

ALEXIAD

(ΑΛΕΞΙΑΣ)

\$2.00

Today is Groundhog Day. The Weather Channel sent a representative and showed Phil's performance live. Punxsutawney has turned the groundhog's appearance into a festival rivaling Derby here. This morning Phil did not appreciate being woken from his comfortable slumber. He resisted being dragged from bed but the bigger, stronger humans prevailed. Despite his morning grouchiness he proclaimed an early spring. I put more faith in the big Canada geese, who have yet to appear but we shall see.

— Lisa

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Reviewer's Notes

My job situation remains unchanged. A magnificent indifference. Just like last time.

It's been observed that gerrymandering has led to the polarization of politics, as concentration of one kind of voter per district engenders appeal trending towards the most extreme of attitudes. It isn't just redistricting, either.

I see arguments on Facebook, headed "<Pundit> Totally Destroys <opposition> In One Sentence" or one picture or one comment. Yet for some reason the opposition continues, unaffected by their demolition. Could it be that <Pundit> merely advanced an argument in favor of his own position?

For epic demolitions, there's always "The Bull Against the Enemy of the Anglian Race" issued by Pope Hadrian VII (well, actually his creator, Frederick Rolfe), which tears into the British press baron Lord Northcliffe.

The history of the space program is littered with promising vehicles which were supposed to be the latest thing to go into space, and yet were canceled abruptly. Why?

Well, each administration has to reward its own supporters. So the new space vehicle is, after much deliberation, allocated to a firm which supported the administration. Then mission creep comes in, as it now has to fulfill everyone's requirements, and the vehicle becomes ever more complex and troubled. Finally, a new administration comes into power, and the vehicle is canceled without ever being produced; the process goes back to the beginning.

The storied private companies which are going to overtake the inept if not evil gubbmint are, I hate to tell you this, government contractors using recycled government-developed hardware. (Does it bother you that all the lift vehicles that are in service are refined versions of rockets originally developed in the sixties, except for the Russians, who use a somewhat upgraded version of Korolev's Semyorka from the fifties?) While the Kings of the High Frontier are more capable of producing catchy presentations than actual vehicles.

Ross, Art, Morrie, and Uncle Don would be disappointed.

I regret the brief span for reply, but I wanted to get back on track. Subsequent issues will have a little more time for response.

But fanzines seem to be fading away. Chris Garcia, that effervescent exemplar of fannish energy, is now devoting more and more time to his penguins — that is, his children, and we should all shower him with pictures of Burgess Meredith, Danny DeVito, and Robin Lord Taylor. And other faneds are fading away. Arnie Katz, for example.

Instead, we have the blogosphere, where irrelevancy, derailing, and venom seem to be the prevailing way. And so ends the trend begun by *Comet*, so long ago and so near by.

— Joe

RANDOM JOTTINGS

by Joe



Martian and *Mad Max: Fury Road* are up for Best Picture, Matt Damon for Best Actor, *Mad Max: Fury Road* for Best Cinematography and Best Costume Design, George Miller (*Mad Max: Fury Road*) for Best Director, *Mad Max: Fury Road* and *Star Wars VII: The Force Awakens* for Best Editing, *Mad Max: Fury Road* for Best Makeup, *Star Wars VII: The Force Awakens* for Best Music Score, *Mad Max: Fury Road* and *The Martian* for Best Production Design, and *The Martian* for Best Adaptation.

They must really like *Mad Max: Fury Road*.

OBITS

Jack Robins died on **December 23, 2015**.

Born Jack Robinson, Jack was one of the first Futurians, and one of those who got into the NyCon. He went on to a career in the "real world" (whatever that is) as a chemist, but retained ties with fandom. He was made a life member of the N3F in 2012 and contributed a memoir of his fannish career to recent fanzines.

And now there is only David Kyle left of that band, and of attendees of the First Worldcon but Kyle, Mel Korshak, and Bob Madle.

MONARCHIST NEWS

The Right Hon. Richard John Bingham, Earl of Lucan, has been officially pronounced dead, ending one of the great mysteries of London high life, only forty-two years after he murdered his children's nanny Sandra Rivett and disappeared. His son, **George Bingham**, can now finally use the title.

A DIFFERENT SORT OF ANTHROPOLOGY

Commentary by Joseph T Major

After looking over the dreary mess that John F. Carr has made of his sequels to *Lord Kalvan of Otherwhen*, one would think he should be prevented, by large armed guards if necessary, from ever again writing another piece of Piper-derived fiction. And yet, his *Time Crime* (2011), the expansion of Piper's story of the same title (*Astounding Stories*, February-March 1955) not only avoids the errors of the other work, but actually expands the Paratime Series, with more material on the nature of the First Level society which dispatches the Paratimers, as well as dealing with the future of another Piper work.

"Time and Time Again" (*Astounding Stories*, April 1947), Piper's very first published story, combines Dunne-style speculation about consciousness with the fear of nuclear war, to tell the story of how a time-line divergence takes place, intentionally, the consciousness of a dying man traveling back to his boyhood, where he can try to prevent the ghastly future that killed him the first time around. It is somewhat reminiscent of Cyril Kornbluth's "Two Dooms" (*Venture Science Fiction*

Magazine, July 1958). So for Carr to include "Time and Time Again" in the expanded work is in keeping with the original concept.

Yet, in it, both Verkan Vall and Hadron Dalla, the Nick and Nora of the Paratimers, get found out, and have to take measures to preserve the Paratime Secret (the knowledge that they exist). They use parts of their own names, instead of local ones, and the oddity inspires Hartley the subjective time-traveler to look into the curious anomaly, which requires extra action from the Patrol.

Casualties

Francis R. Scobee, Commander
Michael J. Smith, Pilot
Ronald McNair, Mission Specialist
Ellison Onizuka, Mission Specialist
Judith Resnik, Mission Specialist
Gregory Jarvis, Payload Specialist
Christa McAuliffe, Payload Specialist

On January 28 I remembered *Challenger* and her crew. It has been thirty years since they died "slipping the surly bonds of Earth." Their memory should never be forgotten.

— Lisa

Lieutenant-Colonel (ret.) **Henry Worsley** died in Punta Arenas, Chile, on **January 24, 2016** after being evacuated from the Polar Plateau on January 22 suffering from peritonitis. He had reached the South Pole on **January 2, 2016** in his attempt to cross Antarctica solo, unassisted, and unsupported, having left Berkner Island in the Filchner-Ronne Ice Shelf on November 13. That was his third trip to the Pole.

He was a relative of **Frank "Wuzzles" Worsley**, DSO+, OBE, RD, captain of the *Endurance* and *James Caird* during the Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition and the *Quest* during the Shackleton-Rowlett Expedition. The Pole does draw one down to the utmost generation.

He is survived by his wife Joanna and children Alicia and Max.

The 2016 Golden Globes saw *The Martian* win a Golden Globe for Best Comedy/Musical Picture (it must have been all that disco that tormented Watney), Matt Damon (Mark Watney) won a Golden Globe for Best Actor, and Rachel Bloom ("I Passionately Desire You to Have a Carnal Connection With Me, Ray Bradbury" — well, more or less) won a Golden Globe for Best Actress in a TV series — Musical or Comedy, in *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* [I suppose so, if she wants to have an intimate relationship with a ninety-year-old writer].

In the Academy Awards listing, *The*



Yet, one would think that expert organizations would develop protocols for avoiding such errors. There are many such examples, and somehow it seems authors devise them as a means to drive a plot. In the first explicitly Paratime story, "Police Operation" (*Astounding Science Fiction*, July 1948), Verkan Vall is sent on a mission to eliminate a dangerous animal the discovery of which will endanger the Paratime Secret. He is given a rifle from a manufacturer which no longer exists in the time-line he is sent to, and one of the Pennsylvania police who sees it wonders where he got it. By some fast talking he manages to get out of the predicament, but it's still an error. And recall, in that story he called himself "Richard Lee", not "Richard Vall".

Sometime the blunders are psychological. In Poul Anderson's "Eutopia" (*Dangerous Visions*, 1967) a timeline traveler makes a sexual advance to a seemingly desirable local-timeliner. Unfortunately, the advance happens to be grossly antagonistic to the ethics of the

timeline and the traveler has to flee. That he would not be aware that he would have to fit in to the local mores, and that he was not briefed so, seems to be a gross error of planning and judgment.

Not all such errors can be avoided by careful planing. When in *Worlds of the Imperium* (1961, 1962, 2005) Brion Bayard was caught out in his impersonation of his equivalent on the other timeline it was because of a factor that his alternative version had gone to great lengths to conceal, and the Imperium had not been able to investigate in sufficient detail to find out. (Having terrorists drop nuclear weapons about your territory does induce a certain urgency.)

Sometime the goofs are conceptual. The crosstime merchants observing *The Valley-Westside War* (2008) used a verbal unlocking cue that they were ever so sure didn't exist in this timeline. They were wrong, which shows that too many people watch movies and not enough read.

Perhaps they should have taken examples from time travelers. *Time Scout* (1995) by Robert Asprin and Linda Evans describes an organization that goes to great lengths to ensure that its travelers do not unwittingly reveal their "time secret". They meticulously research the physical goods and the mores of the past. (One could wish that Asprin had done more of these and fewer of the increasingly trite and repetitious "Myth" and "Phule's Company" books, but a writer has to eat.)

A similar nonfiction book, even though it is fiction (unfortunately) is *The Complete Time Traveler: A Tourist's Guide to the Fourth Dimension* by Howard J. Blumenthal (1988). The descriptions of training and equipment could come out of ads in Asprin's and Evans's TT-86. (Blumenthal deserves extra credit for humor; the book has an introduction by H. G. Wells thanking them for giving him a time-travel device, which helped him immensely in doing research for his works.)

The solution might be to hire natives. In "The Adventure of the Extraterrestrial" (*Analog*, July 1965) Mack Reynolds presented an aging Sherlock Holmes and a Watson who thought him even worse off. In fact, Holmes is still enough together mentally to recognize an alien and make an offer to be his local social interpreter. A local, he explains, can see differences that the outsider might not notice. Surely, outtime agents of the Paratime Police or Imperial Intelligence or Crosstime Traders could be rewarded for their assistance with resettlement in an advantageous timeline (as, admittedly, was offered to Brion Bayard).

James Blish defined the term "Idiot Plot"; one that works only because everyone involved is an idiot. One would think that a crucial industry (the Paratime Home Time Line is *only* sustainable because it imports goods from other timelines) would consider security seriously. Too, I find idiot-plot

stories are distasteful.

SOME NOTES ON A DOOR
 Commentary by Joseph T Major on
THE DOOR INTO SUMMER
 (1957; NHOL G.131)

The nineteen-fifties were Robert Heinlein's prime years. Not only was that when the majority of his juveniles were published, but his "adult" novels of the period were also outstanding. *The Puppet Masters* (1951, 1990; NHOL G.091) is a terrifying presentation of the loss of self-control and indeed selfhood. *Double Star* (1956, NHOL G.128) is science fiction's political thriller *par excellence*. Then there's this technological tour de force.

