic boom and the heat and ionizing radiation of the fusion drive, it is destroying everything it flies over. In just under an hour it will reach New York.

The movie is told in near real time and except for one bizarre gaff is close to hard science fiction. That one gaff unfortunately not only involves someone saying that plutonium gives off "the most dangerous radiation known to man" but has that be an important plot point. Plutonium's natural radiation is primarily alpha particles, which can be stopped by a few inches of air or the layer of dead cells on the outside of the skin.

Aside from that — and a bit too much emphasis on a subplot involving one nuclear researcher trying to reach his pregnant wife in time for the birth of their child, plus a case of Stock Footage Syndrome of aircraft taking off and missiles launching — the move is recommended.

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TWICE UPON A TIME

Two Stories: *Frankenweenie* &
ParaNorman
Commentary by Taral Wayne



Neither film is new enough to bother with reviewing in detail, but I thought it would be worthwhile comparing them, even at this late date.

The original *Frankenweenie* was one of

Tim Burton's first films, a 30-minute short made for Disney that resulted in the studio firing his morbid ass. Since then, he had long wanted to re-tell the story at feature length. The other film is *ParaNorman*, made by Laika Studios, the same animators who worked on Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*. It is odd that there should be two undisputed Masters of the Light Macabre, but also that two such similar films should be made in the same year. It does make you wonder if there really are Forces Beyond Our Comprehension.

Or perhaps the coincidence is due to nothing more than the army of finks, squealers and industrial spies working in Hollywood. We'll leave that question unanswered.

The Burton film shows its origins in the 1984 live-action film for Disney. Not only are both *Frankenweenies* thinly disguised homages to those 1950s Universal monster movies, that Burton loved as a kid, they also follow almost identical plots. Little Victor Frankenstein — an otherwise ordinary suburban American kid who lives and breathes horror movies — has a dog, Sparky. Sparky is run over in the street, but Victor has learned from school that electricity is the source of the Life Force. Using equipment that may as well have been borrowed from the set for the 1931 *Frankenstein*, Victor brings Sparky to life again with lightning. The aftermath is fairly predictable. People scream and look for the nearest torch or pitchfork to chase the monster down. There is a big confrontation at the end of the film in which the misunderstood "monster" shows that it has a heart of gold. Victor's parents and neighbors all learn that "monsters" can be good as well as evil.

The chief difference between the 1984 short and 2012 remake is a sub-plot about jealous students at Victor's school. They learn Victor's secret and try to duplicate it, with disastrous results that shout "padding" in the same ear-splitting shriek of the bikini babe at the Black Lagoon, just before the "gill creature" grabs her.

The inserted section is only sometimes funny, and in no way contributes to the plot. The 1984 film got to exactly the same point without the padding.

I have to admit, too, that I spend a good deal of time throughout *Frankenweenie* feeling that I had just witnessed a well-placed homage, but hadn't the foggiest idea what it was. Yes, I understood the white streak in the poodle's hair, and thought I understood the multiplying "Sea Monkeys." (Remember "Sea Monkey," from the backs of comic books, that were just tiny brine shrimp?) Unfortunately, I was mystified by other things that obviously possessed deep meaning for Tim Burton. What was the significance of an archaic, drunkenly-leaning Dutch windmill at the edge of town? Was it a scene from *Frankenstein*? I don't know. I never saw the original movie. Was I missing references to films like *The Fly* or *The Blob*, that I wasn't familiar with either? I had the nagging suspicion that I was. Clearly, *Frankenweenie* is a film from which horror film

buffs will get the most.

For all that *ParaNorman* is also a film animated by stop-motion, and like *Frankenweenie* also belongs to the horror genre, there are remarkable differences the two films. The most obvious of those differences is that it follows an altogether dissimilar plot. Norman sees ghosts, but naturally no one believes him, and his parents actively discourage their son from talking about his talent openly — it makes Norman look abnormal. But the fact is that Norman *does* see ghosts, and the gift has come down to him from generation to generation. A smelly, disheveled, crazy old uncle who lives in a creaky, junk-piled, old house on the edge of town is the current possessor of a secret ceremony, which must be performed every year on the same date to keep the town safe ... or something terrible will happen! The uncle must pass the secret on to Norman, but of course, nobody wants Norman to go anywhere near him ... not even Norman. The secret is only partly passed on before the uncle abruptly drops dead, leaving the problem of how to perform the ceremony squarely in Norman's lap.

Another of the intriguing differences between the two films was apparent by this time. In *Frankenweenie*, the characters tend to be stereotypes. They exist only to remind you of Vincent Price playing a mad scientist, to be creepy like Peter Lorre, or to be the fat, stupid kid on the block who you don't trust. The characters in *ParaNorman* were all people in their own right, however, and capable of delivering unexpected twists. One of those twists is, in fact, the principal pay-off at the end of the film. If you haven't seen *ParaNorman*, I won't spoil it for you. In fact, every character is broadly realistic, important in his own way, and well worth the time spent getting to know them — even the monsters.

While *ParaNorman* is at least as funny a film as *Frankenweenie*, it doesn't require any foreknowledge of the viewer to understand the humour. It is not a film buff's film. Oddly enough, it is also at times a frightening movie, which *Frankenweenie* frankly never is, even when the "bad" monsters are running amok. When the real threat to the town in which Norman lives is revealed not to be the one everyone thinks is the threat, but something much more dangerous, the movie shifts gears to become downright scary. The final evil in the story is not something dragged out of an EC comic book, but the result of a terrible injustice done to the most innocent of people. The scene in which Norman faces this injustice is literally electrifying ... and ends with an unexpectedly tender scene in which peace is restored in a manner which will bring a tear to the eye of all but the most unsentimental souls. (You know who you are, you unfeeling brutes.)

While both movies are entertaining from beginning to end, and well worth watching if you're inclined to animated films at all, the chief difference between the two comes to this:

Frankenweenie was Tim Burton going through the motions of sharing a second-hand experience. He loved the old black and white horror movies he grew up with, and obviously he hopes you did too. But it lacks not only colour, but a third dimension.

ParaNorman may not be as sophisticated a film, in that it eschews Burton's self-referential showmanship, but it is a movie about deeper issues, and with real characters to play their parts in resolving them.

See both, if you can. But if only one, let it be *ParaNorman*.

ParaNorman

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1623288/>

Frankenweenie

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1142977/>

Windycon 41

Con Report by Leigh Kimmel

Windycon is an annual literary science fiction convention held in the fall in the Chicago area. This year's Windycon was held over the weekend of November 14-16, 2015 at the Westin Yorktown in Lombard, Illinois, one of the western suburbs of Chicago.

Because we wanted to be able to start loading in as soon as they opened the dealers' room doors on Friday, but didn't want to have to leave Indianapolis so early we'd arrive exhausted, we drove up on Thursday. We had one false start when we discovered my husband had left his keys in his other coat and we had to go back for them, but after that we made pretty good time. Our worst problem on the drive was the strong wind, which made the van handle badly and probably did things to our gas mileage. We did have a slight slowdown while we were in the Loop, but after that things went smoothly.

When we arrived, we stopped by the main hotel to scope things out. The weather was forecast to be too cold for the hotel to allow us to use the roll-up door beside the dealers' room to load in, so we wanted to take a look at the loading dock we were supposed to use. However, we couldn't really tell where it was, and we couldn't find anybody from con or hotel staff who could give us any definitive answers.

At that point there was nothing for us to do but head over to the nearby hotel where we were staying and get checked in. At least this year we knew how to get in and out, so we had a lot less trouble finding it. We got our personal possessions moved into the room and settled in for the evening. I pulled out an old novel I've been trying to rewrite for indie publishing and set to work on some particularly difficult passages.

On Friday morning we got up bright and early to enjoy the hotel's complimentary breakfast. Then we headed over to the main

hotel and discovered that they'd started loading in dealers early. We got ourselves a place in the loading dock area and started hauling stuff in, but because of the lousy logistics that required us to haul every load down a long corridor, combined with a lack of gophers, we were still setting up when the doors opened for business. As a result, we pretty much lost that day to sales.

When the dealers' room closed, we headed over to the con suite to get some munchies. We'd been talking about visiting some of the parties, but my husband was so sore from the heavy labor of load-in and setup that he just wanted to rest. So we headed back to our sleeping room and I made a few notes on a new novel idea before we turned in for the night.

On Saturday we had the complimentary breakfast at our hotel, then headed over to the main hotel to visit the con suite before the dealers' room opened. Once we got our dealer tables open for business, we were starting to feel somewhat more energized and positive about our situation. Sales were slow at first, but soon picked up and we even had some big sales. Of course one simply can't count on big sales as one's bread and butter, but by the end of the day I felt reasonably confident that we'd made expenses and would be able to justify returning.

We headed over to the con suite to have some munchies while we waited for the parties to begin. I pulled out a notebook and made some more notes on the new novel idea.

There were several interesting parties, including a bid party for a Washington DC Worldcon. They had some really nice munchies, but after last year's unpleasant experience, I firmly restrained myself from eating everything I might've liked. I knew that I could not afford to be sick and miserable on Sunday, when we'd need to load out and drive home. After we'd pretty well covered all the parties, we headed back to our sleeping room and turned in for the night.

On Sunday we got up and had breakfast. Then we packed up our personal possessions and got checked out of our sleeping room before heading over to the main hotel. Because the weather forecast was really bad, we decided to start packing early in order to make sure we had as much time as possible for load-out. Even so, we still made a number of sales while we were packing, a process that was helped by a young couple who responded to our request for assistance.

By the time I got the van into the loading dock and started carrying out, the snow was coming right down. All we could do at that point was carry out as fast as we could and get things loaded up, but nothing wanted to load properly and I had to rearrange things several times. I also had the problem of needing to have certain items where I could pull them easily because we couldn't sell them at the following weekend's convention and I didn't want them coming with us by mistake.

