



TIGHTBEAM #275

TIGHTBEAM is produced on a bi-monthly basis by the **N3F –The National Fantasy Fan Federation**, a world-wide club for fans of science fiction/fantasy and related subjects. Copies are sent electronically direct to all current members, and copies are also posted, somewhat later, on the efanzines.com web site thru the generous courtesy of webmaster Bill Burns.

This is issue **#275** and is edited by Bob Jennings. Letters of comment are solicited from everyone reading this; also, reviews of books read, movies seen, and convention experiences recently attended, and any other fannish material that would be of interest to our members is also requested. Please contact Bob Jennings at—

fabficbks@aol.com or

thru regular mail at 29 Whiting Rd. Oxford, MA 01540-2035

You may learn more about the N3F by going to our website at n3f.org

This issue's front cover is by Denney E. Marshall

BACK AGAIN on a slightly revised schedule. *Tightbeam* will still be primarily a bi-monthly fanzine (reserving the right to appear more frequently when we have a lot of good stuff to offer), but instead of appearing at the beginning of the month, we will be coming out near the end of every other month. This change has been made to allow a more even spacing with the other N3F fanzines, particularly *Ionisphere*, a brand new publication devoted to interviews with published authors and connections with the world of prodom. This new title is edited by John Thiel. The first issue is out right now and available to those who are interested.

LETTERS, WE DO GET LETTERS but, we could use some more. We want *Tightbeam* to become a meeting place for fans of all kinds, where they can discuss things that interest them, exchange ideas and commentary, and. Please send us your letter of comment on this issue. The primary purpose of the new, revived *Tightbeam* is to act as a forum for fan comment and discussion. You are invited to send some commentary about the material in this issue, or on any other pertinent SF fannish related subject.

Got something you want to say about the book you just read, or the film you just saw? Think about writing up a review and letting us run it. Your comments will be read many other fans who are interested in learning your opinions and sharing some of their own comments on the matter. Because we are publishing in an electronic format, we are not bound by constraints of page count the way a print fanzine would be. You can write your essays as long or as short as you please. We must insist that your comments and letters refrain from profanity, lewdness or malicious insult. We want this to be a civilized forum of interested individuals with shared common interests. You are cordially invited to be part of our next issue.



LETTERS

John Thiel; 30 N. 19th St.; Lafayette, IN 47904



Well, well, TIGHTBEAM is back after over a year's absence; I think we have George Phillies to thank for this—he's putting a lot into getting the NFFF back on its feet. It was certainly a loss to the organization to be lacking Tightbeam, and it's a very good thing to see it back. I might add to this that he's found a very able editor; you're really livening things up in this issue and everything is there and in its proper order. The future looks bright ahead.

A good set of reviews of both books and fanzines, with various reviewers, another plus. There could be more controversy in the fanzine reviews, but I suppose the important thing is to keep things orderly and accurate. But as you mention, fandom thrives on criticism and controversy. I regret I have not seen the books that are reviewed, and so can make no purchase, or say anything about them, but I was interested in the reviews and am kept up to date by reading them.

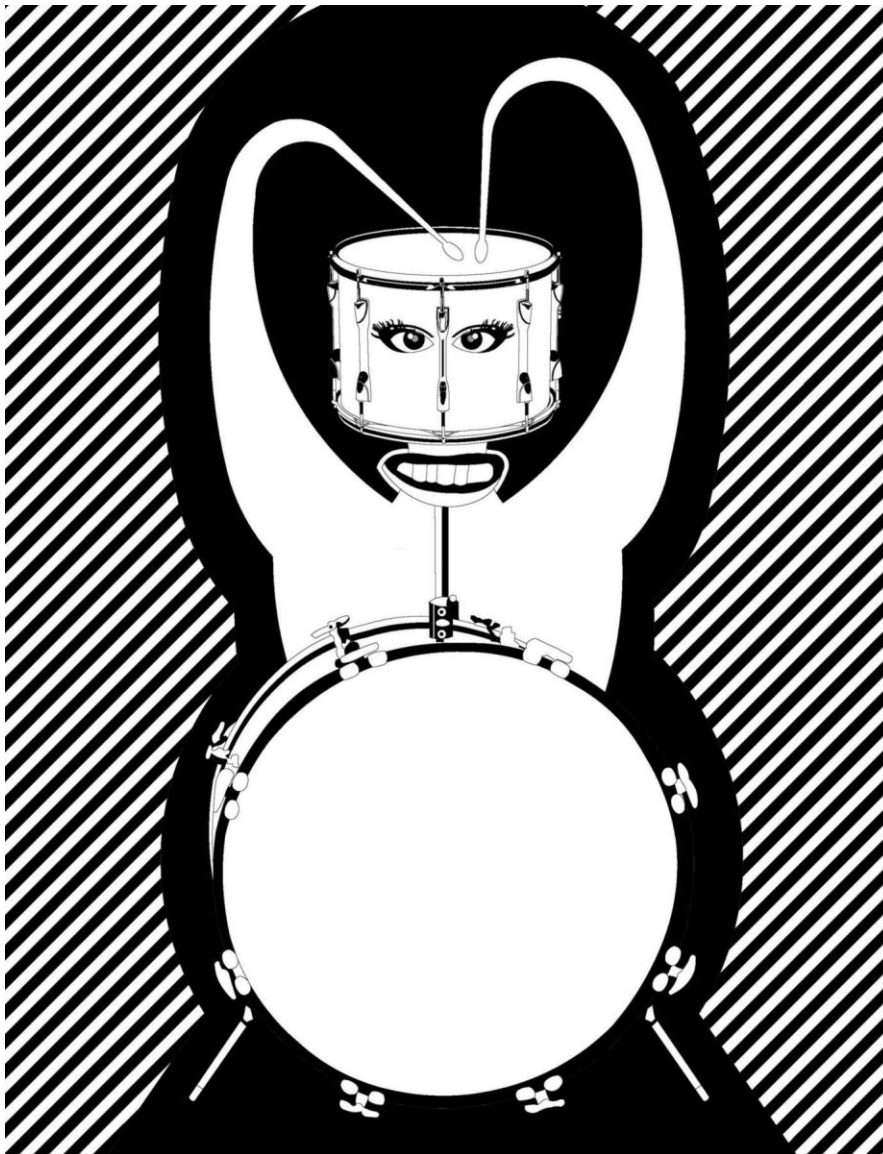
The issue also gave me a chance to see who won the Hugos, which I have not learned elsewhere and I don't care to go web-searching and Googling in a quest for them. I notice that nothing listed this year is taken from the Big Three, the Dell Publications and F&SF—I think they had a number of stories that should unquestionably have been nominated, so I am not sure I'm satisfied looking at the awards, but it's clear there weren't any puppies having their way, considering the award given to the Cats, Please story.