For all that it began with a cat going from door to door trying to get out in the winter, it contains a number of speculations that have been accomplished. There are ATM's, CAD (Computer-Assisted Design, but strangely enough not its partner, CAM, Computer-Assisted Manufacture), and Roombas. There used to be interoffice mail delivery robots, but email seems to have made them obsolete.

However, there are some legal issues. Please, brilliant legal minds out there (That means *you*, Guy Lillian!) expound further on these if I don't get all the details.

When Dan Davis, designer, and Miles Gentry, manager, set up Hired Girl, Inc. to make cleaning robots, they incorporated for legal protection and issued stock. Dan got fifty-one percent, their secretary Belle Darkin got one share for reasons of incorporation, and Miles got the rest.

Then Dan got infatuated and gave Belle some stock as a pre-wedding present. At that point she'd won; she had Miles under her control (there is an ambiguous phrase that indicates she may have drugged him) and so she now controls the company. They kick Dan out and proceed to run the company into the ground.

After Dan awakens from his low-temperature suspension, stockless, he gets a job with the old company, which has been reorganized and is now a subsidiary. They can trace the stock. Belle sold off the stock she had. The rest of his block went to someone whose name he doesn't recognize, someone he thinks is a nominee of Belle's, put in to have three stockholders.

Then he finds out the "someone" is Miles's stepdaughter, the daughter of his first wife, Frederica Virginia Heinicke. (Which is a shout-out to Heinlein's wife. The character's nickname is "Ricky", Ginny Heinlein was known as "Ticky", so he was kipling. Ginny was Virginia Gerstenfeld, and "Heinicke" is close enough to "Heinlein".)

The interesting point is that evidently Miles had a will, and left everything to Ricky, and Belle didn't think to have him change it. If she had inherited his share of Hired Girl she would be better off. As it was, there should have been some legal conflict between Belle and Ricky's

guardian, unless said guardian didn't vote the stock at all, like the Lavins' stock in GML in Pohl's and Kornbluth's *Gladiator-at-Law* (1955). Obviously Belle did not have any connections at Greene, Charlesworth (the investment fund controlling GML through various shady circumstances).

Which leads us to problem two. Let's view it from the point of view of an employee of Riverside Sanctuary, where the heiress Frederica Virginia Heinicke is waiting in suspension for her beloved, Daniel B. Davis. He arrives, she is awakened, and they depart for marital bliss.

Two days later Daniel B. Davis shows up in the middle of the night. He is semi-coherent, unkempt, and smells of liquor. He demands to know where F. V. Heinicke is.

The employee must consider the possibility that Davis found out that his love had changed during the period when he was suspended and she was not, murdered her, got dead drunk, and now, returning to awareness with a memory lapse, is trying to find out where she is.

This incident is earlier in Davis's personal time-line than the earlier one in Ricky's, when her beloved was there when she woke up. But the Sanctuary people don't and indeed can't know that. The reader will wonder why they didn't call the police. That would have derailed the plot, and could have been worked around in the writing, but not bothering is a problem.

Then problem three comes in. At the end of the story, Daniel B. Davis is a partner in Aladdin Autoengineering, one of the most important manufacturers of household automata. His wife, Ricky H. Davis, is a principal stockholder in Hired Girl, one of the most important manufacturers of household automata. Can you say "antitrust"?

AN ORDINARY DAY
 Review by Joseph T Major of
GENTLEMAN JOLE AND THE RED QUEEN

by Lois McMaster Bujold
 (Baen; 2015; ISBN 978-1-4767-8122-8;
 \$27.00; Amazon Digital Services; \$9.99)
 "A Vorkosigan Saga Novel"

Countess-Dowager Cordelia N. Vorkosigan, or Cordelia Naismith, depending, is beginning to come to terms with her widowhood. Being administrator of Sergyar, the planet where she first met her late husband, may have helped or hurt.

She is thinking of having more children. This isn't that barbarous oppressive Twentieth Century Earth, she has ova in suspension, the late Count Aral had deposited gametes. She always wanted daughters and that will not complicate the succession. Also, she can give someone a gift.

By a wonderful coincidence, of which we seem to have been unaware of before, the joint lover of the late Count and the dowager Countess is admiral commanding the local Barraryan fleet. After some initial scheduling problems, they pick up where they



left off, absent the third one.

And basically, that's about it. Admiral Jole becomes the close companion of Cordelia, and they both consider their futures. Various other people from the background show up, become reconciled to the situation, and continue with their own lives. Miles and Ekaterin, in particular, bring a large, varied, and noisy brood of grandchildren.

It's interesting to see "normal" loves, ones absent war, political crisis, and other such violences. The Heroic Quest couldn't work without such unheralded backgrounds.

There is an Oz-style attitude — where every book began with Ozma calling her council to discuss a new discovery, then sending someone off who would accumulate along the way a whole new set of characters for future stories. While backstory is real and a series with characters who actually have families is rare and valuable, there is a certain tick-off-the-family-tree air about this.

Is this the last Vorkosigan novel? It could be.

LONG TIME AGO

Review by Joseph T Major of
IN THE KINGDOM OF ICE:

**The Grand and Terrible Polar Voyage of
the USS Jeannette**
by Hampton Sides

(2014; Doubleday; ISBN 978-0385535379;
\$28.95; Anchor (Kindle); \$12.99)

James Gordon Bennett, Jr.'s *New York Herald* was the sort of newspaper which didn't just report the news. They went out to

look for it, as when Gordon Bennett sent John Rowlands off to Africa to look for a missionary. The man was better known by his new name, "Henry Morton Stanley", I presume.

But that was just one man. Gordon Bennett had bigger and better plans. He wanted to send someone to sail the Polar Sea (when he wasn't breaking engagements by using a fireplace or piano as a urinal, racing around New York in a carriage while naked, and so on; they don't make newspaper publishers like they used to).



Meanwhile, the disappointed Lieutenant George Washington DeLong, USNA 1865, feeling left out when all his senior officers talked about the wonderful times they had had fighting the secesh, wanted to make his mark. He had dreams, Gordon Bennett had money. They could come together.

With a blank checkbook, DeLong could be sure the expedition was well provided for. (Scott and Shackleton would have been envious.) He found the perfect ship for the expedition, the yacht *Pandora*, formerly the gunboat HMS *Pandora*. Not wanting to go north with a vessel named after the first dumb blonde, he had her renamed *Jeannette*, after Jeannette Bennett, Gordon Bennett's sister. (And now you know why Richard E. Byrd called his North Polar airplane *Josephine Ford*, after his financier Edsel's daughter.)

Not only that, Gordon Bennett and DeLong had the backing of the U.S. government. The *Jeannette* became USS *Jeannette*, with a Navy crew, though all expenses were paid by the civilian backer. In fact, DeLong could ignore certain naval regs, as when he sailed from Le Havre to San Francisco nonstop with his wife on board. (The marriage of George and Emma DeLong was quite touching, and she was as beautiful as advertised. He proposed to her on the shortest of acquaintance, persevered, and they were happily married. Ronald and Edith Tolkien would understand.)

After a second refit at Mare Island, the *Jeannette* set out for the Polar Sea via the Bering Strait on July 8, 1879. Why there?

Being a man who believed in experts, Gordon Bennett had consulted with the world's

leading expert on cartography, August Heinrich Petermann, FRGS. Petermann believed absolutely in the Open Polar Sea theory, the idea that in spite of the thick ice that all explorers going north towards the Pole had encountered, once a ship penetrated that belt, the explorers would find an open sea, because in the open sea, salty ocean waters couldn't freeze.

The *Jeannette* was heading through the Bering Strait because it seemed obvious that the Kuro Siwo Current (Kuroshio: "Black Tide") passed through the strait and opened up the seas there the way the Gulf Stream did for the Norwegian Sea. The ship passed north, out of communication, and for two years nothing was heard of them.

The *Jeannette* became frozen in soon enough, but DeLong had been able to provision her properly, including a storeroom of liquor. However, there were some personnel problems. The reporter that Gordon Bennett had sent turned out to be an unpleasant and incompetent man. John Danenhower, the navigator, who had seemed all right even though there were reports he had mental problems, started showing other symptoms of syphilis.

Soon enough DeLong was convinced that the open Polar Sea was a myth. It was another case of cartographers putting in what looked "cool", as it were. (There may have been more open water during the Medieval Warm Period.)

DeLong used the British method of keeping the men from going over the edge, having lectures and improv plays (instead of the American, which seems to focus on marathon poker games). They did well for the next two years until the floe that the *Jeannette* was frozen into melted, leaving the ship floating free — and then the other floes closed in and crushed the ship all in a day, June 13, 1881.

DeLong found himself on the ice with ample provisions, dog teams, and three boats. However the rest of his expedition was to turn out somewhat less fortunate than the Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition. They dragged the boats on sledges until they reached a small island which was named Bennett Island (the expedition discovered a number of small islands which are known as the *Ostrova De-Longa* [De-Long Islands]). From there they took to the boats and sailed to the New Siberian Islands.

DeLong proposed to sail to the delta of the Lena River, which according to his map had a large number of settlements. Problems ensued. The three boats were separated in bad weather and when DeLong reached the delta he found out it was surrounded by mudflats and those settlements were mostly short-term refugees usually not inhabited. He headed upriver, but the men grew weaker, and finally he ordered the two strongest men to go ahead and find people.

They finally reached something approaching human habitation. Where the survivors from the boat commanded by the ship's engineer, George W. Melville (and yes,

he said he was related to Herman) encountered them, having reached a village after a hard but not fatal voyage. Melville sent men to find DeLong and his party and records. They found the records and the bodies. The third boat had disappeared with all its crew.

When they returned to America the survivors were hailed and feted. A team was set out to recover the bodies of DeLong and the others. DeLong and five of his men are buried in Woodlawn Cemetery in the Bronx (where Herman Melville is buried).

The fates of the survivors were varied. Melville eventually became an admiral and a significant figure in the navy administration. Danenhower committed suicide because of failing health and his disgrace at the stranding of his ship. (Sloan Wilson, author of *The Man In the Gray Flannel Suit* (1955), was his grandson.) Charles Tang Sing, one of the stewards, became a tong boss in New York, then a restaurateur.

Some small details may grate. Sides uses "Inuit" as if it were singular; the word is plural (the singular is "Inuk") and technically the people in Alaska are the "Inupiat". He does not mention that the drift of wreckage from the *Jeannette* to Greenland gave Nansen hints of the current, which helped him plan and design the *Fram* expedition. This also explains how a letter that DeLong wrote to his wife could end up there, to be recovered and delivered to her by Robert E. Peary.

In this detailed tale of an early step forward, Sides gives a picture of how it was then and what the price of going forward is. DeLong had misfortunes which proved all too fatal, but others took them as an example to honor, not a reason to stop.

DARKNESS IN THE HEART

Review by Joseph T Major of
LYING IN WAIT:

and Other True Cases

(Ann Rule's Crime Files Vol. 17)

by Ann Rule

(2015; Del Rey; ISBN 978-0804179034;
\$25.00; Random House (Kindle); \$11.99)

Jackie Gardenhire Schut killed Georgia Clemons while Georgia's daughter watched, then took Georgia's infant son and abandoned him by the roadside. Shortly thereafter she took at least two more babies. The mother of one died suspiciously right after the kidnapping.