We weren't on the road long before we started running into trouble. The roads were getting steadily more nasty, especially after we got out of the Chicago area and were heading south on I-65. There were times when I was barely able to go 20 MPH, and I could see vehicles off the road on either side. We even talked about finding some place to stop for the night, but by the time we found any suitable place, the worst was behind us and we were so close to Indianapolis that it didn't seem to make sense any more to stop. So we did make it home, but it was almost midnight, and by the time we carried in our personal possessions and got wound down from the stressful drive, it was almost 1AM.



Loscon 42

Con Report by Robert S. Kennedy

On Thanksgiving afternoon, as usual, I drove down to the LAX Marriott. I always do this because the traffic is much less than it would be on Friday morning. The distance is about 50 miles and I made it in about one hour and five minutes.

After checking in and getting things set up my room I went back down to the lobby. There was Milt Stevens. We talked for a while, and then went to dinner. I had the

Thanksgiving Special even though I normally cannot finish it all and that is what happened. But, it's Thanksgiving and I have to have a Thanksgiving Dinner. After dinner we went down to the Ballroom Level and received our badges. Then I wandered around a bit and went back to my room, read for awhile, then to bed.

Friday morning I had the breakfast buffet with the always enjoyed Eggs Benedict, bacon, toast, potatoes, and juice. Things didn't start happening until about 11:30 a.m. so I just kind of wandered around checking out the tables and taking with the representative of Helsinki in 2017. I don't take notes so I'll just mention the sessions attended—Ethnicity in Espionage; Private Spaceflight: Is it Safe?; The Travel Experience Aboard Zeppelins. The session on Zeppelins was incredibly interesting with excellent slides. In between sessions the Dealers Room was visited. The first day I just check it out to see what is available and if there is anything that really interests me and might be purchased later. Also, I signed up for *Loscon 42*. After dinner it was back to the room for some reading. Then it was time for the Ice Cream Social. This time they not only had a tub of Chocolate Chip, they had two tubs! After ice cream it was time for the Lux Reunion Theater. It was a reunion of some of the Luz Theater players with some of them taking several parts. It was great having the long missed players return. Back to the room for some reading and sleep.

Saturday was not a busy day. The only session I have marked as having attended was *How the Soviets Lost the Moon Race*. It was quite interesting with a slide show. Most of the rest of the time was spent in the Dealers Room and Art Show. I also had another long conversation with the representative of Helsinki in 2017, paid for a Pre Supporting, and purchased a T-shirt. If you think that I would like to see Helsinki win you are correct. I will not, however, be going to Finland. My memory is failing me as I do not remember what I did the rest of the day. That evening was the Masquerade. As I remember there were only four or five participants and none of them children. Very disappointing. It entails a great deal of work for the people running the Masquerade. I'll repeat myself and say again that the Masquerade should probably be cancelled. The Half Time Show was Macabre Fantasy Radio Theater. They performed a couple of radio shows. I really don't remember what they were other than that they were enjoyable. (Boy, my mind must really be going.) I didn't stay for the awards. It was back to the room, read, and to bed.

Sunday I attended *The Most Valuable Real Estate in the Solar System and Sex, Politics and Religion in Science Fiction*, or, *Whatever Happened to New Wave SF?* At the latter I noticed the badge of the person sitting next to me and immediately showed her my badge. She was R-Lauraine Tutihasi. As Lauraine

said, now we can put faces to names.

Then it was time to go home. I usually leave early. Nothing was purchased in the Dealers Room or the Art Show. Despite some traffic I made it home in about one hour and ten minutes. After unpacking and putting things away it was off to dinner at the Lure Fish House.

Hispacon XXXII / MIRcon

The 32nd Spanish national science fiction convention,

December 6 to 8 in Montcada i Reixac

Reported by Sue Burke

Saturday, December 6, Constitution Day Madrid - Moncada i Reixac

Due to its outstanding punctuality, Spain's world-leading National Transplant Organization has added the country's high-speed trains to its transportation network, so when I boarded my 9 a.m. train, there might have been a passenger with a human kidney in a cooler. In any case, due to the long holiday weekend, the train was full.

It was an uneventful trip. I needed only 25 minutes to get from my front door into my seat at the train station a few blocks away, and the train left 15 minutes later. We sped through fields of either brown bare fallow soil or feltlike-green winter wheat sprouts, and the landscape slowly grew more arboreous as we neared the Mediterranean Coast, covering 621 kilometers/386 miles in 2.5 hours.

I was headed for Montcada i Reixac, a suburb of 35,000 nestled in the mountains 20 kilometers north of Barcelona. As in previous years, the Hispacon's local organizers, the Urànik Collective, found a willing collaborator in their home town municipality. The name of the town led to the alternate convention name, MIRcon, and its handsome logo: the Mir space station orbiting Earth along with Star Wars' Death Star and Star Trek's Enterprise.

My trip got trickier in Barcelona as I tried to figure out the commuter trains to Montcada i Reixac, but I ran into a friend and her boyfriend, and we compared notes and thought we had everything under control. Then we found out the hard way ("Hey, wasn't that our station?") that on holidays, some Route 3 trains skip some small stops. So we got off at the next available station, waited a half-hour, got on a train going the other way that did pause at Montcada-Ripollet, got out, and walked a couple of blocks to the hotel. As the weekend wore on, we learned we were not alone in our Route 3 adventure.

As a result, we arrived right on time for the lunch break, having missed some interesting morning panels. The hotel was located at the edge of a warehouse-industrial park area and alongside a small shopping mall, so our best choice was Viena, a sandwich shop chain in the mall – good food, freshly made, and not too expensive.

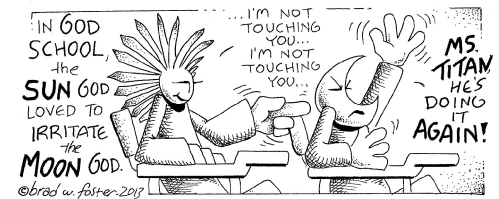
Then I picked up my welcome pack with

five books, a souvenir button, and several cards and bookmarks, and unpacked. Although most of the events were at the hotel, some were located at the municipal theater-library several blocks away, and I hiked over to hear a talk by one of the guests of honor, Aliette de Bodard, who discussed the background to her Xuya series, translated from English to Spanish by her interviewer.

After that I hit the sales area in the lobby, interested in picking up certain books, but the eight stands weren't carrying them, so I bought a Dr. Who tee-shirt for my husband as a Christmas present, went back to the hotel and caught a humorous talk on why politicians shouldn't read science fiction. The funniest jokes – all true – were about a classic Spanish space opera series, the Aznar Saga, and the misplaced interest it aroused among politicians when José María Aznar became prime minister in 1996.

I returned to the theater, caught the end of a talk by Miquel Barceló, a mainstay in fandom, and then saw some short fan-fiction videos about *Doctor Who* by Vision Factory. The amateur actors looked astoundingly like the real actors, and, entertainingly, The Doctor and his companions spoke Spanish. While the stories suffered from small budgets, they did their best to be creatively dramatic and fit seamlessly into the canon. Earlier that evening, a Zombie Walk led by Guest of Honor Carlos Sisi had attracted about 20 people, so the audience was littered with walking dead in varying states of death and decay.

Then I went to the library-theater bar and had a beer with friends, and on my way back to the hotel saw some other friends in a café in the shopping mall (the hotel had no bar), had another beer with them, then went to bed, although *Plan 9 From Outer Space* and *Night of the Living Dead* were being shown at the theater starting at 10 p.m.



Sunday, December 7 Montcada i Reixac

The hotel had a nice breakfast including dark chocolate croissants, and I was well-fed and ready when events began at 10 a.m. I attended a presentation of *Mañana todavía* (Still Tomorrow), an anthology of a dozen short dystopia stories. Its editor mentioned that because it had "dystopia" on the cover, at least one bookstore shelved it in the Young Adult section.

As on Saturday, five tracks of activities

were going on at once. Three conference center halls in the hotel held book presentations, round tables, and talks, along with the Aznarcon, a convention within a convention for Aznar Saga enthusiasts. On all three days, the municipal library-theater housed MIRcat, a Catalan-language track with similar activities. MIRcon Jr. at the municipal youth center featured presentations by authors.

According to the organizers, 155 people signed up for the convention and another 70 attended – municipal patronage meant that all events had to be free and open to the public (except for the award dinner, obviously). An additional 80 people attended MIRcon Jr., 50 attended MIRcat, and 15 participated in a writing workshop. Sunday evening's *Game of Thrones*-style Night's Watch swearing of the guard, held at a venerable oak tree in the town's main square, attracted 90 people.

I spent Sunday morning listening to authors, including an unscheduled chat by Aliette de Bodard in fairly good Spanish – how many languages does she speak? After another lunch at Viena, activities moved to the municipal theater for talks by the other guests of honor. Christopher Priest said books are metaphors, and “we like them the most when they're the most invented.” Nina Allan discussed new weird. Karin Tidbeck showed successive drafts of a story to illustrate the creative process. Finally Félix J. Palma disappointed some editors when he said he planned to concentrate on novels and would write no more short stories.

Then it was time for the awards dinner back at the hotel. At each place setting we found a miniature of the black and white “monolith” given out for the Ignottus Award, Spain's equivalent of the Hugos, presented by the Asociación Española de Fantasía, Ciencia Ficción y Terror (AEFCFyT). It may have been the abundant wine, but our table had lots of fun with our “miniliths.”