Hi John;

Thanks for your comments on *Tightbeam* #274. The problem with short stories for the Hugo Awards (or most any other awards) is that not very many people seem to be interested in short fiction these days. Novels continue to sell well, but the circulation figures of the surviving pro-mags are slowly eroding away, indicating an aging readership with not many new people coming into the fold.

I blame a lot of that on the lack of places that will even carry magazines anymore, let alone science fiction or fantasy mags. Yeah, my local Rite Aide pharmacy still has a four foot magazine rack, stuck in the greeting cards section, but the magazines offered are primarily titles aimed at female readers, plus self help, exercise, and some assorted popular men's titles, with a smattering of TV and movie hype mags and not much else. No fiction magazines are offered at all, and the paperback sections almost never carry SF/fantasy titles. This situation is pretty much true for all of the limited locations that still stock magazines of any sort. Unless a potential reader stumbles across a SF promag in places like Barnes & Noble he would probably never know that such a thing even exists any more.

I fear the internet is not much better. There are many different electronic SF/fantasy magazines offered on the web these days, but the quality is very erratic, with most of these journals charging prices equivalent to the cover price of the professional magazines to download their issues. This has already stuck me as fairly bizarre. E-mags don't have to physically print copies, and they don't have to pay for shipping or mailing costs, plus if the customer buys direct from their web-site, they don't have to give a distributor or retailer discount either. Yet the overwhelming majority of them are not inclined to offer their readers any better prices for their efforts. It is not surprising that most of these titles have short survival rates.



Some people have even suggested doing away with the short fiction categories for future Hugo Awards. I dunno, maybe it is the wave of the future.

Taral Wayne
Taral@bell.net

Regarding your review of my fanzine *Broken Toys* and your comments about Oldstyle Press; much as its tempting to allow Michael Kellermeier to take the blame, as editor of The Yellow Booke, and other Oldstyle Press publications, he does in fact, allow his contributing authors free *digital* copies of the publication their stories appear in. He goes even further, and allows them to download free of charge any other Oldstyle Press publication in his catalog – and there’s a lot of stuff!

The rub is, a .pdf doesn’t look good on your shelf and doesn’t make a good gift to a friend. Especially not to one who has been giving you free autographed copies of his hardcover books throughout his lengthy, Hugo-winning career!

Also, by great irony, I am not a dark-fantasy reader. I read

the classics back in the 1970s, watched the genre evolve (or perhaps I should say “mutate”) into modern dark fantasy during the Steven King era, and eventually came to the conclusion that it wasn’t my cup of tea. The old stuff was usually very affected, and the new stuff was fearful of change, science and rationality – not a state of mind I like to spend time in. If I were American, I would not have voted GOP in the last several elections or in the coming one.

Odd that, so far, dark fantasy is what I’ve had published and may continue to be so. But there’s just something about creepy old houses and spooky woods that I find interesting to write about, while stories about computers that run faster does not. However, I’ve never been one to follow a rule-book, and now that I’m officially retired, I don’t propose to start.

Two or three times a year would be a wildly optimistic prediction about *Broken Toys*’ replacement. Once or twice is likely close to the mark.

I have begun a “concordance” for *Broken Toys* – not only for the sake of letters on the final issue, but also a complete index, and whatever else was left over in the frenzy of editing number 50. It would be gratifying if the concordance itself was a hefty volume, but the indications are that it is more likely to be rather modest. The index will run a few pages and there are nine letters of comment. I was a bit surprised by the pokey response, but I suspect that readers who were confronted by over 70 pages of reading have been taking their time getting through it. I wouldn’t be at all surprised if most of them have still not finished reading the issue.

Ah well, in future, the readers will still have *Vibrator* and *Fugghead* to neglect.

Hi Taral;

Thanks for your comments on *Tightbeam* #274. Thanks also for the correction concerning free digital copies of "The Yellow Book" being offered to contributors. I think the phrasing in your last issue of *Broken Toys* led me to the conclusion that the editor was an ultimate cheapskate. You are right, tho, that e-books do not look good on a trophy shelf, nor do they make attractive gifts that can be used to impress friends and family. It still seems very chintzy to me that a publisher would not at least send a print copy out to the people who contribute stories to his anthology. If the publishing shoe-string is stretched that thin, then maybe the publisher should get out of the book business and into something else.

I also echo your apprehension about dark fantasy. I have always enjoyed supernatural adventures, but the depths-of-horror stuff does not interest me much, and a lot of the newer stuff turns me off completely. Quite a lot of it seems to pander to sadistic cruelty in the guise of fantasy, often using premises so incredible that I can't suspend my disbelief long enuf to finish the stories. But, there's no denying the popularity of the genre. Sales of dark fantasy and horror seem to be hanging in reasonably steady while every other kind of fiction is on a sales roller coaster ride.