She is not the most reprehensible person in this story.

In this, which is probably the last of Ann Rule's books that will be prepared by her, she tells the repulsive story of "**The Baby Seller**" and her ghastly associates. However, in this story she focuses on the survivors, and their attempts to try to get on with their lives.

Schut gradually drifted into this infamous career from a rather loose life. Perhaps the

tipping point was when she met a man who put on live juvenile sex shows, and provided him with a performer, her own daughter. I said she was not the most reprehensible person involved.

The climax of her career was these multiple kidnappings and murders that took place in the winter of 1980. Jackie Schut was tracked down before long, but due to the multiplicity of jurisdictions in which her crimes had occurred, she somehow managed to escape the death penalty.

The most surprising of the "**Secrets of the Amorous Pizza Man**" was how he managed to juggle his many lives for so long. He was a technician for the U.S. Antarctic Program (apparently a summer-only person). He ran a pizza parlor. And, finally, he murdered his wife in order to be free to marry again. The unraveling of his web of deceit and exaggeration shows primarily how the criminal who thinks he's so smart he can outwit the dumb cops generally isn't.

The "**Road Trip to Murder**" shouldn't have been all that surprising, since Joey Pedersen was an ex-con with a rap sheet and a white-supremacist tattoo. His girlfriend Holly Grigsby was another ex-con, and when they decided to drop in on Joey's father Red and his new wife, what ensued was not surprising. Red's new wife Dee Dee was a kindly woman and Red's harshness had mellowed with age and marriage, but that wasn't enough to stop Joey and Holly. Then they fled, killing two more benefactors along the way before being arrested. In spite of Joey's antisocial nature, including an anthrax scare at the prosecutor's office, he beat the death penalty. As did Holly; it was too much trouble to prosecute them with that aim.

Many of the stories in the "**Ann Rule's Crime Files**" were written by one Andy Stack. When you learn that Ann Rule's maiden name was Stackhouse, that makes the association clearer. Like the following.

The "**Murderous Epitaph for the Beautiful Runaway**" was for a tragedy that fell all too often to those who didn't realize that the rules of the world were not the same everywhere, and indeed had changed for the worse. The young heiress decided that all she needed was love, and went wandering in the world in the hippie style. Her journey of peace and love ended in a seedy Seattle skid row joint, where those who were open and trusting were meat for the killing.

The "**Track of the Serial Rapist**" is an all too modern sort, a man who fancied himself irresistible, and took what he wanted when it wasn't offered. Worst yet, he'd boast of his prowess during his crimes. And in a very brief time he managed to permanently scar several lives of young women in Seattle.

A program that rounds up well-doers to help means that they "**Take a Lifer Home to Dinner . . . With Murder for Dessert!**" Arthur St. Peter was a chronic felon and chronic escapee. Not surprisingly, he always got caught soon after he got out. Somehow, in the game of always giving a man who's down another

chance, he got out to have dinner with a guard's family and escaped again. This time, he killed a pawn shop owner. (You never know what is gonna come through that door.)

When surveying the ruins left in the wake of these deeds, the conclusion is the one that Robert Bloch made; the greatest horror is in the human soul. Supernatural beings cannot compare to the horrors perpetrated by humanity.

CAT THOUGHTS

by Lisa



Tonight I watched an interesting episode in which a man bites an intelligent lizard, causing the lizard to begin transforming into a human being. I found myself wondering how Mr. Chunk, the old style Siamese, sees us. He seems to have real affection for us. And yet I wonder how he really feels. We were not the people he picked out to be his own. Would he have chosen us instead of Dale and Tammi had he been given a choice? We did not give him one. We came and whisked him away in what must have been a scary experience for a small animal. And yet he did not seem to mind too much.

THE JOY OF HIGH TECH

by Rodford Edmiston

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

Detour

We're all familiar with the road not taken. However, what about the road taken but then abandoned? There are many examples in the history of technology where what appears to be a good choice turns out to be less good than an alternate which takes off unexpectedly. Of course, there are also examples of people knowing very well that what they're using now works better than the available alternate choices, but that it has severe limitations which will result in it being eventually abandoned. There are even examples of people thinking they're participating in this second option but the expected alternates simply didn't prove out and they were stuck with the original, functional but limited choice!

Then, of course, there are the human factors. Taste, politics and individual whims all influence what becomes the standard. In the US electric trolleys were mostly destroyed by busses — a largely political decision — but today light rail is making a comeback in some places. (Due in part to improved automation capacity for safely controlling transportation devices without crew aboard. Which owes a lot to Walt Disney.) Pneumatic mail and parcel delivery through dedicated tube networks under large cities was taken over by trucks. Why? Largely lobbying by trucking interests, much the same as with trolleys. London, England had an elaborate underground rail system for mail, but that is almost entirely abandoned these days. Which means delays as mail trucks get stuck in traffic.

Thomas Edison faced many obstacles in marketing the incandescent light bulb. One of those was the fact that gas lighting was at that time a mature technology, and with the addition of the thorium dioxide and cerium dioxide impregnated mantle gas gave a bright, white light with little odor or smoke. However, people who understood both methods of artificial lighting knew that there were inherent limitations to gas lighting which did not affect the electric bulb. The main one being that you could turn on an incandescent bulb over there with a simple flick of a switch over here, while a gas lamp required the application of a source of ignition at the actual burner. Who knows; if someone had figured out a practical way to supply a spark remotely — as you can with many current water heaters, using a piezoelectric device — the gas lamp might still be in widespread use.

Decades later Henry Ford and other early automobile manufacturers faced competition from both electric and steam automobiles. Gasoline eventually won out over electricity because a tank of gasoline is a very lightweight and compact source of energy which is quick and easy to replenish. It won out over steam largely because even very sophisticated boilers require at least several seconds to build up enough pressure to get the vehicle moving. Meanwhile, electric cars could take off even more quickly than those

with gasoline engines, but energy storage density was poor.

Today electric cars are seeing a resurgence. They're still well behind internal combustion engines — whether gasoline or diesel — in both range and number of sales, but both continue to improve. Advances in technology have greatly increased both the energy storage density of batteries and how quickly they recharge, as well as the efficiencies of vehicles in general.

In the late Eighteenth and early Nineteenth Centuries black powder weapons were strongly challenged by air rifles. Even Louis and Clark carried Girardoni air rifles — a military model actually used as an issue arm by Austria from 1780 to 1815 — on their famous expedition. Though muzzle velocity was lower and the weapons more fragile than equivalent black powder rifles they were lighter, could fire twenty or more times in quick succession and needed less cleaning, while being much quieter and not producing huge clouds of white smoke. The party also didn't need to stock black powder and flints; just bullets, air pumps and reservoirs and maintenance/repair kits. (Note that most early air rifles had a "firing" mechanism which externally resembled a flint lock. Just for the sake of familiarity.)

One reason air rifles fell out of favor as serious military and hunting weapons was the development of percussion caps. Not only did this make single-shot black powder firearms more reliable, it also allowed practical repeating firearms. The development of cartridges further reduced any advantage for air guns. Smokeless powder pretty much sealed the deal.

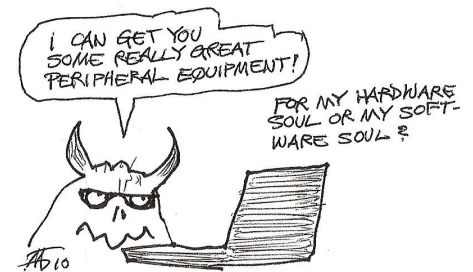
Today, however, air guns are making huge comebacks. Modern materials make air rifles quite effective on small and even medium game, and for target shooting in places where the loud bang of conventional firearms is considered inappropriate. Some of the technological developments driving this are due to paintball games. (Interestingly, paintball guns were originally invented for marking livestock.) The materials for pressure tanks, rapid-action valves and so forth for paintballs can be applied to air rifles, though the latter generally have higher operating pressures.

For a couple of decades during a part of the Twentieth Century flywheels floating on magnetic bearings in vacuums were *the* high density electricity storage devices of the future! They could be charged and discharged far faster than even the majority of modern chemical batteries. These flywheels weren't made of solid chunks of metal but strands of wire of some other high-density, high tensile strength material which could spin freely in the vacuum. In the event of a catastrophic failure these simply could not pierce the safety covering around the flywheel.

However, having a powerful gyroscope aboard a moving vehicle produced some — let's say — interesting handling qualities. As well, chemical batteries greatly improved during the same period.

Speaking of gyroscopic effects, the Fastrand

I memory storage unit (used with the UNIVAC 1108 computer, to provide the first permanent file storage capability in the UNIVAC 1100 series family) had to be fastened securely to a sturdy concrete floor or it would hold still as the Earth rotated under it. This in spite of the fact that it weighed over two tonnes! No surprise, really, since it was basically a hunk of iron sewer pipe spinning at a high rate around its long axis! The pipe was balanced and smoothed to allow read-write heads to scan back and forth along the length of the iron as it spun. One of these memory storage units was installed in a US Navy ship, and reportedly greatly reduced the maneuverability of the vessel in turns. The problem was solved by making the Fastrand II a double unit, with one pipe positioned above the other, spinning in the opposite direction. Even that, of course, couldn't prevent what would happen if one of those pieces of digital ironmongery came off its supports and crashed out of the machine. Folks were very glad when magnetic tape drives came along . . .



In the late Nineteenth Century the US Army decided to replace the M1873 Colt Single Action Army in .45 Colt (originally a black powder cartridge) with a modern double-action revolver chambered a modern, smokeless powder cartridge. The revolver was marvelous; reliable, easy to maintain and use and accurate. Unfortunately, the .38 Long Colt cartridge chosen for it proved to be underpowered. During the Philippine-American War of 1899 - 1902 performance of that cartridge was so disappointing the Army reissued the old single-action .45. No-one was surprised when their next handgun was an autopistol chambered in .45 Auto, a smokeless powder round which had ballistics very close to those of the old .45 Colt.

Coming forward in time a bit, in the early Eighties the Next Big Thing in computer data storage was bubble memory. However, it stopped being competitive when the storage density of FETs on silicon around '84 or '85. That technology simply had too much stretch for bubble memory to match.

In the late Nineteenth Century X-rays were all the rage. Between legitimate medical use and a faddish desire to see one's own bones many people were exposed to dangerous levels

of radiation. These days, in terms of total number of images CT and MRI outnumber simple projection X-Ray images by about one hundred to one. While traditional, single-exposure X-rays are still used, instead of film a digital sensor pad is the detection medium.

CDs replaced vinyl records . . . only not entirely, and in recent years vinyl is making a comeback. In double-blind tests using high-quality audio equipment, some people can tell the difference, and almost uniformly prefer the vinyl sound. This is largely due to audio clipping being used on CDs to reduce the amount of data stored. Some higher quality CDs are now using less clipping or abandoning it altogether, but vinyl is still growing.

