

AVATAR PRESS



Volume 2, Number 24, November 28th, 2002

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RANDY RANTS

I hope everyone has been enjoying his or her Fall season. At times, it has been quite dreary but occasionally there are days that have been delightful in their blue-sky crispness against the fiery colors of the fall foliage. Emotionally it has been very similar in some respects.

My quest for weigh loss continues but with less success this time. Hopefully all the walking I'm doing lately will eventually pay off. I really need to cut back on the calories too. Good luck during the Holidays.

I've started on the other project at work. I'm looking forward to learning some new technologies it uses (but not in implementing them in the ways the project currently does). Hopefully, by the time the economy improves, I'll least have some more marketable skills in case I am unable to gut it out until I work on something more interesting. I'm taking the week of Thanksgiving off (vacation/holiday), as well as the weeks before, including, and after Christmas.

My family is not doing well. My Uncle Paul was killed (68 years old) in automobile accident (teenager lost control of her jeep and hit him). My mom was very close to him and feels the loss keenly. My Mom may also have Parkinson's (but only time will tell). My cousin Johnny is in the final stages of his terminal cancer. My other cousin (his sister) has been diagnosed with Muscular Dystrophy. My oldest nephew is still without work but at least has not had any major tantrums and/or legal run-ins as far as I know.

As you have probably noticed (for those who actually read this publication), I have come up with yet another design. For me, designing the appearance and layout are part of the fun. Of course, I am doing this at the last moment again but I have this week off so I can at least try to spend more time and effort than usual on this issue. I hope you enjoy it.

I've started to flesh out my new web site more. I added some photo albums of my artwork and my professional resume. I hope to do more during my vacation time. ☒



EVENT REPORTS

I've been to quite a few formal and informal events in the past two months. Here are some brief reports of some of them.

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Big Spring Jam

This year's downtown music festival in Huntsville, September 27th-29th, was not as enjoyable as years past. My friend, Julie Wall, came up Friday and we enjoyed *Beau Soleil avec*

Michael Doucet and a bit of *Lynyrd Skynyrd*. Unfortunately, Julie had to return home the next day. Saturday, there were no compelling bands that I wanted to see so I did not go. Sunday, I really wanted to see *Filter* but they cancelled (supposedly due to lead singer having laryngitis). However, the *Gin Blossoms* put on a really good show, keeping it from being a total disappointment. The Big Spring Jam web site is: <http://www.bigspringjam.org/>. ☒



David Weber Book Signing

Julie Wall invited me down to a dinner, Thursday, October 10th at the Ocean restaurant in Birmingham, Alabama. The dinner was for David Weber who was in town for a book signing. Also there were Toni Weisskopf, Charlotte Proctor, Gary and Debbie Rowan, Naomi Fisher and several others from Julie's book club. The meal was very good and David Weber was a very entertaining speaker. It was nice seeing Toni also since I had not seen her in a while. The Baen Books web site is: <http://www.baen.com/>. David Weber's site is: <http://www.davidweber.net/>. ☒



Con*Stellation XXI: Payo

The convention ran from October 18th-20th in Huntsville, Alabama. It went fairly smoothly despite last minute changes in venue and guests and some burn out on the part of the staff (who had just ran DeepSouthCon 40 only four months earlier). Attendance was low. Julie Wall helped make it a fun convention for me though, whenever I could get out of the Art Show. We were the dance on Friday (despite music, while interesting was not the most danceable). Saturday, Pat McAdams was the DJ and did a great job. Lots more folks were dancing. It was also really nice to meet Darrel K. Sweet (who is one of the most deserving artists for a Hugo without one).

checking out the web site regularly: <http://www.constellation.org/>. ☒



Alabama Renaissance Faire

This annual free small faire in Florence, Alabama was

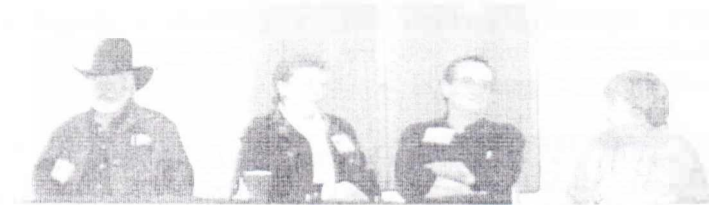
cool and drizzly on Saturday, October 26th, when I went. Surprisingly, it did not seem to dampen the attendance much (if any). I saw several friends. I picked up a book from the nearby library's used bookstore and a very nice drinking flask from one of the many vendors. I only stayed a short while due to the rain and because I have several other events to attend that day. The Alabama Renaissance Faire web site is <http://www.geocities.com/alabamarenfaire/>. ☒