Lloyd Penney; 1706-24 Eva Rd.; Etobicoke, ON M9C 2B2 CANADA

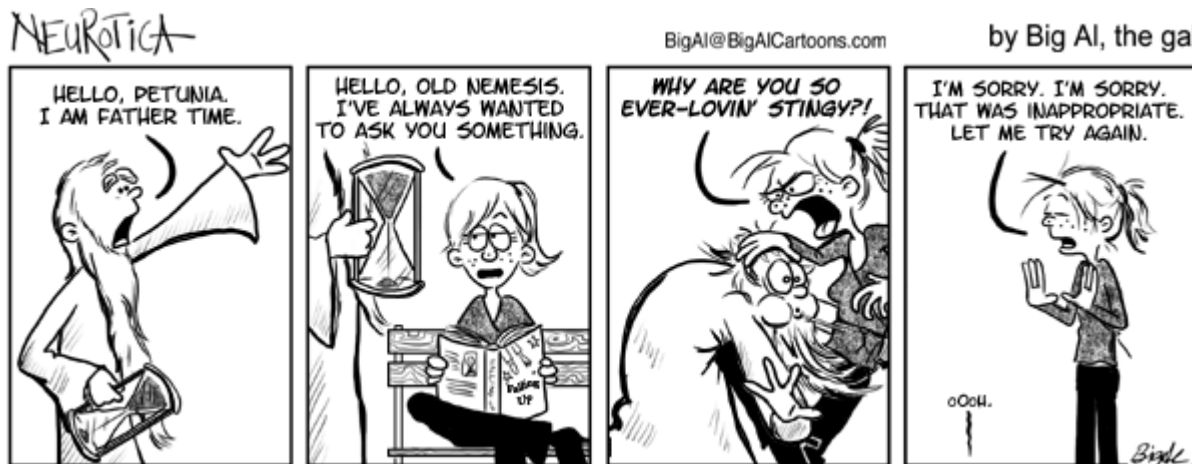
It's good to see the return of *Tightbeam* to N3F members, and great to see you take the reins of it. Two issues are out, and I am sure you're working on the third. I have meant to write a loc, but there's been a lot of catch-up to do since we got back from England, and that was about two months ago now. Time for me to get caught up with issues 273 and 274.

273...The realities of the day are certainly against us. Of course, we'd like to have paper fanzines, but now, printing costs are prohibitive. Pdfing zines are the normal solution, but unfortunately, we treat e-files as completely disposable. Some people will not respond to .pdfed zines, but I am pleased to do so, mindful of those afore-mentioned realities.

Tom Feller reviews so many good books, but all I can say is that I have the John Wyndham book, and that's it. The costs that keep zines electronic also keep me from buying new books. We haven't bought any in some years, and so, SF has left me behind, and all I can do is find cheaper ways to entertain myself. As for movies, I suspect our next one will come in November, when the movie *Fantastic beasts and Where to Find Them* will come out.

Fanzines...Ray Palm recently interviewed me via e-mail, so I expect that may appear in a future issue of *Ray X X-Rayer*. I have never seen a copy of *DASFAX*, even after several requests, but that's okay; I am trying to consciously reduce the number of fanzines I respond to. Even with that, I need to check to see if there an issue of *Fadeaway* I need to LOC.

274...Tom Feller's article on this year's Hugo finalists was interesting, not because I've read anything there, but because he was obviously dissatisfied with what found its way to the final ballot. I found many are dissatisfied, and not just because the Puppies put their own distasteful mark on the whole proceedings. Perhaps today's SF is keeping a younger audience happy, but I think us older readers may have to rely on older books that will keep us interested.



I saw “Soylent Green” on TV a few nights ago. I must smile when I see that few remember this movie, but are reminded of it by a company making food supplements called Soylent, and some being sickened by the supplements. If they knew the original use of the word, they might be sickened further. These news items are keeping the movie in the public eye.

I so seldom get a chance to travel, but the last two weeks in August saw us not at the KC Worldcon, but on the streets of London, England. We flew to Gatwick, took the express train to Victoria Station, and stayed at the Grosvenor Hotel, one of the oldest hotels in the city core. Certainly, it was one of the more expensive ones. We toured around via the Tube, and saw so much. We took a bus to Watford to spend the day at the Harry Potter exhibits, saw Big Ben and the Parliament buildings, and took a spin on the London Eye. Then came a week in the town of Lincoln for The Asylum VIII, the world’s biggest steampunk festival, where 3000 of the world’s best dressed fans gather to show off and spend some great evenings. Over too fast.

Hi Lloyd;

Thanks for your comments on *Tightbeam*. It is unfortunately true that too many fans (most) do not seem to want to LOC fanzines in pixel format, but I hope the situation will change with *Tightbeam*, since I am aiming to make it a fan friendly format with an active letter column. Time will tell, of course.

Like you, I haven’t read that many new books lately, including most of the material nominated for the Hugo Awards. I think the practice most recent WorldCons have adopted of sending out all the nomination material as e-books for any person who buys a full or supporting membership is an excellent idea, and is a real bargain at supporting member prices. Even if a dedicated reader could afford to pick up all the magazines, books, anthologies, and web-zines from which the nominees are pulled, (a rough estimate for this year’s offering---\$328.00 just to buy the primary source material), it would likely be very difficult to budget the time to read everything out there anyway.

In my case it’s been a matter of lack of time for any kind of sustained reading this year, rather than the cost of the material that has kept me from sampling the new stuff. The simple solution to this, at least so far as novels and print anthologies go, is to frequent the local library. Even the library in my small town has a decent SF/fantasy section, and thru the miracle of inter-library loan they can deliver almost any SF book printed this year or in the last decade or so. I have used the library every year except this year, 2016, and I have found it is the best way to keep up with the new stuff, plus, if I come across a book I really like, one I know I’ll reread in the future, I can buy it. And for books I enjoyed but don’t want to read again, or didn’t like, the library is fine for me, and no cash was emptied out of my pocket for the privilege of reading the volumes either.

I think the company that is producing those Soylent food bars is very well aware of the connection with the SF movie; and deliberately chose to exploit the connection. Unfortunately for them it appears that their food bars and some of their other food products (all plant based) have caused gastric illness among a lot of their customers. They have recalled batches of their protein bars and as of this afternoon, they have expanded a recall and suspension of production to a number of their other food offerings, including their powdered protein drink. The very nature of the produce: all-vegetable ingredients with very little or no saturated fat and very low calorie content, may be what is upsetting customer digestive tracts and causing nausea and diarrhea. Clearly, the company was a lot more in sync with the movie than they expected.