Airships were already in decline when the *Hindenburg* burned. However, the extent of that disaster would have been much less if it had been filled with helium, which it was originally designed for. (The US was and is the main source of helium and had embargoed its export to Nazi Germany.) There have been several attempts in recent years to build commercial airships (above and beyond Goodyear). Even the old Zeppelin company has gotten back into the business, with a few blimps of several sizes. These are mostly intended for the tourist industry, where there is definite financial potential. An airship can fly high enough to give a good view of a city or natural wonder while going much more slowly than even a propeller airplane, offering a good look.

Most commercial nuclear reactors have been expanded versions of reactors developed for submarines. There are problems with this, since those are much smaller than what is needed for public power plants and scaling them up introduced problems. Several alternative kinds of nuclear reactors would have been better for civilian use than the BWR (boiling water reactor) and PWR (pressurized water reactor) designs we ended up with; that choice was driven mainly by the selection of those small, military designs. Safer, cheaper reactors with less waste might have led to a mostly-nuclear electric grid by now.

Thorium has repeatedly been recommended as nuclear fuel, including by Robert Heinlein. Almost no reactors have been built to use it. Thorium is harder to use for a bomb than uranium or plutonium and its decay products are much less problematic. Thorium is also relatively plentiful in the Earth's crust (there's about four times as much as there is uranium) and not difficult to extract. The fact that it has been used in gas mantle light sources for well over a century (thorium when heated glows a brilliant white) is testimony to that.

Thorium is about half the density of uranium or plutonium. It is a soft ductile metal in the pure form, and that and some alloys can be processed in much the same way as mild

steel. It also has a high melting point. All characteristics which make it more suitable for use as nuclear fuel than the other choices.

Another interesting "road taken and abandoned" variant is the road taken, abandoned, retaken, abandoned again and retaken again. What's interesting is that you see this most often in military hardware.

Abraham Lincoln overrode his own Secretary of War and the Army's Ordnance Chief to buy 10,000 Spencer repeating lever-action rifles. This was a year and a half after both Lincoln and an evaluation board recommended this purchase, but the Army delayed. This "Damned Yankee Rifle You Load on Sunday and Shoot All Week" (as the Rebs sometimes called it) was the first practical repeating long firearm adopted for military application. It was a lightweight, handy rifle shooting an intermediate power cartridge and giving a high rate of fire and could have shortened the War if acquired when Lincoln first gave the order to do so. It provided an enormous increase in firepower over the muzzleloaders in common use at the time, though at a significant sacrifice in range and effectiveness. It was later supplemented by the similar Henry repeater.



About a century later, the M-16 was adopted by the US Armed Forces. It was a lightweight, handy rifle shooting an intermediate power cartridge and providing a high rate of fire. The 5.56 cartridge was smaller than the then-standard 7.62 US military cartridge and thus allowed more ammunition to be carried, greatly increasing firepower. It even met with one of the same bizarre objections from high military brass: That it would encourage soldiers to waste ammunition. While on the surface all this echoes the situation with the Spencer the execution was very different. The M-16 as originally developed (as the AR-15) was intended as a military aircrew survival firearm. It attracted the attention of people — many of them not familiar with firearms or military needs — who thought the economies of the system (smaller, cheaper cartridges in a smaller, cheaper rifle, allowing soldiers to carry more ammunition for the same weight and cost) and handiness of the rifle would be useful in the close-quarters fighting in Vietnam. In this they were actually right; the M-14 with its greater size and weight and larger, more powerful cartridge was built for combat at long ranges,

much like the previous M-1 Garand. Both were known to be awkwardly long for close-quarters fighting.

However, the M-16 as issued was very different from the system as tested. The barrels were not chrome lined, leading to excessive wear. The cartridges used a different powder, greatly increasing fouling and the resulting malfunctions. Due to a misunderstanding, the rifles were issued without cleaning equipment, because of a myth that they did not need to be cleaned!

Today the M-16 and its descendants are long-proven standards, but in the early days of their use in combat they cost many lives on the side of those using them.

Recently, however, experience in Afghanistan, Iraq and other situations where combat takes place at long ranges in open country have resulted both in the M-14 being put back into service and other firearms with greater range than the M-16 being issued. The old, tried and proven concept of the squad sharpshooter has also been revived.

The ME-262 was the original lightweight jet fighter. Though it had some problems — mainly caused by its primitive engines — it proved the concept. During the Fifties the US and many others built jet "fighters" of rapidly increasing weight and complexity . . . Until Lockheed built the F-104, which reaffirmed the concept of the lightweight fighter. After adopting this and a few similar highly effective aircraft, the various air forces went back to increasingly complicated, increasingly heavy "fighters" which were increasingly sluggish and unmaneuverable. Until the F-16 reaffirmed the lightweight concept. After adopting that and a few similar planes they went back to (rinse and repeat).

People who ignore Santayana are doomed to have him quoted to them. It seems the lesson here is that the people who buy equipment for their military services don't understand that often one size does not fit all.

STANDING ALONE: An American Woman's Struggle for the Soul of Islam

By Asra Q. Nomani

Harper Collins, 2006

\$14.95 Paperback: 306 pages

Reviewed by Marilyn "Mattie" Brahen

This remarkable true story came to my attention when the author appeared on Bill Maher's talk show. It documents a courageous and honest journey embarked upon by a thoroughly modern American Muslim woman seeking to discover her roots and overcome the misogyny, sexism and intolerance practiced by many fundamentalist members of her faith. All the more extraordinary, Ms. Nomani, a journalist for the *Wall Street Journal* for twelve years, was also a single mother of a son conceived out of wedlock, after his father condemned her as illegitimate. This would also brand her as a "criminal" in orthodox Islamic

societies. In her quest to understand true Islam as practiced in the days of the prophet, she and her infant son, her father and mother, and her niece and nephew travelled to Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia on the Muslim pilgrimage known as the hajj. We follow her footsteps as she experiences the Ka'bah and the black stone legend says was placed within it by the angel Gabriel.



The myths of Judaism, Christianity and Islam merge in the Islamic version of the tale of Abraham and his wife Sarah and his second wife Hajar. Ms. Nomani identifies strongly with Hajar, abandoned with her infant son Ishmael in the desert valley of Mecca, her faith saving them. As Sarah's son Isaac created Judaism, and Hajar's son Ishmael created Islam, the author notes how differently the world would have been, if their mothers had joined forces and raised their sons independently, not permitting Abraham, a patriarch in both religions, to separate the brothers.

Ms. Nomani finds both affirmation of her faith on the hajj and questions raised about how the religion had been hijacked by male control and intolerance:

With this revelation, I was coming to terms with what I believed rather than simply embracing what I was supposed to believe. It seemed to me that all of us, Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists, have to challenge our faiths.

(Page 58)

She recalls the strong women in the prophet's life: his first wife, Khadijah, and their daughter Fatima, who with her husband Ali vied with Muhammad's later and favorite wife Aisha death.

The legacy of the male rule after the prophet's time was becoming clear

to me: the spirit of Muhammad had been betrayed by centuries of men who instituted rules to protect their power.

(Page 101)

After the hajj, she carries the pilgrimage home to Morgantown, West Virginia, to its only mosque which her father founded, but which is now separating and marginalizing the rights of its women parishioners. Fighting the sexism, she allies herself with intelligent, moderate Islamic scholars, both male and female, including Alan Godlas, professor of Islamic studies at the University of Georgia, who tells her:

"One can look at you and Islam together as the fetus kicking and trying to come out. Islam wants to be born into the postmodern world."

(Pages 188-189)



Ms. Nomani launches her battle, creating both An Islamic Bill of Rights for Women in Mosques and An Islamic Bill of Rights for Women in the Bedroom. She and her allies build scholarly arguments protecting Islamic women against abuse. She cites research by Dr. Abou El Fadl which discredits a historical figure, Abu Hurayrah, a contemporary of the prophet "whose records of the prophet's sayings were often some of the most virulently anti-women elements of the religion." (Page 236) Abu Hurayrah is reprimanded by Aisha, who dismisses any authenticity in his reports of the prophet's sayings. He responds to Aisha: "Oh, mother, you were busy with your kohl (eye liner) and with beautifying yourself for the prophet, but I—nothing kept me away from him." (Page 236)

Ms. Nomani is invited to meet Dr. Khaled Abou El Fadl, respectfully known as the Professor, at his home in Los Angeles, CA. He tells her: "It is a great victory that you are writing. You can only testify to the truth that you know," he said. "And you are doing that." (Page 275)

Standing up for human rights, especially feminist rights, she concludes:

I believe there are some fundamental changes the Islamic world must make in order to be true to the spirit of the religion. First, we must live by the

golden rule common to all of the religions and philosophies of the world. Second, we must open the doors of Islam. Saudi Arabia must open the doors of Mecca and Medina to those who are not Muslim.

Muslims around the world must open the doors of their mosques to women and those who are not Muslim. Third, we must open the doors of ijtihad [humane judicial reasoning used to mediate questions of law—author's note]. Fourth, and finally, we must honor and respect the voices and rights of all people.

Despite intimidation and even a death threat, Ms. Nomani speaks out bravely. The world needs more voices like her own and should respond in a passionate dialogue, letting her know she is not standing alone.

Confusion 42

Con Report by Murray Moore
<http://confusionsf.org/>

The highways to, streets in, and highways from, Novi, Michigan, last Friday-Sunday (Jan. 22-24) were bare and dry.

I started attending Confusion when it was happening in Troy, the year that Steve Stiles was a guest.

Until I began driving to Confusion I thought that driving in January, through southwestern Ontario into Michigan in January, was daft, not that Mike Glicksohn was deterred.

Novi (vi = eye) is a city of 50,000 near Detroit in which buildings are built seemingly at random. The city centre is a shopping centre. For the past three(?) years Confusion happened in Dearborn, closer to Detroit.

Always good not only to spend time with friends but also with new people. During Confusion 42 the new person was Ken Josenhans.

We both were at a previous convention, but it was Ditto 7 (1994, Ann Arbor, Michigan). Ken, and Leslie Smith, were co-chairs and I was at my first American convention, the first of the three that I attended in the previous century; also Octocon/Ditto in Cincinnati (1997) and Ditto in Newport, R.I. (1998).

The other early arrivals at Ditto 7, who I met standing together, were the late George Flynn (Boston), Eric Lindsay (Somewhere, Australia), and the late Howard DeVore (Dearborn).

During Confusion 42 last weekend we did not see Gregg Trend, who was there earlier than us on Friday, in a wheelchair; he, with Audrey, was expected to return Saturday, but did not.

Dick Smith and Leah Smith have been at recent Confusions, but not this year. Leah continues to recover from carelessly breaking an ankle in three places.

Joel Zakem showed Rick Lieder and

myself, and probably others, one of the books he bought on his drive to Confusion, a Donald Grant book about Virgil Finlay published in Italy by an Italian publisher.

Joel also bought a Haffner Press Henry Kuttner reprint for \$20. But he did not pay \$150 for a different Haffner Press reprint at a different Half Price Books store.