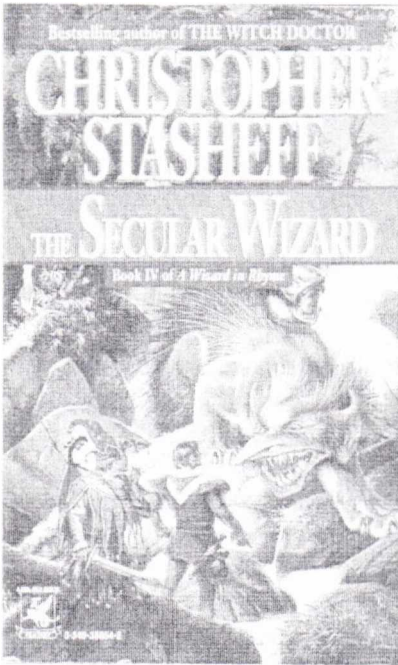
Halloween

I did the invitations to the Halloween party put on by my friends John and Leana Justice at their place also on Saturday, October 26th. The theme of the party was Gods and Goddesses. I dressed as Bacchus, the god of wine. I won their guess the pumpkin weight contest. I've included a picture of Leana as the goddess, Iris (that's a rainbow on a stick and not a brush), and Ashley as the mythical monster, Medusa (note the snakes). Leana's web site is <http://www.geocities.com/soho/square/7536/>.

At work on Halloween, I dressed up as an old Hippie (bald and white haired wig and a tie dye shirt). I got about 12-15 trick or treaters at my house this year. ☒



Darrel K. Sweet (AGoh), K.D. Wentworth (MC), Eric Flint (GoH), Sandy McDade (FGOH)



I also was able to purchase an original cover painting by Darrel K. Sweet for the "The Secular Wizard." by Christopher Stasheff. The "Wizard in Rhyme" series is one of my favorite fantasy series. I was the art show director again. The room was smaller but the art show was a comparable size to last year. This year's art show consisted of 352 pieces from 18 artists (including 28 charity pieces), displayed on 31 panels and 4 tables.

The mail-in participation was from 10 artists. The print shop had 6 artists participating. There were 83 pieces sold for a total of \$3,981. Thus the average sales price was \$47.96 per piece and the average total sales per artist was about \$221.17. The most sales for a single artist was \$2500 and the lowest was, unfortunately, no sales. We had 33 pieces that went to the Saturday voice auction, which was well attended. We also raised \$262, from 22 donated pieces, for the North Alabama Science-Fiction Association. The Art Show staff decided the following awards:

- **Best Amateur Science Fiction:** Melissa S. Humphrey, "Comet"
- **Best Amateur Fantasy:** Abranda Sisson, "Monarch Queen"
- **Best Amateur Horror:** Allison Stein, "Solitude"
- **Best Professional Science Fiction:** Darrell K. Sweet, "The Demons at Rainbow Bridge"
- **Best Professional Fantasy:** Darrell K. Sweet, "Elven Ways"
- **Best in Show:** Darrell K. Sweet, "Faust"
- **Judges Choice:** Richard Miree, "Mask 2"

This issue's cover is a piece, "Pavo Mask," that I did for use by Con+Stellation XXI. Be sure to keep up to date with next year's convention, Con+Stellation XXII, by



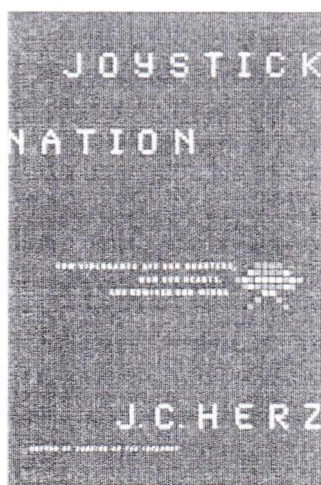
Leana (Iris) and Ashley (Medusa)