BOOKS

Down Styphon!; by John F. Carr; Pequod Press; hardback; \$48.00—NO e-book

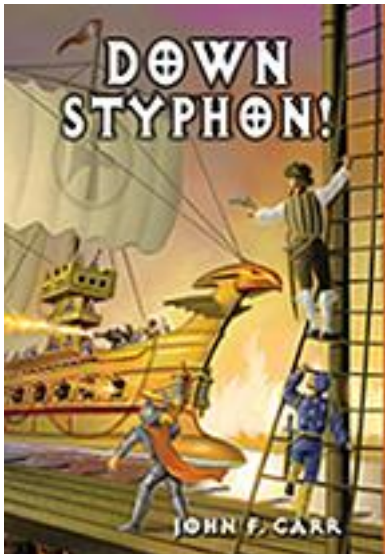
version

Five decades ago, the late science fiction writer H. Beam Piper wrote a novel "Lord Kalvan of Otherwhen" about Pennsylvania State Trooper Calvin Morrison, who was transported by a cross-time flying saucer from our universe to another universe, parallel to ours, in which America had been occupied by people who crossed the Bering land bridge instead of occupying Europe. The folks on the flying saucer viewed this as the Aryan-Transpacific timeline.

Needless to say, the universe had a collection of villains, namely the priesthood of the healer-God Styphon, whose priests had discovered gunpowder, given themselves the monopoly on its manufacture, and become fabulously rich and powerful in the process. They were now preparing to crush the small kingdom of Hostigos. Calvin saved Hostigos, incidentally winning the hand of the beautiful princess Rylla, and found himself embarked on a continent-wide war to defeat the priesthood.

Piper tragically passed away without completing the series. It remained for John F. Carr to write the remaining seven books in the series, which after a mere five decades has now come to a natural end. The forces of evil have been defeated. Calvin has brought peace to a continent. At the end he has returned quite literally to the arms of his beautiful princess. Of course, there were a few minor obstacles in his path, which took all seven books to resolve.

Unlike many books of this sort, Calvin and his students are extremely restrained in how much technology they are able to introduce in how little time. We do not see here over the course of five years people progressing from galleys to Majestic-class ironclad battleships.



Calvin knew some history of the gunpowder era, but had no miraculous tricks up his sleeve to ensure that he could not be defeated. Indeed, he lost at least one very important battle, as a result of which his country's capital was sacked and its population was forced to flee over vast (by medieval standards) distances. The various characters other than the hero are properly fleshed out in considerable detail. Calvin suffers considerably as a result of his wife's short temper and impulsive nature, perhaps not surprising when you hand command of a significant Army over to an 18-year-old princess, even if she is the best of Calvin's generals.

The last book politely mounts over the fireplace several shotguns that the author could choose to take down if he wished to write additional volumes. The city that is not Constantinople will indeed take poorly to the cannon that the southern barbarians now have been given. The Californian Romans are gaining a new religious faith. Someone must live in Europe; at some point they could come visiting. There are openings here if the series were to be restarted in the coming years.

If you enjoy military science fiction, the series is well worth reading.

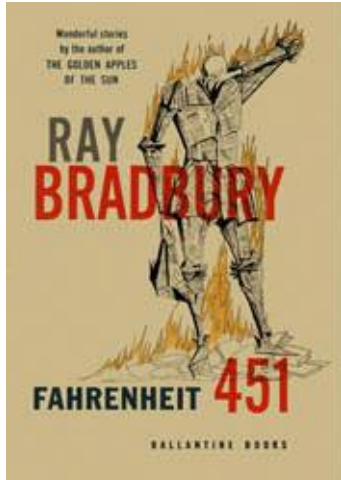
---review by George Phillies

Fahrenheit 451; by Ray Bradbury

We are, of course, discussing a novel by a Neffer, indeed a Neffer who won what was at that time called the N3F Laureate award, and is now the Neffie. “Fahrenheit 451” is arguably Bradbury’s best-known work. I have seen it converted into a play, with remarkable use of computer generated special effects to compensate for the lack of budget.

At the time, the novel could have been read as an attack on the television culture, an attack on those who opposed freedom of the press, and as a prediction of a dystopic future. It was also perhaps a warning about warfare, as the book closes with atomic bombs being dropped on the hero’s former city.

Originally published as a novelette in the February 1951 issue of *Galaxy SF Magazine*, under the title “The Fireman”; an editor at Ballantine Books was so impressed with the style and the subject that he contacted Bradbury and convinced him to expand the story into a novel length work that would be issued in book form as quickly as a suitable manuscript could be approved.



The paperback book first edition appeared in October 1953, followed shortly thereafter by a limited hardback edition. Success was immediate. *Playboy Magazine* serialized the novel in its March thru April 1954 issues. The novel was critically acclaimed by both science fiction readers and the mundane world at large, including winning the prestigious American Academy of Arts and Letters Award in Literature in 1954. The book has never been out of print from that day till this.

All in all, the novel has not aged entirely well. Like almost all other SF authors, Bradbury failed to anticipate the computer and internet revolutions, which made reading skills critical. One might well ask how his technically sophisticated society is supposed to work with no written material. If all knowledge at this point in time has somehow been reduced to film and audio recordings, then the anti-literary duties of the Firemen are impractical.

The attitude toward television, treating it as an anti-intellectual item intended to dumb down the public, was a common position among the literary -- I did not say ‘educated’ -- classes of Bradbury’s day. The notion that video had purposes other than lowest-common-denominator mass entertainment was at the time socially unacceptable. Those same classes, during that time period, often had little respect for or interest in the science, technology, engineering, math/management disciplines. The notion that you could have such disciplines without books, or that modern technical society could survive without those disciplines, seems not to have bothered Bradbury. I suppose that novels with magic or faster than light spaceships are just as unlikely, but magic and faster than light spaceships are accepted STFnal tropes.