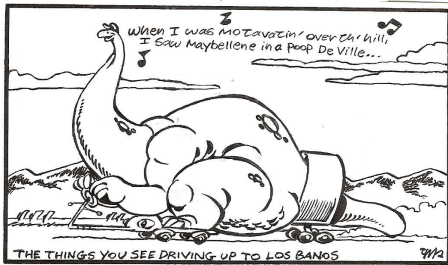
Ken Josenhans was at his first Confusion in twenty years because he wanted to see Ann Leckie. He has read her trilogy multiple times. He has the Ancillary books on his phone. In odd moments he will read a chapter. Leckie was one of the guests during Confusion of Michigan small press publisher Subterranean Books. Subterranean authors are additional Confusion guests.

I was impressed that Leckie was attending until I discovered that she lives in St. Louis, Missouri, not where I believed she lives, somewhere in England (my belief wrong because her publisher is Orbit).

Kurt Erichsen was busy as the organizer of the Artists Alley and of the Iron Artist competition. Mary Ellen and I had a good talk with his partner, John Widmer.

Of the artists I renewed acquaintance with Mike Kucharski and John Benson and Bill (Journey) Loeb. In the Huckster Room, when Larry Smith admitted he is Lawrence C Smith, I gave him a pair of fanzines he edited decades ago. He was the new books seller. The only used books seller told me that he rarely has a customer under the age of thirty.

Ripple of David Hartwell. Rick Lieder told his old friend during Detcon, the Detroit NASFiC, of his desire to do a major Richard Powers retrospective. Hartwell walked across the Detcon dealer room to World Fantasy Convention Saratoga Springs chair Joe Berlant and made it so.



Cy Chauvin introduced me to Ken Josenhans on Friday evening. After being in the same place several times on Saturday, Ken joined me at a table in the lobby in the evening. I was waiting for Mary Ellen and Cy to return with Indian food. I learned from Ken that Leslie needs a wheelchair and that she must husband her energy.

Ken mentioned that he introduced to fandom one Pat Mueller (now Virzi): he wondered, where is she now?. Ken and Leslie were recruited to chair Ditto 7 by Leah. When the foragers returned Ken got hotel food and we had a good natter.

Confusion is the very model of a modern SF convention.

From the program:

Friday "How Many Genders?";

Saturday Acceptable Bodies in Comics; Anthologies as Advocacy; The Fiction of Political SF; The Golden Age is Tarnished; Women Made of Chrome; Seeing the World Through Different Eyes; The Princess Problem; LGBTQ* Alphabet Soup; Standards of Beauty in Made-up Worlds; Hell Hath No Fury: Ways to Motivate, Impede, and Change Female Characters; Colonialism and Post-Colonialism;

Sunday What's Wrong With Gendering Kids' Media?; Are Steven Universe and Korra the Future?

Literature track panel descriptions here:

<http://2016.confusionsf.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Literature-2.html>

I attended Anthologies as Advocacy; The Golden Age is Tarnished; Nominating for the 2016 Hugo Awards; Interview: Ann Leckie; and Concert: Tom Smith.

From the free books at Registration I picked for us the smallest books, handsome tiny Tor.com hardcovers, three and three-quarter inches wide by near-six inches tall, no wrappers; *The Devil in America* (2014) by Kai Ashante Wilson and *Wakulla Springs* (2015) by Andy Duncan and Ellen Klages (four stories). If we had attended the Saratoga Springs World Fantasy banquet we would have received signed copies.

The Devil in America is a deal with the (African) Devil in 1877 in Rosetree, somewhere in the U.S. South. The source inspiration might be the killing of blacks and the burning of homes in Rosewood, Florida, in 1923. *The Devil in America* was a Nebula Novelette nominee in 2014. You can read it on-line here:

<http://www.tor.com/2014/04/02/the-devil-in-america-kai-ashante-wilson/>

Mary Ellen and I did our book buying at John King "Michigan's largest book store" Books in Detroit, housed in a former glove factory. I bought fifteen paperbacks, ranging in price from \$1.50 to \$6: Ballard (three collections), Russ (two), three Ace Science Fiction Specials (Eklund, Friedberg, McAllister), Farmer (collection), Neal Barrett, Jr. (two late career fantasy novels), Galouye (Dark Universe), T L Sherred (collection), Williamson (Golden Blood), Simak.

I didn't look at other sections on the second and the third floors. Neither of us during our multiple visits have explored above the third floor.

I also took delivery from Cy of a copy, by consensus, of R A Lafferty's best novel, *Okla*

Hannali. Months ago I bought it from Ned Brooks and had Ned mail it to Cy, to save myself the increasingly expensive cross-border postage.

WORLDCON BIDS

2017 NASFiC

San Juan, Puerto Rico
<http://www.sanjuan2017.org/>

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/>

2021

Fort Worth

2022

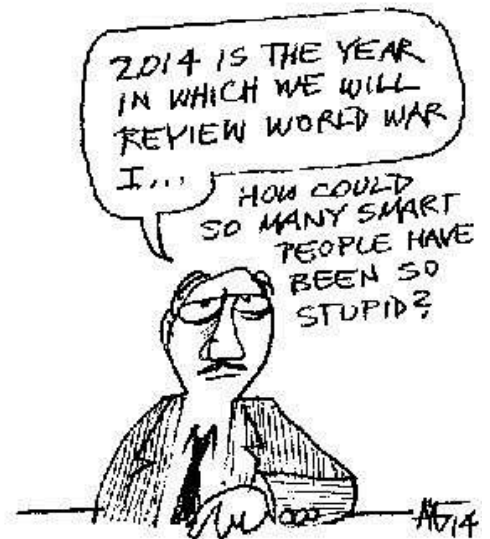
Chicago
Doha, Qatar

2023

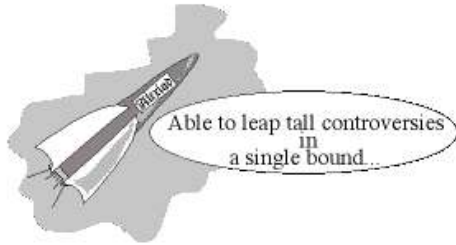
Paris
<https://sites.google.com/site/parisin2019/>

2025

Perth, Australia



Letters, we get letters



From: **Joy V. Smith** January 4, 2016
8925 Selph Road, Lakeland, FL
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Pagadan@aol.com

I see I made a mistake and confused H bombs and A bombs. The thing is — I swear I doublechecked that to be sure I didn't make that mistake; and I just searched to see what I said in a book review and couldn't find one for *Hungry for Wood*. Drat!

Well, aside from being really embarrassed, I enjoyed the issue. Thanks for the reviews — I especially enjoyed the Frederick Forsyth background — and the con reports. I always enjoy Sue Burke's con reports about the SF field in Spain.

Re: Letters: Interesting background on battle ships and battle cruisers. And fun advice on learning to drive in Canada. Another entertaining and educational issue — and I hope I've got a handle on A and H bombs now! (A comes before H. That should help me remember. And I vaguely remember something about two different versions...)

Forsyth did more than just write and it shows in his works. But then that seems to be a very British thing; compare the accounts given by Bill Slim (*Defeat Into Victory* (1956)) and John Masters (*Road Past Mandalay* (1961)) of that reconnaissance into Persian-held territory.

— JTM

From: **Brad W. Foster** January 4, 2016
Post Office Box 165246, Irving, TX
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<http://www.jabberwockygraphix.com>

First, congrats on the new body-shape Lisa, and your happiness with it. Inspiring words, as I have resolved (and I usually don't do the New Years Resolution thing), that I will bring my own weight back down in this new year. Hit the 6th decade in 2015, and realized that, if going to get a handle on this,

need to do it *now*. So, your opening was a bit of added inspiration at the right time.

The new El Rey cable network (started by Robert Rodriguez of "Dusk to Dawn"/"Spy Kids"/"Sin City" etc) ran a four-day marathon of 17 Godzilla flicks, and I managed to catch them all at various times over those four days, including many of the films from the 90's on that had never seen before. Just as goofy, if not more so, but with somewhat better affects — though the film makers do still show their love for the miniature cities to be stomped, and the little tanks to kick around. I wonder if this will be my new holiday tradition?

Made out like a bandit with a new stack of some dozen or so books to get me through the first few months of the new year. Now, if I can just avoid the urge to snack while reading, maybe I can get that new/better form back again. We shall see!

Where I saw that was on *Ultra-Man*. There is an incredible fondness for Japanese media skiffy which I find unjustified by the bulk of the material. Hearing limited-animation cliché-ridden animé praised as far better than anything the round-eyes can do shows a certain obsession. It also insults the artistry of the great Japanese animation masters such as Hayao Miyazaki.

— JTM

From: **Cathy Palmer-Lister** Jan 4, 2016
Ste. Julie, Quebec, CANADA
cathyp1@sympatico.ca
<http://www.monsffa.ca/>

Thanks for *Alexiad*, Joe. I always enjoy reading it.

About your review of *Uprooted* by Naomi Novik, I was at first disappointed that she had chosen to write "something else" ie not a Temeraire story, but I have to say it was a wonderful novel, IMO one of the best of the year.

Slavic folk tales — CJ Cherryh wrote a trilogy based on the Rusalka. Patricia McKillip wrote the Cygnet books, which I think involved the house on chicken legs. What I most remember about the Cygnet books was the constellations falling out of the sky to become real. Being an amateur astronomer, I recognized the constellations right from the start. I must reread those books, I remember that I really, really liked them.

In answer to Lloyd Penney's LoC, you wrote: *We're not gafiating from fandom, fandom is gafiating from us. But all the other activities that are crowding us out were started by fans, and taken up by a large number of others.*

MonSFFA is a general interest club, and I've been told many times that we are of a disappearing breed. True enough, as you point out, the various splinter groups are fans, too,

though I know some argue the point, but I think these fans miss a lot by being too tightly focussed on a particular interest.

Milt Stevens wrote: *I wonder if the Internet promotes solipsism. Maybe I'm alone in a computer at the end of the universe.* I had to look up solipsism, so now I know why I lost interest in philosophy years ago.

I had to laugh at Murray Moore's comments on driving in Toronto. In Montreal, it is forbidden to turn right on a red, it was judged that driving in the city was bad enough without people turning on red lights.

What happens is that fans like something. They tell their friends who read/watch a little SF and like that thing, and they come. Those in turn tell their friends who like that thing but don't read/watch SF and they come. And this is why there is no more DisClave.

— JTM

From: **Tom Feller** January 6, 2016
TomFeller@aol.com

Thanks for e-mailing the zine.

While it did seem that Carrie Fisher looked older in the new Star Wars than she did a few years ago when we saw her at Dragoncon, I am amazed that people would criticize her for that. We all look older than we did in 1983.

I fondly remember the Baba Yaga stories.

The "age shaming" thing made no sense, which fitted it for the Internet era. I mean, Leia Organa has gone through a *lot* since her father's death, as discussed in the film. Why shouldn't she look worn and concerned?

— JTM

From: **Milt Stevens** January 12, 2016
6325 Keystone Street, Simi Valley, CA
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In *Alexiad* #84, Lisa comments on body image. My body image is one of those pieces of software that I am usually running in the background of my mind. I say "usually" because I don't bother loading it when I'm really concentrating on something. When I'm really concentrating I'm just a processing unit and am not aware of having a body at all. From that experience, I can imagine what being an AI must be like. Just because I was disembodied didn't mean I felt particularly hostile. Why should I? I was just an uninvolved bystander.