Sucker Punch

My friend, John Justice, is the drummer for the band, *Sucker Punch*. My other friend, Kevin Craig, plays guitar. They cover current alternative/pop rock songs. I've seen them play twice now, both at a downtown club called *Mollie Teals*. They are pretty good. I'm working on some art for them (Real Soon Now). ☒



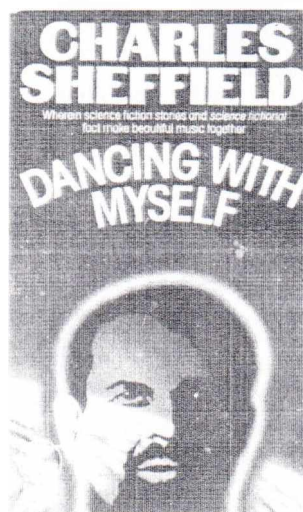
BOOK REVIEWS



Joystick Nation: How Videogames Ate Our Quarters, Won Our Hearts, and Rewired Our Minds by J. C. Herz
Hardcover: 228 pages;
Dimensions (in inches): 9.53 x 0.88 x 6.29
Publisher: Little Brown & Company; ASIN: 0316360074; (June 1997)

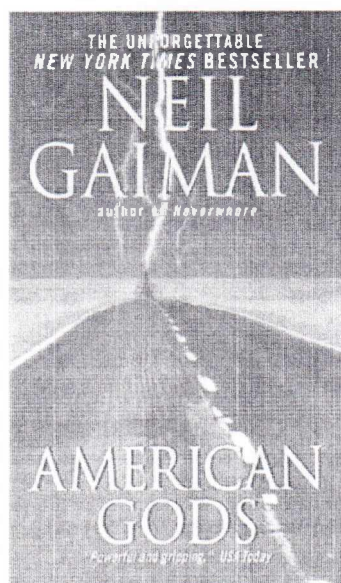
This book is a very high level tour of the start of videogames, from Space Wars until Doom, and how they've affected our culture. However, is inconsistent in tone and depth. The writer at times seems to be trying too hard to be clever at the expense of focus. I enjoyed it but at times it was a little irritating. I would have like it to be a lot more biographical (in detail) of the game industry/culture and a little less

satirical with inane commentary. It's a quick read and has some interesting chapters but as a whole, I cannot recommend it unless you are very interesting in the development of games. ☒



Dancing with Myself by Charles Sheffield
Mass Market Paperback: :
Dimensions (in inches): 0.82 x 6.75 x 4.13
Publisher: Baen Books;
ASIN: 0671721852;
(September 1993)

I was reading this when Charles Sheffield died recently. I was also reading a Gordon Dickson book when he died so this is a bad trend. I read Charles Sheffield for the ideas. This book is a collection of short stories, each one based on a unique idea, with an essay by Charles Sheffield afterwards about the story and/or idea involved. I enjoyed the book but it will now always be tinged with sadness. I was fortunate to have seen Sheffield in person at a few conventions and he impressed me with his intelligence and wish to invest science fiction with actual science. ☒



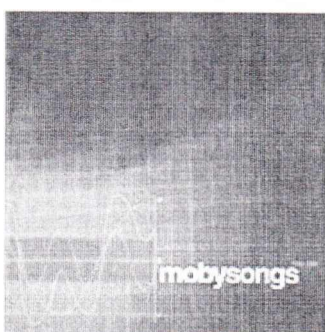
American Gods by Neil Gaiman
Mass Market Paperback:
608 pages; Dimensions (in inches): 1.33 x 6.70 x 4.26
Publisher: Harper Mass Market Paperbacks;
ISBN: 0380789035;
(April 30, 2002)
Book Review by Leana Justice