Bradbury himself always said the novel was about book burning, and the freedom of expression. The story was conceived in the darkest day of the McCarthy era, where there was genuine fear that anti-communist extremism might well lead to wide spread censorship and government muzzling of the press within the United States.

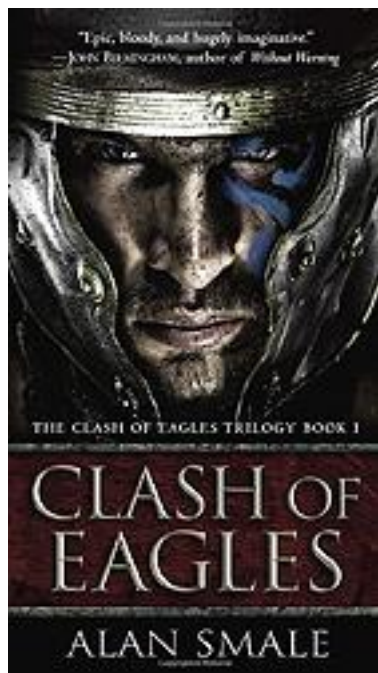
With respect to freedom of the press, I would say that there has been enormous change since Bradbury’s novel, in the directions of greater freedom of press and speech (except at the next WorldCon, it would appear). Bradbury’s predictions here seem to have been a miss, at least thus far. I am barely old enough to remember when novels were sold as “banned in Boston”, a technique that was supposed to prevent naughty novels from falling into the hands of upright citizens, but actually seemed to have worked as a way to increase sales everywhere else. The censorship board responsible for reading the novels and choosing what to ban was apparently not impoverished, with many publishers having a great interest in seeing that their novel was indeed banned in a timely fashion.

In the 1950s, especially the early years of that decade when this novel was published, there was also a very real fear that atomic war could break out and totally destroy human civilization. So far, we have managed to avoid an atomic war, a condition that will hopefully long endure.

Bradbury’s concerns were very real, and in some cases his pessimism has turned out to be true. In the 1950s there were massive public book burning celebrations where thousands of comics books were tossed into the flames and the cries for censoring or completely eliminating comics books were widespread. In the 1980s there were public book burnings of Dungeons and Dragons role playing game books. There have been attempts

thruout the years to censor this very book, Bradbury's opus against censorship and book burning. The threat of censorship seems to never be too far out of reach for America, but, for all of that, the courts and the public at large seems to have resisted the urge to give in to censorship.

One could say that Bradbury in this novel has a unique writing style, somewhat breathless, somewhat dependent on short-lived images weaving a suggestion of a larger and more intricate backdrop. The three parts of the novel work together to form a powerful and memorable story. Yes, the novel is dated, but I think "Fahrenheit 451" will remain in print and continue to be well remembered for a good many years to come. It is one of the enduring classics of science fiction literature.



A Clash of Eagles / Eagles In Exile by Alan Smale; Del Rey Books, Paperback; 480 pages (book 1); \$7.99; e-book is MORE EXPENSIVE

I met Alan in both the 'Year In Astronomy' panel and in the autographic session at a recent convention. I liked him well enough to rush out into the dealers' room and buy a copy of the first volume of Clash Of Eagles trilogy.

In this alternative history the Roman Empire didn't fall and in 1211 A.D. Praetor Gaius Marcellinus leads a legion of Rome's best troops into an invasion of Nova Hespera (A.K.A. North America) with the mission of subduing the new continent as a province of Rome and to see out any gold or other valuable plunder that might be there for the taking. The timing of the invasion is important because it is before the rise of the really nasty diseases such as smallpox, syphilis, and bubonic plague so our Romans don't get the biological warfare of the Conquistadors in the 1500s.

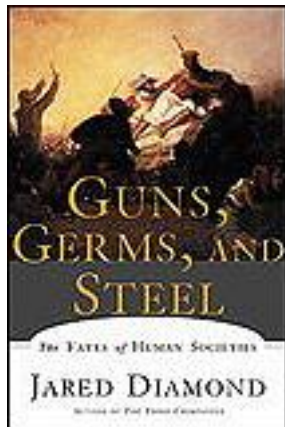
Indeed, all goes well as the Roman Army fights its way across the disorganized tribes of the coastal regions and middle-Appalachians. When they reach the Mississippians culture at the height of their power at the mound city of Cahokia, the natives have other ideas. The Cahokians have invented both hang glider-like wings that can lift up to twelve passengers and their own version of napalm. With the introduction of air power and incendiary bombs,

the Romans are doomed, and out of an army of 5000 only Marcellinus is left alive at the end of the battle.

In order to survive, Marcellinus begins to teach the Cahokians Latin, metallurgy, masonry, and Roman military tactics. He also falls hopelessly in unrequited love with Sintakalla, the magnificent bird-woman leader of the Cahokian Air Force. Marcellinus knows that Rome won't leave the destruction of an entire Legion unanswered, so he attempts to build up the Cahokians to the point of being ready to stand up when the time comes. He also recognizes that the Cahokians have a spark of invention and innovation that the Roman Empire lacks, but desperately needs.

I've been recommending these books to anyone who'll stand still long enough to listen. Alan Smale has done a fantastic job of research into both Roman culture and what little we know about the Cahokians. (Yes, Cahokia is a real place in modern day Illinois on the banks of the Mississippi.) The story is fast-paced when needed and introspective when studying details. The major characters are all distinctive and vivid, especially Marcellinus' Batman-like survivor guilt and Sintakalla's swagger, plus dozens of other characters really make this work come to life.

---review by Gary Robe



Guns, Germs and Steel by Jared Diamond; W.W. Norton Co.; hardback, 480 pages; hardback, trade paperback, and e-book versions available at discount prices

This Pulitzer Prize winning book attempts to explain why of all the independent societies on Earth, only the Eurasian culture from the Fertile Crescent managed to invent the whole package of technological innovation encompassing agriculture, animal domestication, writing, metallurgy, chemistry, navigation, and disease resistance. If one rejects the Judeo-Christian explanation that those people were chosen by God and were mentally superior to all the other cultures on the planet,

then what else can explain why the Eurasians got all the stuff and all the others posed such little resistance to the explosion of European colonization beginning in the 1500s.