In my younger days, I was 5-11 and usually around 170-180. I used to think of myself as a large man. That was before I was worldcon chairman. As chairman, I discovered I was pretty much the only member of the committee who wore a medium T-shirt. Just about everybody was more massive than I was. Most

of fandom comes in sizes large, extra large, and really huge.

After reading Joseph's comments about gay dino porn, it occurs to me that porn fandom is probably in the same condition as SF fandom. Years ago, porn was fairly generalized stuff that most people could understand to some degree. However, there got to be so much of it that you couldn't make any money out of it. Porn became more specialized and more extreme. SF and fantasy seem to have been going in the same direction. Whatever may be said about the virtues of broader subject matter, gay necrophilic lust just isn't my cup of tea.

I might quibble about *Logan's Run* being George Clayton Johnson's most noted work. I think "Ocean's Eleven" was the work he was best known for with the general public.

Uprooted sounds interesting. I may give it a try.

Teachers never made fun of my cursive handwriting when I was in elementary school. My handwriting was so illegible I think they feared it might be a new form of artistic expression.

Somehow the thought of a giant orgy presided over by Count Dracula with Lestat, Barnabas Collins, Edward Cullen, and so on is uninviting and yet I know someone must have written something like this.

— JTM

From: **Robert S. Kennedy** January 18, 2016
1779 Ciprian Avenue, Camarillo, CA
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robertk@cipcug.org

Thank you for Vol. 14, No. 6 (December 2015), Whole Number 84.

You even more have my sympathy regarding your work problem given that you were the "only one got rid of." That sucks!

I've requested that the library purchase *Out of Time*, *Stealing Trinity*, and *A Year of Ravens: A Novel of Boudica's Rebellion* as a result of your reviews.

In my letter in the previous issue of *ALEXIAD* when commenting on the latest novel in the SAFEHOLD series by David Weber I made mention of Marlin's when that should have been Merlin's. So much for spell check and my ability at proofreading. Well, a long time ago a friend told me that if you make a mistake you will often make the same mistake when proofreading.

The Golden Globes awarded *The Martin* Best Motion Picture, Comedy/Musical. It is my understanding that it was placed in that category at the request of the Powers-That-Be at the studio because they realized that it could not win Best Motion Picture, Drama. There may be a couple of chuckles in *The Martin*; but it's not a comedy or a musical. The "win" is ridiculous. Better to lose than win in the

wrong category.

Speaking of *The Martin*, it looks like my hope for it to win a HUGO may have gone down the drain with the late December release of *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* (which I have not as yet seen).

THUNDERBIRD by Jack McDevitt (2015) was something of a disappointment. The political party of the President was not actually identified. Well, the party of the opposition was identified so I guess that would mean he belonged to the other major political party. Perhaps that was just as well as he seemed to be something of a wimp. My major problem with the novel was that I did not like the resolution of what was considered to be the problem which I did not consider to be a problem. That doesn't include the EPILOGUE which was good. Read it because you may disagree with me. After all McDevitt is the author of numerous excellent novels including the magnificent *Time Travelers Never Die* (2009).

Everybody was expecting *The Matrix* to win the BDP Hugo in 2000, but *Galaxy Quest* did. I still can't believe that the producers "just happened" to have come to Chicago for the Hugo Awards ceremony.

— JTM

From: **George W. Price** January 21, 2016
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December *Alexiad*:

The note on p. 1 says this issue was printed on December 34. At first I thought that was a typo. Then I realized that it was e-mailed on January 3rd, which would be the same as December 34th. So the December issue really was printed out in December, although not until the 34th. Now that is sneaky!

* * * * *

I will recommend the latest in the "Ring of Fire" series, *1636: The Viennese Waltz*, by Eric Flint, Paula Goodlett, and Gorg Huff. It revolves around creating a monetary system, with emphasis on how to inspire public confidence in paper money that competes with silver money. I can't say that I agree with it all, but it is interesting.

* * * * *

Dave Haren mentions World War II veterans who were thankful that the atomic bomb saved them from having to invade Japan. I almost fell into that category. I turned sixteen a month before Hiroshima and Nagasaki got it. Had the war lasted another year or two I would surely have gone into the Army. I wouldn't have been in the initial invasion, since that was

already scheduled for November of 1945, but I could easily have been among the troops mopping up the holdouts in the Japanese home islands. We were sure that would take at least two or three years — two or three very bloody years. So I am not the least bit sorry about dropping those bombs. The Japs (as we thought of them then) were not about to give up easily. The warrior code of bushido forbade surrender unless the Emperor commanded it. The A-bombs were what it took to get him to give that command. And I got to complete my college education before being drafted during the Korean war.

The people pushing the No Bomb thesis claim that the Japanese were offering terms. Since the terms were not sanctioned by their Foreign Ministry, and consisted of "No occupation, each side to demobilize its own troops and try its own war criminals," the offers were not serious. There seems no way to point this out to them.

—JTM

From: **John Purcell** January 23, 2016
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I hope this letter finds the two of you well and safe as Winter Storm Jonas sweeps across the eastern third of the nation this weekend. Down here in SouthCentralEastern Texas the temperature is "chilly" at 39F, which for us transplanted northerners feels just fine, especially with it being a sunny day, too. Valerie is planning out the garden, which should be fully completed in a week or two. Such is life in a sub-tropic region of the USofA.

Lisa makes a good point regarding body image and being perfectly happy with yourself. I heartily agree, and congratulate her on the wonderful progress she has made. Taking care of yourself is a fine goal to have. That's my plan, too. It's not worth becoming a fitness nut and exercise three hours a day, slamming down power shakes, going paleo, and so forth. Naw. I'm perfectly fine watching what I eat and getting some exercise every day. Like Lisa, I have lost some weight, which is good, but the object is to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Works for me.

So Carrie Fisher has aged? What a shock! How dare she? And the same goes for Mark Hamill and Harrison Ford! Stop it, all of you! It's bad enough I'm going grayer by the year, trimming ear and nose hair that grows faster than the weeds in our yard, and the rock and roll heroes of my youth are dying. Accept the aging process gracefully and just tell those damned young punks to get the hell off your lawn. Hollywood images be damned.

Oh, and while I enjoyed *Star Wars: the Force Awakens*, it was entirely too predictable.

I wasn't surprised by anything in the plot, yadda-yadda-yadda. It was a typical J.J. Abrams movie. Lots of action and SFX. Just imagine what it would have been like if Michael Bay had directed the movie. One gigantic explosion from beginning to end. Yeesh...

I haven't been keeping up on the new books, but will keep my eyes on the reviews to see what looks good. The latest book on my night stand is *Seven Gothic Tales* by Isak Dinesen, and find the stories very interesting and thoughtful. Not exactly entertaining, but definitely worth reading. I recently finished Asimov's *The Robots of Dawn*, although I was sorely tempted to stop reading it by page 150. Damned boring book, plodding along with Way Too Much Information about practically everything on Aurora, having sex with robots, the lengthy investigation interviews, getting inside Elijah Baley's thought processes.... Hooey, I began skipping pages whenever Asimov starting extemporizing like that. It is Not A Good Book. In my humble opinion, only a die-hard Asimov fan would like it. He has definitely written much better, although it is unlike to see anything new by him since Asimov died in 1992.

This seems odd. Other writers (Bradley, McCaffrey, Reynolds, Kornbluth) have had extensive posthumous careers and during his lifetime Asimov had a fair number of books published under his name to which he contributed little.

Anyway. Hopefully the next sfnal book I read will be more enjoyable. It is beginning to look like it will be Neal Asher's *The Engineer Reconditioned*. It's been a while since I've read anything by him, and what I have read has been quite good.

Lots of WorldCon bids going on. I have been promoting New Orleans for 2018, although the San Jose 2018 bid is manned by lots of good people, too. Tough decision, but I'm going for proximity, and it's been a long time since N'Awleas has hosted it. They have my support. So does Dublin in 2019 and DFW in 2021. That is about as far ahead as I'm planning our WorldCon travels. This coming August will find Valerie and I in Kansas City for the 40th anniversary of Big MAC, and we're getting excited for that. Hope you two can make it; love to meet you guys finally. Also on the convention front, the local AggieCon (#47) is off the docket because I have a professional conference the same weekend. Also, it was just announced that there will be no ApolloCon this coming June (no hotel available, among other issues), which means Val and I are shifting gears and now planning for ArmadilloCon in July over in Austin. We really want to get back to FenCon in Dallas in late September, too: those folks throw a damn good convention. That is

one of the most fannish conventions in this area very reminiscent of upper midwest cons like Minicon, DemiCon, and WindyCon of my younger years.

Well, I have no real comments about the lettercolumn, except that once again it's extensive and informative. It makes me bummed out to fail to loc the 83rd issue, but I've been busy. *sigh* So it goes.

That reminds me: I need to mail out more copies of *Askew* and start planning the 36th issue of *Askance* (slated for March). Feel free to write a loc or an article if you wish, Joe or Lisa. There is always room for more material.

With that, I am done. Take care, and I hope things go much better for you folks this year.

Thank you for your kind words.
I fear they will not be predictive.

— JTM

From: **Sue Burke** January 29, 2016
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I attended *Star Wars: El despertar de la fuerza (Episodio VII)* in "versión original con subtítulos" with some friends and their grade-school-age son. The movie had all the excitement I expected and all the foolishness I feared. (Fitting all the energy of a sun inside a planet? Really?) The boy saw plot holes, too, and invented novel ways to fill them – but mostly he saw wonderful adventure. The next day he was pretending to be Finn, the storm trooper turned hero.

Rod E. Smith asks about remembering the song "Istanbul (Not Constantinople)." I know it from the cover by They Might Be Giants, specifically from their fine (though strange) 1998 live album, *Severe Tire Damage*. Their earlier version of the song was a minor hit in 1990.

I'm not sure I understand George W. Price's disagreements with me over the US Constitution. He seems to have forgotten the 9th Amendment: "The enumeration in the Constitution, of certain rights, shall not be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the people." This has been held to mean that the first eight amendments do not list all the rights, and the 9th Amendment helps in the interpretation of the 14th Amendment. The 9th Amendment was cited in *Roe vs. Wade*. I don't see how, if there are rights of the people that neither the federal nor state governments can regulate, this gives governments more power.

I enjoyed my brief visit with my husband to Morocco over the Christmas holidays. We ate tangerines in Tangier, and bought a fez in Fez and ate its signature dish, a tasty pigeon-meat and almond pastry topped with powdered sugar and cinnamon. We wandered through medinas and kasbahs, visited the Roman ruined city of Volubilis, peered out across the strait at

Gibraltar, and felt welcome wherever we went although we were clearly foreigners.

Although the main language is Arabic, French is its second language due to its days as a colony, and we often encountered Spanish and English (and a little Latin in Volubilis), so our days multilingual. I know more French than I thought. Sometimes little boys greeted us with a cheery "Hello!" or "Bonjour!" although when I tried to talk to them, that seemed to be the only word they knew, but they were delighted to use it.