The winners were:

Novel: *Memoria de tinieblas* (Memories of Darkness) by Eduardo Vaquerizo

Foreign Novel: *Embassytown* by China Miéville

Foreign Story: “El hombre que puso fin a la Historia: documental” (The Man Who Ended History: A Documentary) by Ken Liu
Best Novella: “Detective” by Rodolfo Martínez

Short Story: “El aeropuerto del fin del mundo” (The Airport at the End of the World) by Tamara Romero

Anthology: *Terra Nova II*, edited by Mariano Villarreal and Luis Pestarini

Non-Fiction Book: *La 100cia ficción de Rescepto* (Rescepto sC_ience Fiction) by Sergio Mars

Article: “La ciencia ficción española” (Spanish Science Fiction), by Mariano Villarreal

Illustration: Cover art for *Memoria de tinieblas* by Eduardo Vaquerizo

Audiovisual Production: Los VerdHugos

(The Hugo Hangmen) podcast by Miquel Codony, Pedro Román, Elías F. Combarro and Joseph Maria Oriol

Magazine: Scifiworld

Website: Tie. Cuentos para Algernon (Stories for Algernon) by Marcheto (<http://cuentosparaalgernon.wordpress.com>), and La tercera fundación (The Third Foundation) by the 'Los Conseguidores' Association for the Diffusion of Fantastic Literature (<http://www.tercerafundacion.net>)

Gabriel Award for Lifetime Achievement: Antoni Garcés, artist

Domingo Santos Short Story Award: “La oscura majestad de la Dama Cuervo” (The Dark Majesty of Lady Raven) by Juan Angel Laguna Edroso



Monday, December 8, Immaculate Conception
Montcada i Reixac – Madrid

AEFCFyT, one of the sponsors of the Hispacon, met first thing to handle business matters, and as a member I came and voted on the budget and some minor technical changes in Ignottus Award rules.

Then I had to leave for my presentation with Mariano Villarreal for *Castles in Spain / Castillos en el aire*. This is a bilingual anthology we plan to produce at the end of 2015 of ten of Spain's most historically important science fiction, fantasy, and horror short stories. An Indiegogo campaign from January to March is collecting funds for minimal payments to the translators, always the hurdle for bringing literature from one language to another. Learn more (and support us!) at <http://igg.me/at/CastlesInSpain>

After three more sessions, it was time for lunch – at Viena again – and then we toddled off to the train station, this time checking and rechecking the Route 3 schedule. It was chilly on the train station the platform, and it had been cold all weekend, even in the hotel conference center and municipal theater. Somehow the ventilation systems could only run on “arctic” and “stifling,” usually favoring chill, so we attended many events in coats.

But it could have been worse. The days before MIRcon were marked with deluges and flash floods. On the day after, a windstorm killed three people in the Barcelona area, and it crashed a tree onto the Route 3 tracks, derailing

the train and severely injuring the engineer. Instead we all enjoyed quiet trips home.

Next year's Hispacon will be held in Granada on October 31 to November 2, and we spent the awards dinner trying to convince the organizer, who was sitting at our table, to include a group visit to the Alhambra, possibly with Washington Irving as Ghost of Honor. The following Hispacon will be held jointly with Bcon, the 2016 Eurocon, in Barcelona on November 4 to 6.

WORLDCON BIDS

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

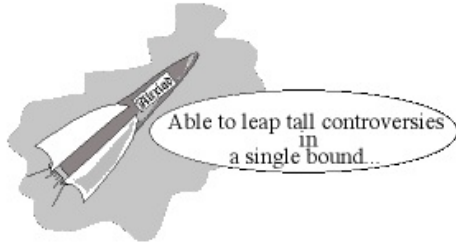
2022

Chicago
Thanks to Mike Glyer for the updates.

Latest church sign:

**WHOEVER IS
PRAYING FOR SNOW
PLEASE STOP**

Letters, we get letters



From: **Evelyn Leeper** January 4, 2015
eleeper@optonline.net

Page 2: "Un mayo-deciembre marriage"? Surely that should be "un mayo-deciembre matrimonio", or better yet, "un matrimonio mayo-deciembre matrimonio". :-)

Ah, but remember that Doña Cayetana was of Scots ancestry, a descendant of the Stuarts, so a macaronic comment es en ordre.
 — José

From: **Milt Stevens** January 7, 2015
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In *Alexiad* #78, John Thiel attributes the earliest idea of a utopia to Plato. Maybe. One definition of a utopia is an intellectual's idea of how other people ought to live. Plato really doesn't give much information on how people lived in the Republic. He outlined how the government worked and indicated that women participated in the government. Presumably women had approximate equality with men. The plan for government was adopted by the Vatican and has been in use for the better part of 2000 years. That makes it a pretty good plan. The government plan would work no matter what gods you worshipped, what marriage customs you followed, or whether you allowed people to eat bagels in public.

I think the Garden of Eden qualifies as an earlier utopian idea. I can't say it appeals to me, but many people think it sounds like a good idea. If Eve hadn't shown some initiative, she and Adam would have spent the rest of eternity as neuter house pets. On second thought, it doesn't seem they were allowed in the house, so I guess they were outdoor pets. If we accept this story as reality, I'm very glad we exhibited curiosity rather than obedience. Without curiosity, we'd be damned dull company.

It sounds like *Excellent Sheep* accepts the idea that admission to ivy league colleges is based on merit or lack of it. I don't think I ever believed that. I believed most of the

students at such schools were members of a particular social class. The schools also admit a few plebian workaholic geniuses for the sake of appearances. Most people think college degrees are a way of letting people in. Their main function is really to keep people out. Ivy league degrees are better than most for doing that.

When I was in the Navy I met one guy who was a Harvard graduate. That was Mr. Cheevah from Hahvad. Within five minutes of meeting Mr. Cheevah, he would inform you he came from Harvard. It is true that without his degree from Harvard people would have thought he had a speech impediment. Fortunately for me, I was a JG and he was an ensign. That meant I didn't have to take him seriously. Of course, sailors don't take anyone seriously. Mr. Cheever wasn't a bad egg, and he eventually stopped taking himself so seriously.

You wouldn't meet Ensign
 Cheevah from Hahvad now. Ivy
 Leaguers don't go into the military
 any more.
 —JTM

From: **Joy V. Smith** January 11, 2015
 8925 Selph Road, Lakeland, FL 33810-
 0341 USA
Pagadan@aol.com

I hope you're feeling better. All the best to you and Lisa.

Speaking of Churchill — *The Churchill Factor: How One Man Made History* — I read recently that it was Churchill who enabled Turing to go ahead with his Enigma work after someone had turned him down for a grant or something.

Thanks for the background on L. Sprague de Camp and his early works now available on Amazon. I wasn't aware of any of them. I do have his *Rivers of Time* collection.

And I learned even more from your readers' LOCs; I always enjoy Sue Burke's news from Spain. Speaking of typewriters and computers, I bought my old Royal typewriter with my baby sitting money. Thinking back to the time of correction ribbons and Wite-Out, I love my computer, even though I detoured to it via a Brother word processor — and worked hard transferring mss to a computer!

I really enjoyed your Starfleet officer profile derived from fan fiction, which I'm only vaguely aware of, though I know they play fast and loose with other characters and their relationships . . .

You did notice that she didn't
 mention her father.
 — JTM

From: **Sheryl A. Birkhead** January 5-7, 2015
 22509 Jonnie Court, Gaithersburg, MD
 20882-3422 USA

I suspect the weather there is similar to here — just a "tad" on the chilly side. My brother and his family went to London for Christmas . . . then went over to Barcelona and hit a few more spots before heading back. In a week or two the two of them head off again for another looonnnng cruise — just in time to avoid the snow and ice. must be nice!

I stopped off to wish a friend happy holidays and asked how her cold blood (I think Bally is an Irish Sport Horse) is doing. Turns out she decided to re-tire him along with Patrick — her off-the-track retired Thoroughbred. She is a nurse and keeps working to be able to keep them both in the manner to which they have become accustomed. She had told me that when the time came, she would not get another horse. Well . . . she popped out her smart phone and showed me a picture of a gorgeous blue paint. She had done a lot of research and found a breeder who specialize in the Thoroughbred/Paint/Draft cross. This is her first mare and at 4 V2 is just a youngster who has only been under saddle for 60 days. I believe Sue said she already comes in at 16 V2 hands and is still growing rapidly. Right now Sue is paying to keep her about an hour away with the trainer and driving up every day or two. After all the holiday and weather stuff she will trailer her down to the barn where she has kept both Patrick and Bally — where the manager is also a trainer. I have not asked, but I imagine (and this is a perfect cross for it) she hopes to show in dressage. She showed Bally for a year or two (transitioning him from jumping) until leg and neck issues made under saddle work too painful for him- let's hear it for insurance! Indie (from Indiana and also Indigo Blue) is gorgeous from the one pic I saw. I look forward to meeting her. Sue is tall and Bally is probably between 16.5 and 17 hands—but I'd guess Indie is going to end up even taller. Luckily she has the width and depth from the Draft component without the super slender Thoroughbred legs.

Just took a quick peek at the current temps here and there — we are behind you by about 5 degrees. At that temperature, it really doesn't matter all that much. it's cold.

The cardiologist has suggested coffee sans caffeine (since I don't like coffee and don't need the jump start). He says the good results to liver and heart are not based on caffeine. I looked at the straws of de-cafe which make it easy to "brew" a cup. Agh- the Starbucks pack for sale in the grocery store is \$8 and (to me at least) tastes awful. I have never liked the instant (or the brewed, but brewed in better even to one who doesn't like...) stuff- but at least diluting it with Taster Choice helps--and I can thin it with "creamer". Obviously I am not one to comment on the good points of coffee. That having been said, the mere thought of cinnamon . . . yeech.

Yeah, Harlan moved out and Jerry moved into the same room!

Read in the NASFA Shuttle that Sue Mason

won the Roister Award congrats!

For those eligible- remember that now it is 2015, the Hugo nomination season is officially here. Start thinking about it now and remember to fill in all the blanks if you feel qualified! This year I will be able to nominate, but without any kind of membership in Sasquan I won't be able to vote or do much beyond this. Ali yes, but the roof is almost paid off — no savings left, but...

Mr.D.— I am a very poor typist. While I LOVE a typer, I must admit that typing a bc on one now would really irritate the heck out of me since I could not go back and correct the spelling etc. Of course I am talking about the non-electric non-word processing machines. I liked having different color ribbons that I would use — one color for upper case etc — but they were getting more and more difficult to locate and now I doubt (m)any people remember them.

It would appear that this is going to be short — I still have not dealt with any of the ideas, sketches I have and the pile of zines screaming for attention continues to grow. Yeah, one more zine into the responded to pile isn't a deal breaker, but it does help. . .

So — stay warm — and laugh a lot — it does help!