This is a theme that I've been thinking about a lot as I begin to do research on a novel idea I have. What if in the meeting between the Jamestown colonists and the American Indians was technologically lopsided in the opposite direction of our history. This book answers a lot of the questions about what historical changes I'd have to invent to have a technologically advanced Indian culture in the 1500s.

Diamond examines each of the factors that play into the rise of a technological culture and then explores how and when each of them were replicated in diverse parts of the world---or not. One of the things I like most about the book is that at no place does superior intelligence of a particular race play a part in how advancement takes place. For example, in plant cultivation, in every part of the world the indigenous people discovered and exploited every cultivatable plant available to them. Each region had edible plants that could be domesticated. Almost without fail all of the useful plants and animals were cultivated and domesticated to the extent that nearly no current efforts to domesticate and cultivate different plants and animals have been successful even with modern genetic engineering!

This book is a must read for anyone curious about how we got to where we are today as a species. Diamond misses a couple of details like not recognizing the persimmon and Paw-Paw as cultivated food sources in North America, but that's a quibble. This book is also available to borrow for free by Amazon Prime members.

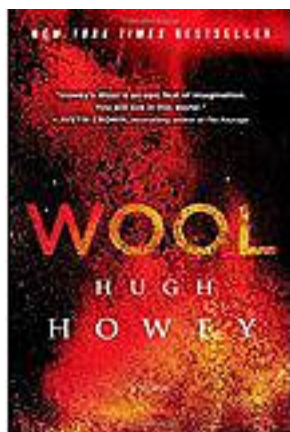
---review by Gary Robe



The Infinite Sea by Rick Yancey; Tor Books; Paperback; 352 pages; \$10.99; e-book version available

This is the sequel to *The Fifth Wave*, a young adult alien invasion story, and reportedly the second book in a trilogy. All the main characters who were still alive at the end of the first book are back, especially Cassie Sullivan and Evan Walker, both teenagers. By the end of the first book, the aliens have killed off 98% of the human population. Evan is actually an alien who looks human but has turned against the invaders. The story moves slowly, because many of the scenes are repeated but from a different character's perspective. Like the first book, the plot relies heavily on coincidence. I would only recommend it to someone who has actually read the first book, not just seen the movie based upon it.

---review by Tom Feller



Wool by Hugh Howey; Simon & Schuster; Paperback; 528 pages; \$15.99; e-book version available

This is a post-apocalyptic work of fiction consisting of the first five stories in the author's *Silo* series, which were originally self-published on the Internet. The cause of the apocalypse is not revealed in this book, but the atmosphere contains some sort of deadly airborne pathogen rendering it poisonous and unbreathable, and the survivors live in a silo that extends underground about 144 floors without an elevator but with a spiral staircase. The farmers and mechanics live in the lower third, the information technology people in the middle, and the executive and professionals on the upper floors. Members of the different job categories wear color-coded uniforms. Population is strictly controlled so that a birth is permitted only if someone else has died. As a form of capital punishment, individuals are sent outside to clean the lens of the cameras that look out on the outside world. The main character is Juliette, a

mechanic who is promoted to be sheriff, but she loses a power struggle and sentenced to be a cleaner. However, she refuses to clean the lens and leaves the area around the silo. Other interesting characters are Holston, Juliette's predecessor as sheriff who volunteers to be a cleaner, Jahns the mayor, and Marnes, Holston's deputy and Jahns's lover. This book was a fascinating read and hard to put down when you get to the last hundred pages.

---review by Tom Feller



Coyote by Allen Steele; Ace Books; Paperback; 448 pages; \$7.99

I read this book on the flights to and from Kansas City for the Worldcon. It is the story of Earth's first interstellar spaceship, named the *Alabama*, in which about 100 people travel to the star Ursa Major 47 using suspended animation. It is the first book in a series of six. They start in the year 2070 and arrive in 2300, traveling 46 light years. "Coyote" is the name of the one planet in the system capable of supporting human life, although its year lasts more than one thousand days and each day lasts 27 hours.

By 2070, the United States has split into three countries, the largest of which is called the United Republic of America and includes Texas, Alabama, and Florida, where most of the space program's infrastructure is still located. It is a dystopian future and the leaders of the Republic essentially bankrupt the country to build the ship. It was a good, solid hard science fiction story and very enjoyable read.

---review by Tom Feller

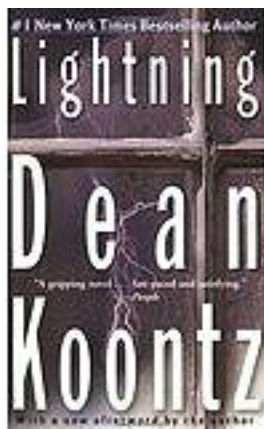


The Broken Kingdoms by N. K. Jemisin; Orbit Books; Paperback, 432 pages; \$7.99; e-book same price as print copy

This is the second book in the author's Inheritance trilogy. I had read the first book *The Hundred Thousand Kingdoms* when it was nominated for a Hugo a few years ago. This book was a nominee two years ago and takes place ten years after the events of the first. This is unusual, but I actually liked the second book more than the first. I think this is because the first book focused on members of this world's ruling class, the Arameri, and the gods of this fantasy world. The main character in the second, Oree Shoth, comes from much more humble circumstances, but she is far from ordinary. She is a member of an ethnic minority called the Maro. A few millennia previously, her people had been almost completely destroyed as "collateral damage" in a war between the gods, and the survivors were allowed to settle on a reservation. Although blind from birth and a seller of trinkets that she herself makes, she can "see" magic.