Rated 'A' for overall effect, 'B' for technique and novel construction. A fast, dark humored novel that'll make you chuckle, beat the heel of your palm against your forehead, and snort. This novel is a 'guess who' for well-read literature purveyors. Gaiman dutifully provides all the details, you guess which god/goddess/daemon/servant spirit is currently harassing poor Shadow, our protagonist. If you've never endured Deconstructionist theory, you will greatly enjoy *American Gods*, a stampede roll call through the world's oldest mythologies. The novel can stand alone if you aren't that familiar with Native American, Island and Eastern European myths, but you'll miss some of the jokes, and you'll sense it. Gaiman the Brit is writing about American

gods, both imported and indigenous, who are exhausted co-habituating the continent. 'American world culture' gods have decided it's time to ice the old-world gods. Shadow must choose sides in the 'coming storm' or clash of the titans, and he's never been a very spiritual person. He's often confused. Also remember that some of the old-world gods' hostiles and in fighting stem from one god's worshippers having conquered/raided/pillaged the other gods' worshippers throughout history. Poor Shadow hasn't studied much history. On a deep level that only smacks readers directly in the face a few times, Gaiman explores what humans offer as sacrifice to stronger, not necessarily higher, powers: money, time, attention, blood, pain. American gods, by the way, the new kids on the block, are *hilariously irritating*. Leave it to a Brit... I highly recommend *American Gods* to frequent readers: check it out of your library now and then give the novel as a gift when it's released in paperback. ☒



MUSIC REVIEWS



Moby : 1993-98-Songs

Date: July 11, 2000

Label: WEA/Electra

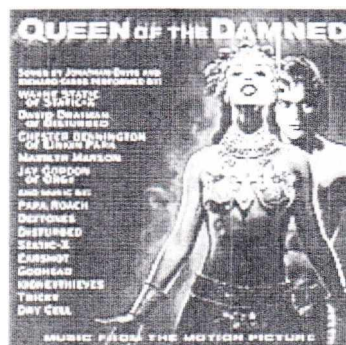
Genre: Electronic/Dance

This is my current favorite CD. It's tonic for the soul. If you want to listen to some beautiful soulful electronica from the master, then this is the disc to try.

I listened to this intensely on the way back from my Uncle Paul's funeral while driving late in rain and fog on curvy NC mountain roads. It made for quite a surreal experience.

Tracks:

1. First Cool Hive
2. Go Badalamenti
3. Into The Blue Goese
4. Now I Let It Go
5. Move (You Make Me Feel So Good)
6. I Like To Score
7. Anthem
8. Hymn
9. Feeling So Real
10. God Moving Over The Face Of The Waters
11. Alone
12. Novio
13. The Rain Falls And The Sky Shudders
14. When It's Cold I'd Like To Die
15. Living
16. Grace



Queen of the Damned

Date: February 19, 2002

Label: Warner Brothers

Genre: Soundtracks

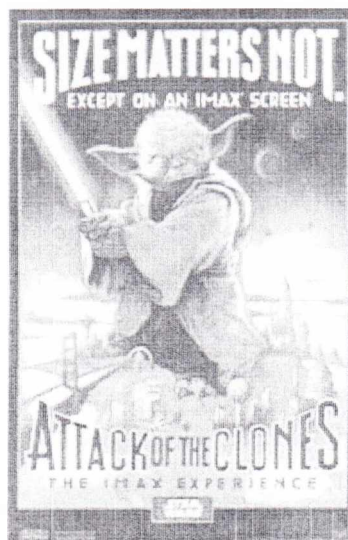
I got this CD the same day as the Moby CD. It's very hard, dark, and intense. It has five custom written hard rock songs and the rest are similar thematic songs from various artists. I like it. I've not seen the movie but hear it is not too good.