From: **Lloyd Penney** January 14, 2015
1706-24 Eva Road, Etobicoke, ON
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penneys@bell.net
<http://lloydpenney.livejournal.com/>

I haven't done this in a long time...I missed an issue of *Alexiad*, and might have come close to missing a second. Time to get caught up and say some things about issues 77 and 78.

77...I hope you've been able to get past Christmas and New Year's, and are into a more positive 2015, especially on the job front. I am disappointed at the fact there are fewer books out there, and fewer places to find them, but I am not surprised. Reading and publishing, plus editorial work and running a bookstore, are becoming as old-fashioned as barrel-coopering.

The finding of one of Sir John Franklin's ships has been a huge media event, mostly drummed up by the CBC, and especially by none other than Prime Minister Stephen Harper. CBC has been giving this airtime for years because the chief correspondent, Peter Mansbridge, went up there himself to see what it was all about. The PM is involved in this because it smacks of true adventure, something so rare these days, and he is always in campaign mode, so anything like this should be good for a few votes.

When we were planning to go to Loncon 3, we won the lottery, and had a room at the Aloft, across the path from the front of the ExCeL. Ah, if only... In the long run all a hotel does for you at a convention is store your luggage in the day time, and your weary

body at night.

The local...you say that perhaps the Klingons might have been Jewish, or perhaps the Ferengis. I know in the original series, the Klingons represented the Russians, trying to gain territory against the Federation/Americans. In more modern shows, with all their ceremonies and honours, I thought the Klingons were more ancient Japanese than anything else. Thank you to John Purcell, Sheryl Birkhead and Rich Dengrove...yes, we've been fully employed for some time now, more than 6 months, and our steampunk business is perking along. We don't get out much to sell, but when we do, we do fairly well. Thank you all of you for your kind words. Time for us to redirect those good feelings towards the editor of this fine fanzine.

I haven't been infested with bad SF novels; in fact, I've read very little lately. I suspect that social media is to blame for that, and ultimately, me to blame for that.

My loc...we did indeed meet Lev Grossman at the Toronto International Book Festival, got lots of autographs, and reminded him of the various Magicians programming at the Reno Worldcon. Some very good memories, and I hope there is reason to meet up with Lev again soon. The convention in Guelph, Genrecon, was a great time, and a profitable one, too.

78...I understand you so well, Joe. I've been unemployed much more than Yvonne has over the years, and if it wasn't for her paying the bills, and keeping the two of us fed and clothed, I don't know where I would be right now. We have good women to help keep us going, and bless their loving hearts.

If I was to try to help someone get into reading SF, I have no idea where I'd look. I am completely out of touch with SF, books, magazines, authors, readers...I know almost nothing about the modern-day SF. That's probably the main reason Yvonne and I have moved onto steampunk and Murdoch Mysteries fandom, which is definitely a thing. Fandom and time march on, and we just can't keep up any more.

On the other hand you did miss RaceFail, RequiresHate, and other crucial events of the blogosphere.

Greetings to Al du Pisani; it has been a very long time. Al, are you still connected with the club in Johannesburg? I still get *Probe* from them.

Joseph, I think this is it. I think I will have letters on three issues in the next issue, if you choose to publish them, and I hope you will. I would not wish what I went through with unemployment on anyone, and I hate to see anyone else going through it. We wish you the very best in finding some meaningful employment, and I hope this appeal goes through. Take care, and see you next issue. I will try my best not to screw it up.

From: **George W. Price** January 15, 2015

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price4418@comcast.net

December *Alexiad*:

Alexis Gilliland disputes my assertion that "Most creditors are not rich, since 'creditor' includes everybody with a bank account." Not so, he says, "bank account holders are depositors, rather than creditors." Well now, they are both: depositors are also creditors, since they lend their money to banks (which then lend it to others). The ultimate creditors are the persons whose money is being loaned. Banks and investment houses are intermediaries.

My larger point stands: shafting "creditors" hurts not only "the rich" but also all the lower and middle income people who have bank accounts. As a prime example, many have counted on interest from savings to sweeten their retirement. They are now suffering because "easy money" policies have driven interest rates down near zero. Twenty years ago certificates of deposit paid around 5%; now it's 1%.

Alexis disappoints me in his refutation of my argument that debasing the currency is theft. He says, "... debasing the currency does not do only one thing. True, our depositors are seeing the slow erosion of their savings, but the net debtors enjoy the slow erosion of their debt, so that there is a transfer of wealth from creditors to debtors. The government's debt is also eroded, so that servicing it becomes easier."

That is exactly accurate, and is exactly what I object to. Why should debtors have their debt eroded? Why should servicing the government's debt get easier? Why should governments and other debtors not have to pay it all, in full, with no erosion? That "transfer of wealth from creditors to debtors" is precisely what I call "theft." The unspoken rationale seems to be that most of the debt holders are rich, so they can afford to be robbed. This is morally dubious at the least, and I hope Alexis didn't really mean it that way.

The fundamental dishonesty becomes clear if we ask what would happen if debt instruments were offered with full disclosure: "Buy these bonds with our assurance that when it comes time to redeem them, we will give you debased money which will buy a lot less than what you lend us today." Would anyone buy?

That's why we need the gold standard. Such jiggery-pokery is much harder to pull off if the debtor borrows a certain number of gold coins and is expected to pay back that full number (plus interest), in full weight, no excuses accepted. No paper money accepted, either. That's what honesty requires. If a "transfer of wealth" is really justified, do it openly by honest taxation, not by sneaky monetary manipulation.

Further to the gold standard, Richard Dengrove notes that “[George Price] believes I said the price of gold has only risen three times in the past hundred years, and points out that inflation has gone up twenty-four times. No, I said the price of gold has increased three times as fast as that twenty-four times, or eighty times.”

I did not make myself clear. I did not mean to claim he said the price of gold has risen only three times. I quite understand that it has gone up eighty times over the century, roughly three times as fast as the twenty-four-fold inflation. Had we stayed on the gold standard, with no fiat paper money, and with everything else the same, the price level expressed in gold would have risen three-fold over the century. My point was that while three-fold is much worse than the ideal of keeping the price level steady, it is a hell of a lot better than the twenty-four-fold increase we got with fiat money.

And actually, everything else would not have stayed the same. It is unlikely that the price of gold (relative to other goods) would have risen three-fold if we had remained on the gold standard. Some — perhaps all — of that increase has been due to the extra demand for gold as a hedge against fiat money inflation.

Jim Stumm discusses the jerrybuilt Postal Service pension system and how Congress has muddled it. This inspires me to offer my idea of how pension systems ideally should work.

My own experience is relevant. During my working years my employer and I contributed to TIAA-CREF, a private pension company. Each payment earned me additional shares in TIAA's invested funds. Since retiring, I have received a pension proportioned to the current value of my shares. It has worked out well for me, even with stock market ups and downs.

All pensions should be like mine, with the pension company absolutely independent of the employer. Once the money has been paid in, there must be no way in hell the boss can reach in and pull any of it back out. Employers — whether private companies or government agencies — must not be able to “borrow” from the pension fund. It's not their personal piggy bank.

Pension company independence means that pensions don't depend on an employer staying in business. If an employer goes broke there'll be no more payments into the fund, but what is already there is safe. It can't be seized to satisfy bankruptcy claims, because the accounts belong entirely to the workers, not the employer. At worst, a worker gets no additional shares of the pension fund until he finds a new job and starts paying in again.

Pension company independence also makes pensions fully portable. (Health insurance should also be completely portable.) When the worker changes jobs, he just tells

the new boss where to send the payments. Tax laws should be revamped so there is no advantage to having pensions or health plans administered by the employer.

Of course, the pension company itself can make bad investments and go belly up, and then the workers lose part or all of their pensions. So pension funds need to be well-insured, preferably privately. And a worker might be wise to have not just one pension account, but five or ten small accounts with five or ten different pension companies. We'll trust they won't all go broke.

Mr. Stumm describes “a dedicated word processor from Smith Corona. It consisted of 2 pieces that looked like a typewriter and a CRT TV. The typewriter was a daisy wheel with a built-in computer with 64 K of memory and a disk drive that took a 3 inch disk with 720 K of memory. A cable connected the monitor to the computer, but there were no other ports so no other peripherals could be added.”

That sounds very like a Panasonic word processor I've had for about 25 years. It was a gift from a friend who managed a rooming house; one of her departed tenants left it behind. Its keyboard is cable-connected to a box with an 8-inch CRT screen and a diskette slot on the front, and a daisy-wheel printer in the top at the back. The operating system is incompatible with anything else; its diskettes can't be read by standard computers. I used it heavily for several years, mostly for correspondence, until I got my first desktop computer in 1995. It's still sitting on a shelf in my garage.

Minor point of typography: Near the end of Mr. Dengrove's letter he says, “In the '40s through the '60s . . .” As printed, the apostrophes before “'40s” and “'60s” are rendered as single open-quotes, when they should be single close-quotes (which are the same as apostrophes). That is, it should be “the '40s through the '60s” — the “curly quote” curls the opposite way. On my computer, using Word for Windows, this error happens because the same key gives both open-quote [‘] and close-quote [’], and the program thinks that if the quote-mark is preceded by a space and followed by a character, then it must be an open-quote. It does not recognize the possibility of an apostrophe preceded by a space. In Word, one remedy is to type the quote-mark twice to give both open and close quotes, thus: [‘ ‘40s]. Then go back and delete the first one, the open-quote, leaving it as [’ 40s]. Or you can just type in the ASCII code Alt 0146, to get [’]. (Alt 0145 gives [‘].)

On some specialized typesetters that I used before desktop publishing came in, the single open-quote, single close-quote, double open-quote, and double close-quote were four separate keys. Computer keyboards use just one key (and its shift position) for all, and depend

on the program to decide which one is intended. This is a holdover from typewriters, where both opening and closing quote marks are identical vertical characters, like this ["] (symbol font ASCII Alt 0034), not curly quotes.