We also enjoyed a lot of architecture that had elements in common with the Alhambra back in Spain. Our hotel in Fez was a traditional riad-style home, three storeys high with the rooms arranged around an inner courtyard that had trees and a fountain. Clearly, the original owners had been wealthy, judging from the ornate plaster, tiles, ironwork, carved and painted wood, and marble.

We learned that the Prophet Mohammed's birthday is celebrated with music at the mosques – choral arrangements that reminded me of English gentlemen's club drinking songs. Almost every man we met was named Mohammed because of the Moroccan custom of naming first-born sons after the prophet.

And every Moroccan with whom we had any sort of extended conversation made sure to say something like, "We are pure Islam here, we are peaceful, not like those who say they are Muslims but do not know a single thing and only kill!" Clearly, they were referring to ISIS, and their vehemence may have come from the fact that they're in greater danger than we are from terrorism. We noticed that all Moroccans traveling out of the country were carefully questioned on their return (which was why the lines at the airport Customs moved at a snail's pace), and police had regular traffic stops on the highways.

Meanwhile, in both Spain and Morocco, the winter has been extraordinarily warm and dry instead of properly cold and wet, and farmers in both countries are terrified.

From: **Taras Wolansky** January 31, 2016
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The December 2015 *Alexiad*: I've missed a few issues. Without paper I tend to forget things exist; same thing happened to my *NYRSF* sub.

Lisa: I'm not sure I approve of all this good health breaking out. It's hardly fannish.

Joe: Reading Andy Weir's *The Martian* after seeing the movie, I found the story over-familiar. For once, they got nearly the entire book into the movie.

Which I really enjoyed; but it made me think of the 1952 British film, *Breaking the Sound Barrier* (also very good). A nation in decline and no longer capable of such achievements (due to the inexorable expansion of entitlement spending) retreats into a comforting fantasy

reflecting old glories.

Speaking of film adaptations, so far the SyFy Channel version of Lev Grossman's *The Magicians* is excellent. The women are especially well-cast.

Murray Moore: When you wrote that *The Martian* is nominated for the Best Musical or Comedy Golden Globe, I was flabbergasted. But you're entirely correct.

Robert S. Kennedy: Isn't it politically incorrect to talk about "dwarf planets"? Shouldn't they be "little planets"?

LosCon report: Too bad Jerry Pournelle rarely gets to the East Coast. He raises the intellectual level of any convention he attends.

On the subject of military thriller author Rick Campbell, I wonder if his publisher will ask him to use a pseudonym for his projected military SF series, to prevent confusion with "Jack Campbell". (In any case, I count on reading your reviews of the series in a few years, so take care of yourself.)

How about "Richard Hemry"?

While we're on the subject ...

John G. Hemry: How will the "Lost Fleet" comics relate to the books? "Side-stories" (as they say in the anime world), or prequels, or sequels?

Changing subject: do naval designers think beam weapons can take the place of heavy armor?

Paul Gadzikowski: Black, very black. You know the cartoon I'm referring to!

Milt Stevens: I'm not one for seeking autographs, either. (It doesn't help that they misspell my name half the time!) In the past, the only good reason for getting books autographed was that when the books eventually ended up donated to a library, the librarian would take a second look at them before putting them on the sale table. I'm not sure how much that applies today.

Lloyd Penney: If Canada is admitting 25,000 Syrian refugees, will they follow Norway's example and provide classes to teach them rape is not OK? Or perhaps follow Rotherham, England in simply sweeping everything that happens under the rug? All cultures, all religions are not the same.

Richard Dengrove: A common theme in SF (Pohl & Williamson's *Farthest Star*, the movie, *The 6th Day*) is two or more people with the same memories. How can your copy be "you" if you're standing next to him?

The idea that you are whoever you think you are reminds me of the controversy about rape survivors fleeing in panic when anatomically male individuals insist they're really women and claim the right to use women's locker rooms and bathrooms.

With the Yankees holding the high ground, it seems to me the Confederates could have used a few balloons at Gettysburg.

Tom Feller: I kind of enjoyed the alien atmosphere given to Spokane by the forest fires, last summer during Sasquan.

Sue Burke: Is Joseph de la Vega any relation to Diego de la Vega? For some reason, the idea that Zorro was a *converso* amuses me. (Gonzo alternate history writers take note!)

Some of my ancestors were converts – though there's a persistent rumor that they were lying about being Jewish, because it was more respectable that the truth, that they had Gypsy ancestry. My sister is getting her DNA done, so we may have some evidence soon, one way or the other.

Alexis Gilliland: It just cracks me up that the "Puppies" controversy made so much money for Worldcon. I'm guessing it was in the low five figures. I imagine future concons whispering to the guilty parties, "Hey, what you did – can you do it again?"

"Vox Day" has just announced that this year's Rabid Puppies list will be published in February, and there already is a "Sad Puppies 4" list.

— JTM

From: **AL du Pisani** January 31, 2016
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End of January already. During the past couple of months I took three weeks of leave, visited some family and rested. Returned to work in the doldrums of late December – The week between Christmas and New Year is dead most years – This year it was deader than I expected, with more shops closed or closed on Public Holidays than I expected. I managed to catch up with some movies, and got around to some items I have long postponed. Started the New Year visiting friends, and eased gently into work – Where I am leaving the team I have worked with for the past eight years, and am joining a new team doing some of what I have been thinking I would do my entire career, but to which I have just never really got around. I am half terrified and half excited.

In South Africa things are not looking up – Every year for the past 112 years the Weather Bureau calculate South Africa's average rainfall. Normally 608 mm. Last year was the lowest on record, at 403 mm, lower than the previous record of 437 mm. The worst of this is that the places that have had really bad rains have been the grain belt – The maize crop for this year is expected to be about 5 million tons, half of last year's 10 million tons, and a third of two year's ago when it was 15 million tons. We will need to import maize from other parts of the world, and it does not look as if our port and rail infrastructure can handle it.

Once went of some statistics based training when the lecturer showed a bit to the chaotic raw data one guy used to deduce that South Africa have a 22 year rain cycle, with things drier than normal for 11 of the years, wetter than normal for 11 year, and where the wettest

year may be between the two driest years in the dry part of the cycle, and vice versa. But even so there have been at least one patch where the dry years lasted for six years, and twice where the dry years lasted for four years. Last year was the fourth dry year in succession. If this is another dry year, things are not looking up.

What this have meant for agriculture in general is that we have a large number of farmers who are only expecting an income in August next year. And a government who seems hell bent on destroying farmers and agriculture in general – since how difficult can it be to be a farmer? All he have to to is plant things and sit around, and the food and money comes rolling in.

My mother had about 117 mm on their farm last year – which is drier than normal, but since they are living in the dry part of the country, not excessively so. Even do they are suffering, and have been feeding their sheep drought pellets for the past couple of months. Had to and rear significantly more lambs than normal. Normal is maybe three per lambing season, last year was something like eleven. Now the farm has always had limited water, and between my mother and my grandfather they have spent a fortune drilling for water, mostly unsuccessfully. Which is why I was glad to hear that at least one of the holes they have drilled this year have found water. Even if this hole was drilled in between four dry holes drilled previously.

But most farmers in that area are reducing stock to core breeding levels – as much as they can afford to keep alive during the drought. As a result to that there was a huge number of sheep being slaughtered at the end of last year, even though the price paid to the farmer has collapsed. One abattoir in my mother's district was slaughtering 1500 sheep per day, which I think is three times more than normal. We have however not seen any price reductions in the cost of meat offered in supermarkets.

It since started to rain in at least some parts of the country. December was hot and humid with no rain in Johannesburg. By early January we have had some rain. Even some days where I drove to and from work in the rain. But more often it rains in the middle of the night, and I drive to and from work in blazing sunlight. Something which I appreciate, as once it start to rain I can add 30 to 90 minutes to my daily commute. There had even been one day where I drove dry to and from work, and it rained heavily during the middle of the day.

December also ended with the great Finance Minister reshuffle. Our glorious President, Jacob Zuma, has the largest cabinet in the world. One which he reshuffles every now and then. To an outsider it seems that he gets rid of anybody as soon as they prove to be more competent than loyal. For example, Communications are at least five years behind migrating to digital broadcasting. The absolute drop dead deadline was in July last year. We are hoping that at least some of what is required will happen this year, but are not very hopeful. Since we expect the Minister appointed last year

to be either incompetent or replaced during this year.

But the one area which the ANC has left alone have been Finance: Since 1994 we have had three Finance Ministers. Two of which under Zuma, and in both cases where the highly respected Minister has reached retirement age. So for a couple of years we had Minister Nene, a man with a background in Finance, who had been senior in the Department of Finance, and who had worked with the previous Minister in all aspects of the job before his appointment.

Early in December Zuma fired Nene, and appointed the mostly completely unknown David (or also reported Des) van Rooyen. Even though this sound like an Afrikaner, van Rooyen is black, and looks a bit like a Nigerian politician. When people started to look at van Rooyen's accomplishments, they found that he had failed a Mayor of a metropolitan area in the East Rand, and had been promoted to Parliament, where he have been a little known back bencher.

This caused such a financial backlash, with the Rand collapsing, major investors talking about terminating all ties with South Africa, and companies who have bought local banks and companies announcing that they are looking to sell of the local banks and companies. This was so bad that after five days Zuma had to announce that he had fired van Rooyen and moved him to look after Provinces, and asked Pravin Gordan, Minister of Finance before Nene to come back. (There was a suggestion that he asked Nene to come back, but that Nene had declined.)

The Rand has since recovered a bit, but most people think that this had been so typical of Zuma, that a couple of steady years may restore confidence to the low levels that there was previously. See, after government and business come together and announce what good friends they are, and how much they are going to work together in future, government goes back and carry on with their program to kill off business and implement full blown socialism. And business keep their heads low, hire as little people to keep the companies ticking over, and invest their money in countries more sympathetic to business, especially in the area of labour legislation.

This year will be the Municipal elections. The ANC is expected to take a hammering. I am living in a ward that is so anti-ANC that not even busing in voters from surrounding areas had made much difference in the final results previously. I can expect to queue for at least an hour before voting. But the ANC is expected to cheat. A friend recently met some Italians that talked about manipulating election results in favour of the ANC since the middle of the 1990s. They are expecting to earn their money this year.

And so we stumble forward.

I hope that you have more hope. That SF will always enable people to connect with each other, and that things will get better.

From: **Timothy Lane** January 31, 2016
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I rather enjoyed the discussion of the movie *Sink the Bismarck!* and Joe's excellent article on it. Like Joy Smith, I remember and enjoy both the movie and the song, but I ill point out that the song (by Johnny Horton) doesn't appear in the movie. It's much like the song "The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance", which is about the movie but doesn't itself appear in it. As for movie accuracy, another highly accurate movie (based closely on a specific history) is *A Night To Remember*, about the sinking of the *Titanic*. It even includes the scene in which the designer explained to the captain why the ship was doomed.