Tracks:

1. Not Meant For Me-Wayne Static of Static-X
2. Forsaken - David Draiman Of Disturbed
3. System - Chester Bennington Of Linkin Park
4. Redeemer - Marilyn Manson
5. Slept So Long - Jay Gordon Of Orgy
6. Dead Cell - Papa Roach
7. Change (In The House Of Flies) - Deftones
8. Down With The Sickness - Disturbed
9. Cold - Static-X
10. Headstrong - Earshot
11. Penetrate - Godhead
12. Before I'm Dead - Kidneythieves
13. Excess - Tricky
14. Body Crumbles - Dry Cell



MOVIE REVIEWS



StarWars II: Attack of the Clones IMAX

Okay, I was not that impressed with this movie to begin with. Of course, the effects and action are outstanding but the plot and characterization is awkward and disappointing. However, the spectacle of seeing this on IMAX was too much to resist so I organized a group of North Alabama Science Fiction Association members to

attend a showing before the club meeting. The Space and Rocket Center's IMAX screen is actually an overhead dome. This had the unfortunate effect of causing the film to appear distorted in a fish-eye lens effect around the edges. Thus, close ups of faces had a fun house mirror look. We had the best seats right at the top, otherwise we would have been forced to crane our necks back the whole

movie. The movie was so large that any fast camera motion or crowded action scenes were basically just a blur (even without IMAX, I would advise Lucas that sometimes less is truly more, but then again I've not made hundreds of millions creating movies so what do I know). Okay there were moments when the IMAX result was stunning but those were few and far in between. So for \$10 a shot, I cannot recommend this experience. ☒



Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets

Kids/Family and
Action/Adventure
2 hrs. 41 min.
Starring: Daniel Radcliffe,
Kenneth Branagh, John Cleese,
Rupert Grint, David Bradley
Directed by: Chris Columbus
Produced by: David Heyman,
Chris Columbus
Written by: Steve Kloves, J.K.
Rowling

Distributor: Warner Brothers

I bought the book and read it about a week before I saw the movie. Accepting that both are oriented toward younger readers, they are pretty good. The movie follows the book very closely except for dropping the sub plots and having an awkward closing sequence that seem quite forced. The movie's effects are first rate and the child actors do a good job. I do hope the future books are a little less one dimensional in the portrayal of certain characters (Harry's family for instance). The Wizard of Oz was recently aired and it made me think that the Harry Potter series is the new Oz series for a new millennium. I can recommend this movie if you enjoy the books. ☒



The Ring

Suspense/Horror
MPAA Rating: PG-13
Starring: Naomi Watts, Martin
Henderson, Brian Cox, Shannon
Cochran, Lindsay Frost
Directed by: Gore Verbinski
Produced by: Walter F. Parkes,
Laurie MacDonald, J.C. Spink
Written by: Ehren Kruger, Scott
Frank
Distributor: Dreamworks

Movie Review by Leana Justice

Randy doesn't do horror, so he asked me to give a stab at reviewing this flick. This horror movie wasn't horrible. Rated a strong B by Leana, *The Ring* has more suspense than red-dyed Karo syrup, and I like suspense. I like to supply the dread in a horror movie, and *The Ring* allows viewers to scrunch down in their seats several times without showing sucking chest wounds in perfect

anatomical detailing. Don't be fooled by the opening, styled after every slashed-stupid-teen-queen flick. The director is setting you up to have lowered expectations and then----gahk! Quickly the plot becomes a whatdunit. In the final analysis, *The Ring* lacks a sufficiently unifying narrative to rate an 'A'. A few too many 'deductions' that were really fortunate given the lack of facts. No outstanding quotes. Some horror clichés remain unredeemed: farmer at isolated farmhouse, sole survivor in a mental ward, tough girl heroine enlisting aid of beautiful former husband. *The Ring* does, however, give minimum gross-out for maximum effect. Two thumbs for excellent use of ominous foliage. And large childish eyes. I was so glad the film wasn't self-referential. No, 'this feels so totally, like, a movie' lines from the characters. I was not freaked out by the ending; my movie buddy who lives alone was freaked and left her hallway light on all durn weekend. I was left wondering why the level of malevolence in this supernatural being. Perhaps the film wanted to explore the nature of malevolence, that it doesn't need a cause we can understand, and hence the film's often surreal landscapes/nightmarish images. *The Ring* explores images and afterimages, but I'm afraid it didn't leave any residual hauntings in my cranium. I would recommend as matinee or home rental. ☒



FINAL COMMENTS

I hope everyone has a safe and happy holiday season and the New Year brings great things for all of us. Perhaps they'll even bring Mailing Comments next time. ☺

Sincerely,

Randy B. Cleary ☒