The recent uproar about police abuse in Ferguson, Mo. and elsewhere has spurred interest in requiring officers to wear “body cameras” to record their interactions with the public. This is such a marvelously good idea that I thought of it 18 years ago. Following is my letter published in the Chicago Sun-Times of Dec. 15, 1996:

Nearly RoboCop

Linda Jones (Letters, Nov. 25) tells how a police officer abused her for daring to protest his treatment of her son in a traffic stop. Perhaps we should turn to technology to restrain abusive police.

A little research could develop a helmet with a small video camera mounted like a miner's lamp to record everything the wearer looked at, heard and said.

Officers would wear the video helmet whenever on duty (yes, even when going to the bathroom), or give a mighty good reason why not. An officer with such a helmet would be more likely to restrain his behavior, knowing the tape would be examined later.

Equally important, the recording also would protect him against false charges of brutality. And anyone the officer saw attacking him would be recorded, even if the officer did not survive.

The tape should not be in the helmet but should be made by digital uplink to the police station. This would both prevent police from monkeying with the tape, and make it impossible for a criminal to destroy the tape showing his crime.

Can anyone think of a reason why this would not work?

George W. Price
Jefferson Park

(“Jefferson Park” is the Chicago neighborhood where I lived back then.)

I am trying not to dislocate my arm while patting myself on the back.

To bring this up to date, such cameras should be worn not only by officers on street duty, but by interrogators, court personnel, jailers, and anyone else in the justice system interacting with citizens. There should not be one second of citizen encounters that is not recorded. Also, split the uplink signal to

simultaneously make an additional recording in an archive facility not under the control of the police. That recording would be accessed by court order for comparison if anyone claimed the police had doctored their copy.

From: **Brad W. Foster** January 17, 2015
Post Office Box 165246, Irving, TX
75016-5246 USA
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<http://www.jabberwockygraphix.com>

Looks like *Alexiad* 13.6 is the first print zine to arrive here in the new year. I hope it will be a sign of more such nice printed surprises showing up in my postal box through out the year. It seems, year after year, reading of the final demise of the print fanzine. And yet, still hanging in there. And I am much pleased any time a new one shows up.

This being the first issue of a brand spanking new year (by the way, does anyone know why do we spank new years?), I glanced aback at the previous year, and felt a bit embarrassed to see I had no contributions at all in any of the 2014 issues of *Alexiad*. Doesn't bother me as much with online zines, but if someone is going to spend the bucks to print and mail an actual fanzine, I feel compelled to try to "pay back" in some way. Bucks aren't possible, unfortunately. I thought I had sent you a new piece last year to use, but maybe faulty memory. It has happened before. So, I'll attach a piece here that I think would reduce down nicely to the single-column format. Hope you can use it, and assuage at least a little bit my guilt!

I can identify with your feelings about squishing the bedbug, Lisa. I remember when I was a wee elementary school kid. We were supposed to bring bugs to school one day to study and identify them. They were also supposed to be dead bugs, as the teacher had no interest in filling her room with scuttling bugs and screaming kids, I guess. I dutifully hunted around our backyard, and managed to scoop an interesting specimen up in a small glass jar. At this long date, I don't recall the exact instructions we had been given in how to off the bugs without squashing them (for better viewing later, of course, since squashed bug isn't as easy to inspect). But I do remember looking at this tiny little thing running around inside that glass jar for a moment, and thinking there was just no way I could kill anything that seemed so eager for life and exploration. I do recall letting it go, but I've no recollection of what, if anything, I did end up taking to class.

And Joe, I've always been a huge fan of those beautiful Winsor McCay "Little Nemo in Slumberland" strips. When Fantagraphics did the over-sized, multiple volume collection years ago, I was all over that as they came out. You note here that, for you, the only problem was that each strip had to end with Nemo waking up. That was never a concern for me, could just skip over that final panel each time

as read through the stories. But what has always surprised and disappointed me was, for a man of such technical skill, the lettering and word balloons always look like last minute scrawls, crammed in wherever they might (or even might not) fit. I've never run across any discussion of *why* it looked like that. Very odd. Still, even with that, one of the best comic strips of all time.

If you think those were bad, the word balloons in Georgian-era cartoons were really crammed in, and occasionally sidewise to boot. (I remember the one picture of a French admiral who looked exactly like a grown-up Beavis. I was expecting him to have an adjutant named "Tête-de-cu".)

— JTM

Speaking of art, just random curiosity-- Schirm's 'toon there on page 11 has the tell-tale marks of having had a change made, with the light lines around the container of salt in the upper left corner. Just curious- what was there before he decided to make it salt? (Or am I reading too much in a couple of faint lines?)

From: **Jeffrey Allan Boman** Jan. 20, 2015
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2009 Aurora Award Winner, 2010 nominee

This is Jeff from the Jersey Shore...
(No Snookie here, thank Gu!)

Reading the latest zine reminded me how much I've fallen out of the regular LOC habit. According to my archive here I haven't had a letter since 2013! Time to correct that.

Rereading that last LOC also reminds me that my zine is behind by more than 2 years. I also have to fix that. I've been working on the next issue off and on for ages. Lloyd, John, R. Lauraine, Steve and Chris will all be happy once I complete it (Lauraine more since I owe her the last issue soon). Joe and Cathy too.

The next issue I'll send out most copies in PDF, with paper ones (like Lauraine's) on paper. Canada Post decided the way to handle declining use (instead of by offering better service) was through cutting back service more and raising stamp cost to astronomical levels. I can afford a few but I'm not able to afford them all.

I attempted to Crowdfund a novel in late 2013 via Indiegogo and got to 17% funded. I'll have to educate potential funders for next time; many thought I was just panhandling, which would be crass to me and something I would never do. Also I'll have everything closer to completion the next one; because I'm not finished this novel yet. I want to be more fair to future backers.

Montreal now has a large Comiccon every year, which is both good and bad. Good that

I've had the chance to meet many celebrities (in order to get larger attendance there are many genre stars from TV and movies); bad because they all cost for photos and autographs. It's the return of Creation Con\$ to my city.

From: **Robert S. Kennedy** January 22, 2015
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Thank you for Vol. 13, No. 6 (December 2014), Whole Number 78.. Incredible, thirteen years of *ALEXIAD*!

Your review of *The Lost Stars: Imperfect Sword* by Jack Campbell (John G. Hemry) was very much enjoyed. As mentioned in my previous letter I thoroughly enjoy his "The Lost Fleet" and "The Lost Stars" series. *Imperfect Sword* is excellent.

Earlier this month I went to the dentist because a tooth was bothering me. On the 14th it was in to a specialist for a possible root canal. It turned out that it was a crown and when they removed the crown the tooth down to the gum line came with it. On the 16th it was to another specialist to extract the tooth. I now have two empty sockets next to each other. Really great for chewing. ☺

Richard A. Dengrove: I wasn't criticizing you, just asking a question. How do you protect solar plants in geostationary orbit against terrorists? **Jim Stumm** gives a good response to the question. However, I would like to point out that the People's Republic of China sent us a message by destroying a satellite with a rocket. If the solar plant was just for the United States and we get in a confrontation with the PRC might they decide to shut down our solar power? And what if terrorists captured a missile site? Just asking. This doesn't change the fact that I really like (and have liked for many years) the idea of solar satellites.

From: **Eric Mayer** January 22, 2015

Thanks for the *Alexiad* 78. Not to sound hard-hearted, but I wouldn't feel much pity for a bed bug. Even if all life is sacred and every living thing has a soul, if I discovered that bug it would be on its way to the big mattress in the sky before it could say its prayers.

When I lived in Brooklyn long ago the apartment had "bed bugs." They were roaches and though I checked the bedding for them before retiring for the night, occasionally I would be awakened when one fell off the ceiling onto my face.

I pay barely any attention to NASA's so-called plans for the future. So many things change so quickly, the idea that space projects could follow a path delineated today for decades is ridiculous. It reminds me of my distant life in the corporate world when every new manager who arrived in the department would immediately institute his own five or ten

year plan, when everyone including the manager knew he wouldn't stay in the same position for two years and all his long term vision would be swept away by the next new broom to pass through. All I know is that, at my age, I want NASA to send probes on long long journeys to distant places real soon now.

Interesting about de Camp's historicals. I've never read them although I enjoyed a lot of his fantasy and non-fiction history. I wasn't aware that historicals are currently so out-of-favor but "Turteltaub" certainly would know better than me. I do know that historicals are a distinct mystery/detective genre today since my wife Mary and I just finished writing our eleventh Byzantine mystery which will be out in the fall. However, though there is a niche for such books, the potential readership for them is generally much smaller than that for contemporary mysteries. I can see how adding an unfamiliar historical background to a mystery puzzle might strike some readers as too difficult for a diversion.

Wow, I don't think I could stand to read *The Grind That Isn't*. Sounds sickeningly true from what you say about it. My impression is that Ivy League Colleges are mostly just rubber stamps for the elite, "justifying" their entitlement. There are exceptions but mostly, at the Ivy League schools, people with connections are supplied with degrees so they can pretend that they are handed their grossly overpaid post-college positions by dint of being so intelligent rather than because of their connections, as is actually the case.

That's a point Deresiewicz makes; the "excellent sheep" are there to get Important Jobs that they hate. Before that they hated their schools and even hated themselves.

— JTM

Ah, Mary and I love cinnamon coffee. Then again we are in the Coffee Dark Ages, still using a stainless steel, stove-top percolator. Most modern day humans probably wouldn't recognize what we drink as coffee.

Re Milt Stevens' remark on new smells, including that of cars. I just read that that new car smell a result of adhesives and paints may be toxic, although not as toxic as the smell of the stinkin' zombies he also mentions.

Hey, hey, there's one thing I will definitely take away from this issue — Michael Nesmith's mother invented Wite-Out. I didn't know that!

Like Jim Stumm I owned a Timex-Sinclair. Understand, I knew zilch about computers, but the ad touting the wonder of having a real goshwow personal computer at one's back and call intrigued me. I had no idea the gizmo needed to be tethered to a television set and a tape recorder, and when I got it "working"... I don't know what

I expected it to do... something... It was years before I got an Apple computer which I could actually use for something.