I rather enjoyed John G. Hemry's discussion as well. Incidentally, another good book on the ship is *The Destruction of the Bismarck* by Bercuson and Herwig. His explanation for the later disappearance of armor is enlightening. I recall that during the Falklands War modern ships were described as eggshells with triphammers — fragile but powerful. This is one reason I was skeptical when John Birmingham had modern planes using modern weapons make short work of the *Tirpitz*. Why would such weapons be effective against armor that none would ever expect to encounter?

I think it was part and parcel of Birmingham's attitude of how modern people were superior in every way to pasttimers. Like the scene where the pasttimer ship rams the modern Japanese one, which for some reason has a number of American Navy women on board, and a pasttimer sailor takes a Tommy gun and tries to put those poor comfort women prisoners out of their misery.

— JTM

Alexis Gilliland mentions the possibility that *Hood* was actually sunk by *Prinz Eugen*, not *Bismarck*, and it's possible. One version I heard once was that a shell from the former passed through a hole created by a shell explosion from the latter. No one really knows for sure.

I rather liked George W. Price's discussion of the back doors to iceboxes. I knew about iceboxes, and recall seeing slapstick shorts about trying to supply ice in the heat of summer. But I didn't know they had a special back access. One trusts the doors weren't easily raided by thieves.

I also appreciated his stance on homosexual marriage. One of my major concerns is that, increasingly, the "right" to sexual license trumps freedom of religion even though the latter (unlike the former) is a right explicitly listed in the Constitution. This has already

come up in a number of cases across the country, including one here in Kentucky, in many of which homosexual militants seem to seek out Christians to punish for the crime of dissent. So far, unfortunately, they haven't tried to target Muslims similarly. It isn't hard to guess why.

Well, best wishes to one and all. Most of us are old enough that we could definitely use them.

From: **Richard A. Dengrove** Jan. 31, 2016
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This LOC responds to *Alexiad*, December 2015.

One issue I will embrace is whether individuals make a great difference in history; or would the influence masses of people have on events drown their efforts out. Your review of Ward Larsen's *Stealing Trinity* inspired this comment.

We are individualists, for the most part, and prefer the idea that individuals make history. That we needed Roosevelt and Churchill to win World War II. By inference, we do not like the idea that the American and British people would have won the war no matter the leader.

Also, we like to think the novel *Stealing Trinity* realistic: if Alexander Brown, a Nazi operative, had succeeded in stealing the first atomic bomb despite the best efforts of Michael Thatcher, a British interrogator, the Germans would have gotten the secret of the atomic bomb; and we Americans would have lost it. Then the Germans could have threatened nuclear blackmail.

I gather it takes more to produce atomic bombs than having one in one's possession. As we are learning from the Iranians, it takes a whole infrastructure to do it. One the Germans might not have been able to reconstruct from one bomb.

So much for the individual above the collectivity in that example.

I don't quite think you got it.

Now I will take another unconventional position: This one does not concern the recent past but much of the entire past. I am talking about the Fermi Paradox. While the above novel just concerns World War II, the paradox refers to all of history when we might expect extraterrestrials to land here.

The paradox remains far from a slam dunk, however. Robert Kennedy, in his report on LOSCON, characterizes the paradox, as Enrico Fermi asking, "Where are the aliens?" If aliens existed, many in the universe, Fermi argued, must be far enough ahead of us that they would have arrived on Earth millennia ago.

My problem is, with all the stars in the sky, would they have felt impelled to land here? In fact, they may have decided that it would be easier to colonize a virgin planet rather than one

already in use, like ours. I suspect their population is limited like ours; and they couldn't populate or dominate all the planets in the sky.

Similarly, with all the possibilities in the universe, I doubt aliens would have even thought of experimenting with someone on the Moon, and making him believe he was participating in fanzine fandom. Not like in the short story you tell Milt Stevens about. In fact, I think it is even less likely than that the aliens would land here.

What I said. *Science-Fiction Five-Yearly* is on the fanac.org site, so you can see for yourself.
http://fanac.org/fanzines/SF_Five_Yearly/

— JTM

However, that reminds me of a novel by Philip Dick, *Time Out of Joint*, which reverses the Moon-Earth relationship. On Earth, there a man is living in 1998; but the US government has placed him in a constructed reality where the date is 1959. He ultimately finds out his work solving newspaper puzzles for money is aiding a war effort against the inhabitants of the Moon.

That bit of trivia reminds me of another. Robert Kennedy told you a joke about Canadians; and you told him a joke about New Yorkers. I wonder if it came from a contest in the *New York Review* to give the best 'wrong' information about the city. I have another joke about New Yorkers from that source.

According to one contestant, all New Yorkers are on welfare; and they get to ride the subway for free. However, you can come up to anyone on the subway, and say, "Unlike you, I'm not Welfare so give me your seat." Then they have to give you their seat. . . Or would they?

My next comment leaves fake information for the unvarnished truth. Sue Burke was telling an eternal truth when she discusses how polarized things are. By contrast, Joe's anecdote about New York cops, and mine about its subways are totally far fetched.

No, Sue is right that it is a miracle when politicians compromise. I have to admit that's true. However, miracles happen. Big fat miracles happen.

I have a tale of one of them. Before I retired, I was working as a librarian for the Department of Agriculture. One of my assignments was to follow the Farm Bill of 2008.

In order to keep the farm subsidies coming, farm State politicians allowed an increase in the Food Stamp allotment. Voting for it wasn't limited to Liberal congressmen; some of the most Conservative congressmen cast their vote for it. The younger Bush, who was President then, vetoed it. However, his veto was overridden by 80% majorities in both houses.

I confess while politicians from different

sides of the aisle compromised, many of the public thought the compromise sleazy. I hear it got lambasted by Conservatives; and I know the *Liberal Christian Science Monitor* wondered about it.

I don't know whether you could call this compromise a good tiding. I grudgingly do. Any sign of amity between Liberals and Conservatives has something good to say about it. However, what has happened to Rodney Leighton cannot, by any stretch of the imagination be a good tiding.

Too bad about August for Rodney. It would have been bad enough if he had just attempted suicide in that month. However, he was also bulldozed into the hospital by a couple of guys. Then, because of lung congestion and heart failure, he had to go on a medical regimen that doesn't agree with him.

My fingers are crossed that things get better.

Also, I wish good luck on this missive, especially now that it has come time to put it to bed. That is until your next *Alexiad* when I shall once again be inspired by neat book reviews and letters of comment.

From: **Alexis A. Gilliland** Jan. 26, 2016
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<http://www.alexisgilliland.org>



Thank you for *Alexiad* 14.6 in which you published quite a few of my cartoons. I particularly liked the uncaptioned demon on page 3 for a grace of line which my hand rarely achieves. As usual stuff happens, namely the bedbugs returned, and this time around the SBBS people broke the bed, so we had to buy a new one. However, they are insured so eventually we will get reimbursed, but for about a week we were sleeping on the floor, which is less fun than when we were a few decades younger. The new bed is a bit higher than the old partly because it has drawers underneath for storage that Lee has put to good use. The weekend of the 9th we went down to Marscon in Williamsburg, VA, in part for the Ravencon business meeting. Lee did a lot of high energy socializing, and generally had a good time, and we left around noon on Sunday, so we could attend her author and artist friend Sally Grotta's memorial service for her husband up in the Poconos. After a seven-hour

drive—it being dark and starting to snow, we stayed overnight at motel about an hour away which led to a nice leisurely visit (6 or 7 people vs. about 50 the day before) and a four-hour drive home.

Ah, the weather. Thursday the area got a dusting of snow—less than an inch, and we made the mistake of going out to dinner. Sigh The 15-minute trip home took over an hour because of icy streets and accidents, several of which were in front of our house, though we were able to get the car into our driveway without any trouble. We weren't the only ones though, on returning to Andrews AFB President Obama was unable to take his helicopter because of the weather, and his vehicular caravan, which normally makes the White House in half an hour, took an hour and a half. Friday it began snowing in the early afternoon, with the promise—a blizzard warning they called it, of more snow over the weekend. Saturday morning we had 13 inches outside our front door, and it was still snowing. Eventually with a total of 22 inches reported locally volunteers were paid to shovel the driveway, and I was able to get the Sunday paper and stuff. Enough snow remained piled up so that schools and governments remained closed on Monday, and from the look of the roads it will take a few days to get back to anything close to normal.

Milt Stevens is right that there is usually something to enjoy in every given year, but since there are thousands of choices, they may be hard to find. The Hugos help; I recently got around to Hugo winning *Redshirts* by Scalzi and Orson Scott Card's *Speaker For The Dead*, both of which I enjoyed, albeit for different reasons. Generally I prefer to read nonfiction. Nonfiction is not always cheerful, of course, especially in a presidential election year, but there are bright spots. They recently calculated the existence of the 9th planet, supposedly 10-15 times earth's mass but far beyond the orbit of Pluto — "We know its orbit but not its position on that orbit."

I think it should be called "Yuggoth".

— JTM

WAHF:

Lloyd Daub, with various items of interest.
Martin Morse Wooster, the same.
Tom Sadler, Bruce Gillespie, Marty Cantor, Earl Kemp, Nancy Martsch, Patrick McCray, who got it.



NOT QUITE THE ENDING OF STAR WARS VII: THE FORCE AWAKENS

Rey felt mixed emotions, fear and anticipation. There he stood, the object of her quest across the stars, the last Jedi, looking out over the ocean. The New Order had risen, though it had been balked this time, and the Resistance needed him. She proffered his light saber.

He seemed to notice her now, and turned slowly to face her. There was a strange face under the cowl of his Jedi robe. Too-pale skin, his hands and scarred face were dead white, his lips too red, and that smile . . . He spoke.

"Why so serious?"

Then he put back the hood and let the robe fall to the ground. She gasped. His mouth was drawn up in a perpetual smile, his eyes were ringed in black, his hair was green, and he seemed transfixed. He was wearing purple. He broke into powerful, raucous, hysterical laughter . . .

YESTERDAY INSTEAD OF DRAWING A
CREATIVE PROCESS ABOUT
DRAWING MY OTHER CARTOONS I
DREW FOR MY OTHER CARTOONS.



<http://arthurkingoftimeandspace.com/creativeprocess>

NOT QUITE THE ENDING OF THE MARTIAN

. . . Once everyone reassured themselves that I was still alive, and I sent a message to the guys at NASA and the CNSA thanking them for, well, my life, I got a few hours alone to clean up and get reconciled to being rescued.

There were about a million personal messages waiting for me; my family, officials, all sorts of well-wishers. I could have made millions endorsing potatoes alone, never mind the other items.

Along about the third day, I got down to one that seemed familiar. When I'd been going out with her, Rebecca had been studying law. It seemed she had got a position at some big New York law firm, then quit and gone to California to be with her first boyfriend. Except . . .

Everyone on the *Hermes* jerked upright or awake when I clicked on the video file. It didn't have a useful title, but Rebecca had written a video and performed in it:

"Fuck Me, Mark Watney!!!"

SO HERE'S SOME TOTALLY
UNRELATED ART



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Writers, Staff: Major, Joseph, Major, Lisa

This is issue **Whole Number Eighty-five (85)**.

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

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

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