One day she comes across a homeless man lying comatose on the street and decides to take him home. He doesn't have a name, so she eventually calls him "Shiny", because she can "see" the magic inside him. The author uses the "no good deed goes unpunished" principle to plunge Oree into a political struggle among factions of the ruling class, the investigation into a series of murders, and a conflict among the gods themselves. Oree is a much more active protagonist than Yeine, the main character in the first book, and the novel is better for it.

---review by Tom Feller



Lightning by Dean Koontz; Berkley Books' Paperback; 384 pages; \$7.99; e-book version available

As is our custom, my science fiction book discussion club got off subject and began discussing Dean Koontz's *Odd Thomas* series, because the star of a movie based on the first book, Anton Yelchin (Chekhov in the last three *Star Trek* movies), died in a freak car accident earlier this year. Several of the members liked the series about a cook who sees dead people, so I suggested one of the author's forays into science fiction.

I first read this book about 2-3 years after it was first published in 1988 and remembered liking it, so I knew where the story was going. However, it had been long enough that I had forgotten most of the details. The two point-of-view characters are Laura Shane, an orphan, and Stefan, her "Guardian Angel" who early in the book is revealed to be a time traveler. The passages following Laura are very specific as to dates. For instance, she was born in 1955, and Stefan travels to that specific day and other key dates in her life

to save her from some calamity, such as being killed in a convenience store robbery. On the other hand, Koontz is very vague as to the specific year that time traveler is from, and the revelation of that year turns out to be one of the important plot twists midway through the book. The title comes from Koontz's variation in time travel conventions in that the arrival of a time traveler is signed by a bolt of lightning, which is rather silly, and he has to explain the logic of time travel several times, because his target audience had not necessarily read a lot of science fiction. Nonetheless, the novel was still an enjoyable read the second time through.

---review by Tom Feller

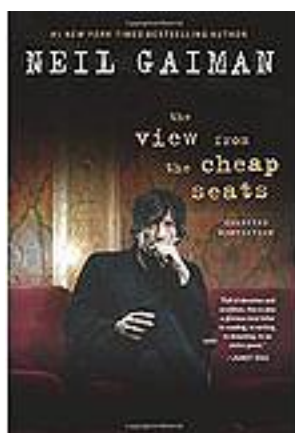


Joe Steele by Harry Turtledove; ROC Books; Paperback; 464 pages; \$8.99; e-book version available

If you think Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton were bad candidates for president, the premise of this alternate history is that the parents of the person whom we know and despise as “Joseph Stalin” immigrated from the Russian Empire to California a few months before his birth. Despite having been born in the United States, he is essentially the same person. Changing his name to “Joe Steele” (“stalin” is “steel” in Russian), he becomes a labor activist and congressman before running for president in 1932. He wins the Democratic nomination after Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt die in a fire under mysterious circumstances, and then easily defeats Herbert Hoover in the general election. He consolidates his power by having Huey Long assassinated after the election and arresting the conservative wing of the U.S. Supreme Court and Father Coughlin on his way to establishing an American dictatorship. In other countries, Trotsky succeeds Lenin as leader of the Soviet Union, and Hitler and Churchill come to power the same way they did in our timeline. World War II proceeds the same in the Europe, but not in the Pacific, and the Cold War begins differently.

There are two point-of-view characters, the brothers Charlie and Mike Sullivan. They are both journalists, Charlie for the Associated Press and Mike for the New York Post. However, their lives take very different paths when Charlie is accepted into Steele's inner circle and Mike is arrested for writing negative stories about Steele. The ending is very chilling, but logical. I would recommend it for people who like this genre.

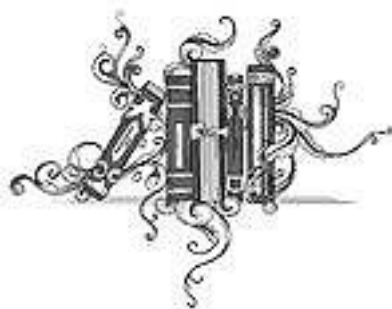
---review by Tom Feller



The View From the Cheap Seats by Neil Gaiman; multiple formats, all heavily discount priced, including e-book version

This is a collection of more than sixty of Gaiman's non-fiction works: speeches, articles, essays, and introductions to other books. It makes no claim to being complete, because he began his writing career as an arts and culture journalist. The title comes from an article he wrote about his experience of attending the Academy Award ceremony the year the film adaptation of his story “Coraline” was nominated in the Best Animated Feature category. From a biographical standpoint, many of the articles include anecdotes of events in his life, and from a literary scholar standpoint, many of them describe the influence of C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, Ray Bradbury, Diana Wynne Jones, Jack Kirby, H.P. Lovecraft, Douglas Adams, Harlan Ellison, H.G. Wells, Will Eisner, Stephen King, Rudyard Kipling, James Thurber, Terry Pratchett, and others. I highly recommend it for his fans.

---review by Tom Feller





Last year I did a breakdown on why I think Larry Correia's *Monster Hunter International* universe has been such a colossal hit with readers. Having finished screening — with my wife and daughter — the runaway Netflix original series *Stranger Things*, I think there are many parallels which are worth re-examining; for writers seeking to tap into that elusive *oomph* that can make a SF/F project spark with the audience.

Both MHI and ST are contemporary thriller fiction which ask us to believe in a kind of shadow world, or alternate realm. Something we think we see just out of the corner of our eye, and when we turn to look, it's gone.

That alternate realm — for both series — is infested by grotesque, nightmare-beneath-the-bed monsters.

As with MHI, the world of ST is troubled by the machinations of secretive government institutions and individuals within the government, who are actively harming the lives of decent citizens, while masquerading as protectors.

Also like MHI, the protagonists of ST are a somewhat rag-tag cast of n'er-do-wells and "broken" people — who've been kicked around by life. Yet, they find within themselves the power to fight for something, even if they don't really understand what's going on.

Family drama is very much front-and-center in both MHI and ST. The protagonists aren't just battling supernatural evil, they're battling themselves as well. Old wounds. Emotional scars. Loved ones lost. Unrequited love. Romance. Envy. Betrayal. All twined into the action, wherein the hero(s) and heroine(s) have to navigate their relationships, at the same time they're trying to defeat demonic forces threatening the real world.