IMHO the Republican "concern" over Postal Service pensions arises from their desire to break the Postal Service because of their hatred for unions.

All in all an excellent loccol. Particularly interesting were the reports from South Africa from AL du Pisani and from Spain by Sue Burke. We need corruption investigations on that scale in this country. Since so many politicians were targeted I'm not sure why the politicians didn't squash the investigations at the outset as would happen here. At any rate I wasn't aware of the travails in either Spain or South Africa. I guess it doesn't make the news in the US, or at least not the prominent part of the news. I admit to not digging very deeply, just the news that shouts out from the headlines is about all I can bear to read.

From: **Alexis A. Gilliland** January 23, 2015
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Thank you for *Alexiad* 13.6, which arrived on or about New Year's Eve, a fanzine dropping down into the mailbox to mark a fannish version of the big do at Times Square. Lee and I went to the party at Freddie's Beach Bar, which featured some quality entertainment, but was loud and getting louder when we left a little after midnight. As the New Year wore on, an old filling wore out, and had to be replaced—which happily took less than half an hour and didn't require novocaine. We also drove down to Williamsburg, VA, for Marscon, a well-run convention of maybe 1,350, featuring a lot of young people, a lot of gaming and lots of excellent costumes. I wasn't on any panels, which may have been just as well, since most of them were outside my areas of interest. The convention was held in the Fort Magruder Hotel, on the site of one of the battles in McClellan's 1862 Peninsular Campaign. The hotel had a display of weapons and uniforms, while outside our room we could see parts of the Confederate earthworks. Our room phone didn't work, so Friday night a maintenance man came in and took a look, but was unable to fix it. Sunday morning, as I was checking out at 10:45, the desk clerk apologized and gave us a

complimentary breakfast pass for the breakfast being served from 8:00 to 10:30. The highlights were silting through a Ravencon business meeting, and seeing old friends in the bar and at the parties.

The other thing Lee was doing was discussing with people what they would like to see in the Museum Of Science Fiction, a local project conceived by a non-fan who holds an MS in Museum Science, and not to be confused with the Science Fiction Museum already up and running in in Seattle. The MOSF is projected to open in 2017, and Lee is in charge of outreach to fandom, which might just possibly have ideas different from those of the prospective director. Her plan is to create a list of possible subjects for the fans to rank in order of preference, and possibly combine some of them. When she finalizes the list I'll pass it along for your consideration and comments.

Utopias get some mention in the letter column. Given that human societies are dynamic, always growing and changing, it would appear that a utopia would be a sometime thing, a transient moment at some happy balance point before moving off in some less felicitous direction. There is also the eternal question of how things could be improved, as demonstrated by our continuous fiddling with the tax codes. Not to mention the question of who is to be the main beneficiary of the utopia in question, since a utopia for teenage girls would be different than the one for teenage boys, or the one for their parents or — by a stretch of the imagination, a utopia for fan publishers. Before 1914 Great Britain was a utopia for the ruling class even though (or maybe because) the lower classes were downtrodden and poor.

Taras Wolansky and I appear to be in agreement on the facts about the Ukraine. President Viktor Yanukovich was indeed a kleptocrat, but he was overthrown because he had cut a deal with Vladimir Putin — a fellow kleptocrat currently worth an estimated 40 billion dollars, that would have taken the Ukrainian people where they didn't want to go, namely closer to Russia and farther from Europe. Putin gave the deposed Yanukovich sanctuary, and continued to pursue his policy by other means, namely a covert war whose covertitude was blown when some fool shot down Maylasian Airlines Flight 17 with a Russian missile. In my view the current outlook is for a protracted conflict made less affordable for Russia because of falling oil prices. The Russian economy is heavily dependent on oil and gas exports, and the price of oil has fallen from \$115/barrel in June 2014 to less than \$50/barrel now. This may cause the Russian GDP to shrink by as much as 5-percent, and is already causing inflation. The Economist says that the economic crisis is now official, because the Russian media are not reporting word one about it. Taras would also have chosen to keep the discussion on climate change. Imagining that vox populi vox del, he

sees the 2014 elections as validating the Republican war on science by making climate skepticism official policy. That notable climate skeptic, Sen. James Inhofe, is now Chairman of the Environment and Public Works Committee for instance. Against this is the feeble rebuttal of NASA scientists that there is a 36-percent chance that 2014 was the warmest year on record by an insignificant 0.02 degrees Celsius. This scientific contempt for the popular will has led to renewed talk of defunding studies on climate change, talk that dates from 1998 with the attacks on the author of the climate hockey stick, Michael Mann. Thus do our climate skeptics embrace a tactic curiously similar to the Russian media silence about the Russian economic crisis.

Obviously you haven't imbibed the wisdom of Lew Rockwell, wherein it is explained that the whole thing is a setup by the neocons. And so libertarianism takes yet another step into irrelevance, defending yet another autocracy. (Also, the Lew Rockwell site just published an essay by a German poly-conspiracist about "A Titanic Cover-Up?".)

— JTM

From: **Jim Stumm** January 21, 2015
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Milt Stevens: I have a similar blacklist of unwanted SF, No vampires, or zombies, or fantasy for me. And I add a few more: no tie-ins (Star Trek, Star Wars, or Dr. Who), no graphic novels (comic books), no super-hero or gamer novels. And I don't want to read any more space war.

So what does that leave for my white list? Hard SF of course, where the science is a reasonable projection of currently known science, which means no FTL travel, time travel, galactic empires, etc. What I want are novels that depict possible futures. Human settlement of the solar system appears to be possible, but travel to other stars is not, except in generation ships or possibly suspended animation. Also plausible is artificial intelligence, advanced robots, humans augmented with digital technology, and reasonable biological advances. But nanotechnology too often is depicted as magic fairy dust that can do anything the author wants it to do.

I don't pay full prices for new books, but if I haven't read it, it's new to me. In 2014 I read 6 SF novels, all set on Earth or within the solar system, out of 47 books in all that I read last year. When I can't find SF I find attractive in the catalogs I buy from, I'm buying more in other categories, especially history, historical fiction, and mysteries.

George W. Price: You mention "crony

capitalism" where the government rescues businesses that screw up. Which, of course, encourages screwing up." That last part, encouraging more screwing up, is what economists call "moral hazard." And businesses seeking to be rescued, trying to get some subsidy or special favor from government, economists call that "rent seeking." Most non-economists who encounter these terms probably get the wrong impression of what they mean. "Rent seeking" has nothing to do with a landlord seeking a tenant for his rental property. And "moral hazard" has nothing to do with personal behavior that might be considered immoral.

A variation on businesses that screw up is businesses that undertake risky ventures believing that the government will bail them out if it goes bad. They might say: heads we win, tails the taxpayers lose. Some people seem to think that firms that sold sub-prime mortgages didn't know it would turn out badly. But they might well have known what was likely to happen and have done it anyway, believing the government would let them walk away unscathed. And they would have been right. That is exactly what did happen. None of the top banksters who set the bank's policy went to jail or were even prosecuted. None even had to forfeit any significant money. Many people suffered in the economic debacle, but all the people responsible walked away with their fortunes intact.

Bankruptcy: Whether a bankrupt company usually keeps operating is a matter of fact that a study by economists could discover. But even if bankrupt companies usually disappear, a sustained "hole" in a free enterprise economy is as impossible as a hole in the atmosphere. Every company (unless it's a monopoly protected by the government) is surrounded by competitors who are eager to take away its business. Customers of a company gone bankrupt will take their business to competitors and the economy as a whole will hardly notice. There may be a period of adjustment especially for the employees of a company gone belly up who have to find new jobs. E.g. when PanAm ceased operations, its passengers didn't stay home. They just booked flights on other airlines.

In USA there are (at least) two kinds of bankruptcy that apply to companies. Chapter 11 bankruptcy means the court protects the company from its creditors while a new business plan is worked out which will require approval by the court and the creditors. The company keeps operating while in Chapter 11 and the intention is that it should come out of Chapter 11 still operating, but on a sounder footing.

On the other hand, Chapter 7 bankruptcy means the company is to be liquidated. It stops operating, all its assets are sold, and the proceeds are divided among the creditors, who typically get pennies on the dollar owed to them. Stockholders get nothing. All employees and management have to find new jobs. But the

effect on the economy as a whole is minimal.

From: **Murray Moore** January 29, 2015
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I have not, Lisa, seen a bed bug. My impression is that the bed bug is teeny tiny. My impression of your bed bug, from your description, is that your bed bug is bigger than teeny tiny.

A result of your reporting is that *Alexiad* readers are less likely to ask to crash at your house. I am not suspicious that your bed bug is fictional, but... maybe...

Do we know enough about our ancestors to label them as savage? Aside from the human bones with human teethmarks, for which extenuating circumstances might have existed, what is the evidence?

Joe, the detail in a Little Nemo Sunday page is fantastic even as printed originally, filling a broadsheet page. Looking at an example on even a large computer screen would frustrate me. But some people might watch *Lawrence of Arabia* on their smartphone screen.

Looking at the detail of an old comic strip often leaves one awed at the return of pay to effort. John Zakour's Working Daze strip had an (entirely fictional) "History of Working Daze" in which John Roberts brilliantly copied a whole range of cartooning styles, from the intricately detailed styles of the pre-fifties to the sketchy styles seen today.

I will be rubbing shoulders in March in Milwaukee during Operacon with a semi-royal. Somtow Sucharitkul's Wikipedi entry states (but with "citation needed"), "A descendant of the Royal Chakri dynasty (his grandfather's sister was a cousin and consort of King Vajiravudh)". Operacon members will attend the premiere of Sucharitkul's, better known outside Thailand as S.P. Somtow's, opera "The Snow Dragon". Trinlay Khadro and Martin Morse Wooster are other Operacon members. "The Snow Dragon" will be my first opera. My only question is How long is it?

Poor Montreal, IIRC the first bidder for 2017. Washington might not run away in the vote for 2017 but it has the advantage simply because it would be the first East Coast U.S. Worldcon since 2004. Helsinki will be second, again. Not all European voters will pick Helsinki. Washington is an excuse for a U.S. road trip. But what do I know?

John Thiel worries about Harlan Ellison. The other day (late January) I listed to a Coode Street podcast featuring Ellison. The man couldn't be happier. Life is swell. He's Jimmy Stewart in the happy part of "It's a Wonderful Life". Not to be confused with Bixby's "It's a

Good Life.”

“... So George thought Mr. Potter into the corn field, and Clarence said, ‘That’s a good thing.’”

— JTM

Robert Kennedy saw a raccoon with what appeared to him to be a smaller animal in its mouth. Might it have been a smaller raccoon?

I can’t contradict Rodney in saying that his *Rodney’s Fanac* is the only SFish paper fanzine mailed from a Canadian address.

I enjoy all Gilliland cartoons but his “UFO Tech Support” in the middle of Rodney’s letter is exceptional.

I was delighted to learn courtesy of Sue Burke of the concept of Joseph as Jesus’s step-father. Brilliant!

Martin mentions Ian Fleming. The James Bond character is out of copyright in Canada. But the Canadian market is too small to make writing a Bond novel profitable for a publisher.

Most alarming statement, by Taras Wolansky: “As paper books age, they tend to emit mold spores.”

From: **Sue Burke** January 30, 2015
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My husband and I enjoyed quiet holidays in Madrid, and I won 100€ in the El Gordo lottery. I got books for gifts, and I roasted a leg of lamb for Christmas dinner. I also finished the first draft of a novel, which is now in the hands of beta readers.

As I mentioned in the report on MIRcon, I’m part of a team running an Indiegogo campaign underway right now to pay for the translation of an anthology called *Castles in Spain*: <http://igg.me/at/CastlesInSpain>.

John Hertz asks about James Michener’s *Iberia*. I’ve read a few of his novels and enjoyed them, but I haven’t read *Iberia*. As a travelogue from a half-century ago, I suppose it would have historic interest, but a lot has happened since then, such as Franco’s death and democracy. He also asks about the Putnam translation of *Don Quixote*. Again, I have to say I don’t know much about it except that it’s been highly praised. And Nabakov’s lectures about *Quixote*? In general around here, scholars think he didn’t fully understand the book, especially its humor.

For once, I agree with **George W. Price**. He said “let the buggers fail.” He reached an insight few if any others have when he noted that “too big to fail” companies don’t disappear when they go bust, they just get new and possibly wiser owners.

I also agree with **Taras Wolansky** that there wasn’t much food at the tent parties at

Loncon, but I know the site had rules and high charges for bringing in food and drink. He’s also right that they didn’t understand hamburgers. My husband bought one at the Fan Village, and although he was hungry, he threw it away half-eaten.

But I can’t agree with Taras when he wrote, “Sometimes terrorism works, as when Spain was intimidated into leaving the War on Terror (that is, into hiding behind other countries).” I know that’s how it was reported in the United States, but that’s not what happened. After the Al Qaeda terrorist bombing of trains in 2004 on the eve of an election, the incumbent prime minister lost and the new leadership took Spain’s soldiers out of Iraq. But at that time, Al Qaeda wasn’t in Iraq. It was in Afghanistan, and Spain’s soldiers were redeployed there, where they spent 11 years and lots of ammo in firefight. In January 2015, Spain sent 300 soldiers to Iraq again.

Regarding the January terrorist attacks in Paris, I see a lot of flailing and fulminating, but no one seems willing to take on the real enemy. It’s no secret that Saudi Arabia funds Islamic terrorist groups around the world, along with promoting an aggressive global expansion of its poisonous variety of Islam, Wahhabism, which holds that all Shia and most Sunni Muslims are infidels, and all other faiths should be hated. And yet we buy Saudi oil, even consider it an ally. War on terror? Yes, we should have one. I think we need research on the level of the Manhattan Project for alternative energy. I’m glad the US is now a net exporter of oil, but other countries still depend on Saudi petroleum, so the Saudis still get the cash to fund both a devastating war within Islam and collateral excursions against Europe and the US.

IS has denounced Saudi Arabia as un-Islamic. It also issued a guide to would-be female jihadis about how women’s rights are uniquely protected in the Islamic State. Oh yes, female writers are “fallen women”.

— JTM

The free market won’t give us an alternative to Saudi oil because there is no free market in energy. The Saudis can sell oil for as little as \$5 per barrel. They command the market – Sharia economic law. If any technology seems to undermine their position, like fracking, somehow oil prices drop. Since any new technology is expensive at the onset, although it becomes cheaper with economies of scale, no alternative to petroleum can be delivered by the market.

This research project won’t happen, of course. Politics and ideology will get in the way, and no one dares bell the cat.

From: **Taras Wolansky** January 31, 2015
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The December 2014 *Alexiad*:

On the subject of the continuing influence of Heinlein: among the fancy hardcover classics available for sale at Barnes and Noble around Christmas time I found an omnibus of Heinlein’s two most famous novels.

As for the oft-maligned later works: in last June’s *Locus* magazine, Gary K. Wolfe reviewed *The Heritage of Heinlein: a Critical Reading of the Fiction*, begun by the late Thomas D. Clareson and completed by Joe Sanders: “**Sanders explains that one of his students ... convinced him that the later novels, far from failed efforts to recapture earlier glories, were more experimental and deliberate than he had initially suspected. ... [H]is approach to these late novels aligns with [Bill] Patterson’s claims that Heinlein was indeed seeking to break new ground in terms of narrative techniques and what we would now call postmodern sensibilities, even if he was not always successful.**” I’ve often thought about going back and rereading those books.

But the party at the end of *The Number of the Beast* (NHOL G.189; 1979), the last half of *The Cat Who Walks Through Walls* (NHOL G.200; 1985), and *To Sail Beyond the Sunset* (NHOL G.201; 1987) are all straight out of Caleb Catlum’s *America* (1936). Oh right, the wonderful new narrative technique of Farmer’s “Riders of the Purple Wage” (*Dangerous Visions*; 1967) was a copy of the “Aeolus” chapter of James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922). Introduce a forty-year-old style from mundane writing and it’s something new and wondrous in SF.

— JTM

Review of L. Sprague de Camp’s historical novels: What I most remember about *The Arrows of Hercules* is the subplot about the engineer hero hunting for his wife, enslaved in the course of one of the Hellenistic world’s incessant wars.

Review of William Deresiewicz’s Excellent Sheep: I read the author’s *A Jane Austen Education* a couple of years ago. He writes that he first considered Austen not very cutting edge, until he started to notice the situations she described in her books occurring around him in the late 20th century. In fact, he eventually came to the shocking realization that, much like certain of the less-appealing characters in the books, he himself was a hanger-on to the wealthy.

That was an interesting book. On the other hand, *Excellent Sheep* sounds pretty thin. As various people have pointed out, the reason parents pay through the nose to send their children to exclusive colleges is that employers use the colleges as proxies for the IQ tests they

are not allowed to give.

Alexis Gilliland: "[I]f the total demand for some product is x , then if one manufacturer cuts prices it may increase sales at the expense of the other manufacturers (if they don't also cut prices) but the total demand for x will remain unchanged." In economics, demand for a good is not a one-dimensional quantity, but a curve which varies depending on the price. To understand the concept, see Wikipedia on "Demand" ("demand is a listing of quantities that would be bought at various prices"), or "Price Elasticity of Demand" ("Price elasticities are almost always negative"; that is, the higher the price, the lower the quantity demanded).

Robert S. Kennedy: You're lucky the puddle on your lawn was not declared a Federally protected wetland. (Not sure that's an exaggeration.)

Been watching *The 100*; high quality holding up in the second season.

George W. Price: No, I didn't advocate flogging as a substitute for imprisonment in general. I merely said that, in that Singapore case, I think I'd rather get the twenty lashes than spend a long term (six months?) in prison.

No evidence for a Young Earth? A Young Earth creationist might argue that the Bible itself is evidence. ("What are going to believe – your own eyes or the Bible?") Similarly, a religious believer might argue that the very fact that billions of people believe in the existence of a God is evidence for the existence of a God.

Jim Stumm: As an example of the sophistication of SF anime compared to Hollywood, the 1983 anime series, *Super Dimension Century Orguss*, opens with a military attack on a space elevator.

One approach to protecting against this sort of thing is to think of a space elevator as something like a suspension bridge, with many lines holding it up; so that if most were cut, it would remain standing (or hanging). Or maybe a better idea would be to design it with the capability for broken pieces to be safely disposed of, either into space or to the ground.

From: **Timothy Lane** January 31, 2015
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One thing to note about the de Camp historical novels is that they were inspired by minor historical tidbits in some cases. *The Dragon of the Ishtar Gate* (which I think was the first I read) was inspired by an actual relief of a Persian king receiving tribute that included what looked like okapis, and *An Elephant for Aristotle* by the fact that Aristotle's description of an elephant seemed accurate enough to have been based on actual observation.

One thing to note about Napoleon I is that

he actually remained active as a conqueror in his first retirement, sending his forces from Elba to conquer a nearby island. (He succeeded, naturally.) So it's safe to assume that he would indeed have looked for suitable targets if he had fled to the Americas.

I'm not an expert on monetary history, but it seems to me that the US kept its official dollar value in gold stable for a long period of time. The greenbacks came in to help fund the War of the Rebellion, not because of economic disruption (though the Greenback Party wanted to keep them in use because of the consequences of the Panic of 1873). Then FDR came in and devalued the dollar, and later Nixon allowed the dollar to float against gold. Inflation has been steady ever since FDR came in, to where the dollar is worth virtually nothing compared to what it was worth at the time.

It should be obvious from the example of aluminum that Gilliland cites that costs can affect the total demand for a commodity (this is in fact what supply and demand is about, but that's microeconomics and too many people ignore that today). This doesn't mean that the demand is ever technically infinite, and much depends on the commodity. It's even theoretically possible for an increase in price for a major staple to lead to reduced consumption of other commodities instead.

Jim Stumm is quite right about how easily a space elevator could be destroyed today. Of course, when people came up with the idea, that wasn't thought to be a problem. I would agree that there probably will be defensive mechanisms of one sort or another in power satellites if we ever get around to using them.

The Spanish corruption scandal Sue Burke reports reminds me of the corruption scandal that devastated the centrist Radical Party shortly before the Popular Front election of 1936, thereby leaving Spain with a choice between two irreconcilable extremes. Something about that reminds me vaguely of conditions today.

I found it interesting that Dainis Bisenieks would mention that some historical personages are more interesting than others, and specifically list Prince Eugene of Savoy over the Duke of Marlborough (his sometimes collaborator in battle). As it happens, I have a biography of Eugene (which I first read in a library copy decades ago) but have none of Marlborough. On the other hand, I have a great deal of interest in central European affairs in general, which no doubt has a great deal to do with it.

Class-action lawyers are among the biggest thieves in America. One way of handling the problem George W. Price reports in the Jimmy Johns lawsuit would be to let them only their fraction of however much is actually paid out in coupons. I also like his solution of paying them in the coupons everyone else gets.

He also has an excellent point about bankruptcy, which I've noticed myself. People praise Obama for preventing GM from going bankrupt (at the expense of taxpayers like many

readers of this magazine), as if this would mean that all their factories would somehow cease to exist. Some would close down, but many would remain active "under new management".

Richard Dengrove is quite right that the "going concern" version of young-earth creationism cannot be disproven, and thus cannot be a scientific theory (just like a certain apocalyptic theory very popular among modern liberals). Another flaw is that it seems to support the idea that the Creator was the Indian trickster god, Coyote.

However, he misinterprets my comments about utopias. I wasn't referring to the creators of fictional utopias, but rather to those who have actual utopian fantasies (which may sometimes get written up in fictional form, of course). So I don't actually disagree with him about the readers of utopia. I can read and enjoy about Mike Resnick's Kikuyu utopia without believing in it (just as he has to point out a number of times that he doesn't either).

I hope "The Profile" is an exaggeration. Perhaps it's just as well that I don't exactly read fan fiction these days.

I hope it is but such hope is
harder to find these days.

— JTM

From: **John Hertz** January 29, 2015
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I'm not a teacher by profession but I do a fair lot. I believe a teacher must not blame the students — nor a student blame the teachers. When you start with how it's your opponent's fault you disable yourself from doing anything about it. And why should teachers and students be opponents anyway? Haven't we outgrown that yet?

The Archon people with their eponym ought to pronounce the name of their con "Arch on".

Easily I agree there is a turgid sameness in s-f these days. Also a turbid sameness. In one of my favorite Nasreddin Hodja stories ("Nasreddin" is a name, "hodja" a Muslim religious title; nobody is sure if he ever had any historical existence, there are stories of his arriving at a London airport and of his meeting Tamburlane; he seems sometimes wise, sometimes foolish, sometimes both) he is asked "What is the punishment for slander?" and answers "Cut off the ears of all who listen to it."

Did he run around with Xena?

— JTM

From: **Richard A. Dengrove** Feb. 2, 2015
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I am behind, I fear. I am sending a letter of

comment for the December *Alexiad*, and I would imagine it will appear in the April issue. Such is life. I hope not too many of my words are ancient history by then.

Speaking of ancient history, modern history and future history, I have come to the conclusion that all systems of government will eventually fall. We don't believe ours could, but I suspect it will. I got this idea from your review of Hemry's *The Lost Stars: Imperfect Sword*.

All forms of government are based on humans and humans are susceptible to weaknesses. Also, some weaknesses are cyclical. Among the cycles entail succumbing to conservatism and the opposite, succumbing to graft. Believing in everything and being conquered by a more flexible people, and believing in nothing and ultimately allowing some other people to buy us off.

I continue my comment on Hemry. However, this one also responds to William Deresiewicz's *Excellent Sheep*. I have to agree the elite colleges reached their height as reservoirs of learning long ago and have been sliding for some time.

You reviews made me recall Harvard University in the '70s. I got the impression that the professors at Harvard depended more on style than erudition. Knowing the right words that would impress the right people. Fortunately, since the students rarely saw the big wig professors for more than lectures, they were free of their baleful influence. According to Deresiewicz's book, it looks like the same has been true of Yale professors.

With all the weakness mankind reveals, where did the idea of utopia come from? John Thiel ponders wonders about this. He finally concludes it can be traced to Plato and his *Republic*. Curiously, that isn't exactly true. For one thing, if Plato believed his Republic a utopia, he would believe it would last forever.

However, Plato admitted that human weakness would end it. It was just one stage in the cycle of forms of government: aristocracy, oligarchy, democracy, tyranny, etc.. Ultimately, people would return to his Republic, but the same would be true of other forms of government.

Nonetheless, I have to agree that most scholars have presumed Plato believed his *Republic* was perfect, and, once attained, would last forever. In short, I shouldn't feel so bad about my reading comprehension.

Yes, flesh is weak. For that reason, Rodney Leighton is right that mail often fails to reach intended recipients. It can happen because of problems with the post office. More often, the subscribers have problems picking up their mail. They may forget; or those charged with picking up the mail don't. It is amazing how many ways exist for people to miss mail.

Also, it is often easy to misinterpret words. On the other hand, I don't think I misinterpreted Jim Stumm. He claimed that I did when I restated his position as

Conservatives being 'closer' to the Founding. What he insisted he meant was Conservative views are more in accord with the Constitution. The difference, he emphasized, is that the Founding Fathers disagreed among themselves.

Of course, I was not speaking about any particular Founding Father, but the Founding Fathers in general. In fact, I think that meaning is implied when you talk about a group in general. I don't think he would object that the views of the Founding Fathers in general reflected the Constitution.

In addition, to his comment about the Founding Fathers, Jim wrote about the Federal pension plan. He criticized it for not investing the pension money of Federal employees.

Ronald Reagan changed that. In 1987, he and Congress replaced the old pension system CSRS with FERS. Apparently, a good percentage of the pension money goes into investment right now. It is not only invested in Treasury Bonds either. The Thrift Savings Plan provides a number of different funds Federal employees can invest in, which include private stocks, bonds and currencies.

It is true an uninvested pension exists. Much smaller than under CSRS, though, because Federal Employees now participate in Social Security as well.

As for the Post Office, they get the same pension plan as the Feds, FERS. Thus, Congress has no reason to place special requirements on US Postal Service pensions, like it has.

We leave matters of practical importance today for some Medieval history. Sue Burke wrote that the Virgin of Almudena Day could not have happened. It celebrates when, in 711, Madrid hid a revered statue of the Virgin Mary in a city wall. Unfortunately, 711 predates the city of Madrid, which was founded later. That recalls other impossible events throughout history, which Lord Raglan mentions in his *The Hero*. In so doing, he even doubted the existence of Robin Hood and Homer, two notables whose existence people are unwilling to doubt.

Note, this was FitzRoy Richard Somerset (1885-1964), the great-grandson of the man who ordered The Charge of the Light Brigade.

Back to an event more recent than 711, the Financial Meltdown of 2008. George Price declares we should let business know loud and clear that there will be no bailouts. I gather the Federal government did exactly that. However, after the Lehman Brothers went bankrupt, there was a big financial panic. In the ensuing chaos, the government blinked and decided to bail out the banks.

We go from the front and center issue of the Financial Meltdown back to the large and less trendy subject of utopia. Joe, you ask me what people read utopias for if not to create a new society. To stimulate their thinking about politics, society and history.

Of course, a few decide to produce utopias. As I said, though, how often do they do that? Did Robert Rimmer do it, whose book *Harrad Experiment* was inspired by a utopia, John Noyes 'Perfectionism'? I know of none Rimmer started. Maybe a few others started communes based on his *Harrad Experiment*. However, a quick Google search fails to turn up one. Do you know of any?

Well, there was the movie (1973), with Don "Miami Vice" Johnson. Seriously, there were some 'zines about the philosophy, many of whom had people grafting their own version of sexual life onto Rimmer's work. He compiled some of them in *Harrad Letters* to Robert H. Rimmer (1969).

— JTM

Taras Wolansky has another objection to my politics. I told him I never heard the Founding Fathers mentioned in Conservative legal opinions. He has indeed found a decision of the Supreme Court, *United States v. Lopez* (1995), where they mentioned them in the first few paragraphs. I checked it out.

I could say they quoted the Founding Fathers for vague principles where they filled in a lot of blanks. Principles the Liberals tried to turned around for their beliefs. However, the decision does mention both James Madison and John Marshall at the beginning.

I guess that is it for comments this time around. I could have commented on bed bugs, the movie *Iron Sky*, flying cars and Miss Marple. However, I only have two hands and so much time.

WAHF:

Lloyd Daub, with various items of interest.

Bob Kennedy, Rod Smith, Trinlay Khadro, Paul Gadzikowski, R-Laurraine Tutihasi, Garth Spencer, Arthur Hlavaty, Johnny Carruthers, Ben Schilling, Mike Glycer, Carol Clarke, Joel Zakem, Chuck Lipsig, Patti Lipsig, Steven Silver, John Purcell, Bill Breuer, Charla Major, Mike Resnick, Bruce Richard Gillespie, Susan Baugh, Jeff Daiell and others with birthday and holiday greetings.

And Dainis Bisenieks, who sent a letter which I carefully put in a safe place to enter and . . .

Alexiad...thataway...



KITTY

I dumped the food dish.
No more mess filling it.

The water bowl goes back.
No more spilling water all over.

The litter box is in the trash.
One less nastiness to do.

No more hairballs on the floor.
Cleanliness is now a possibility.

The sheets have a chance to live.
Being torn to shreds is over.

The hair will come off my clothes.
I can look respectable again.

Waking up won't be with a weight.
Sleep is now a straightforward thing.

The chorus of snarls out the window
And into the window is silent.

Walking is now free of abrupt cries.
Why get underfoot if that's what you get?

He was my friend.

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& McCormick, Grant
Tech Staff: Grant C. McCormick

This is issue **Whole Number Seventy-Nine (79)**.

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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