The conclusion of ST's inaugural voyage is much like that of every MHI novel, in that it suggests there is much more "there" there. A story continuing long after the story, which entices viewers to look with anticipation for the next installment.

Setting aside the sterling character performances of the cast, I think season one of *Stranger Things* deserves high marks for some very astute, sharp writing which uses just about every tool in the thriller writer's *and* horror writer's toolbox. Including some patently classic scary movie editing which really maximizes the "jump in your seat" factor, as well as slowly winding the spring of anticipation — regarding character choices, consequences, and inevitability. In the end, ST's first season is about redemption and sacrifice, as well as the nature and meaning of family, friendship, and loyalty. Each of the protagonists must make hard choices, in the face of overwhelming odds, while attempting to combat two different foes — one of which operates in the real world, while the other operates in an inverted mirror image of the real world.

That, my friends, is a recipe for a hit. It's no wonder people have been talking non-stop about this show! And I watched it eagerly, not just as a writer who is always looking to unravel the clockwork of effective storytelling, but also as a fan — who likes to be swept up in that very same storytelling.

If you haven't taken a look at *Stranger Things'* debut outing, I really think you should. It's only eight episodes, and they really hit the ground running in the first hour. I don't want to give away too many specific plot details, but the performances are top notch — especially the kids. With singular praise for Millie Bobby Brown, who plays the pivotal Eleven. She did a fantastic job, mainly because she had to communicate so much, without having very many lines of dialogue.

As always, when I peg to the fact that a story has utterly evaded the scalpel of my interior plot surgeon — the guy who is forever trying to pick apart every book or movie I see, to figure out how it ticks — I try not to worry too much about the Tab A into Slot B mechanics of the thing. Rather, I let the story roll around on the back forty of my brain. I try to turn off my targeting computer, and just let the story melt across my writerly semi-conscious; like butter on hot toast. I don't believe directly imitating any story is a sure-fire path to success, but I do think that *good* stories can always teach us a lot about the craft, and the art. Because of the way they make us feel. ST (and MHI too) are great at getting us to *feel* these people, and what they're going through. To include — perhaps surprisingly — antagonists who turn out to not be bad guys after all. Even if they've done some bad things.

Anyway, *Stranger Things* was a delight. Highly recommended, both for pure enjoyment, and as a lesson in terrific tale-telling.

---commentary by **Brad R. Torgersen** whose latest book, “**Freedom’s Light: Short Stories**” was written in collaboration with Nick Cole and is available primarily as an e-book (print on demand copies also available)

ROCKS IN A SACK

By Brad R. Torgersen

My wife and I coordinated our Halloween costumes this year to correspond with *It’s the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown!* She’s Lucy, complete with red witch hat and green witch mask; both custom-made — my wife is just talented as hell like that. My outfit, on the other hand, is far simpler: Charlie Brown — to include the white sheet with way too many eye holes. A family friend commented to me (tonight, at the local ward party) that all I needed to complete my portion, was a football, and a paper sack filled with rocks.

I’ve use the sack-full-of-rocks analogy before, to describe what it’s like being an aspiring author. Especially back in the days before dignified independent publishing existed. You either vanity-published, or you did the hard chore of sending your (paper!) manuscripts off to editors. As well as agents. In exchange for (paper!) rejection letters. Lots, and lots, and lots of rejection letters. I still have a fairly large three-ring binder, stuffed with all the paper slips I’ve ever received. As of 2016, I think my electronic rejections have reached or exceeded the paper number. Many hundreds, or more. I’ve lost count, to be honest. And they’ve not stopped, even with a robustly healthy publishing track record to my credit.

When you’re new, it occasionally seems like Lucy is eternally yanking the ball away. No matter how hard you run at it, you can’t connect. You just end up flat on your back, wondering what the hell is wrong with you, or your work. What’s the issue? Do you really and truly suck? Or is the system somehow broken? Maybe, stacked against you?

The truth is that publishing is now easier than it’s ever been. But success? In the words of Kevin J. Anderson, success is as hard as it always was. Maybe, I would add, harder? Because there are more people publishing prose — in the English language, in the 21st century — than at any other time in history. Thousands of new books and stories are launched every single day. The removal of editors and agents as the sole gatekeepers of the industry, means that literally everyone can take their books and stories directly to the marketplace. Which is a bit like having hundreds of new NASCAR drivers merge onto the track every hour, on the hour. And the track is infinitely wide.

It’s enough to make even a competently optimistic author throw up her hands and utter, “Good grief!”

Here’s the good news, as non-intuitive as it may sound. Getting rocks in your sack helps you get better.

No, really, it does. Even if you’re an indie author. Because this is what forces you to *work*. To not stay put, churning at the same level of authorial acumen.

My hundreds of rejections have been hard. They're *still* hard. But they're a reminder to me that there is always room for improvement. And especially in the beginning, when I honestly and truly did not know what I was doing — I still have many of those old manuscripts, believe me, I know how appropriate it is that they never saw print! — rejection was a limiter against which I had to push myself. And it also taught me humility. In addition to appreciation for the eventual wins, when they came. But only after my sack had filled up with rocks, year after year.

Yeah, I get it. No sane person gets a sack full of rocks every single year, and doesn't experience moments of severe doubt. I was getting ready to throw in the towel by 2005 — after over a dozen years of rejection — when my wife said to me, "If you let this dream go, you have to replace it with an equal or better dream." I ultimately couldn't do that, because I couldn't turn off the story-generator in my head. Even if my storytelling chops weren't yet good enough to take what was happening in my head, and smoothly translate it to words. So I redoubled my effort. And I switched up my style. Moving from third-person to first-person — especially for short stories — was a huge win for me. Uncomfortable as hell, at first. But it was the necessary move that helped me bump my short work into entry-level professional territory. So that by 2010 I had stuff under contract, with more on the way, and a bona fide career was launched.

And because I still had all those sacks filled with rocks, I could look at them and relish the (then, new) candy suddenly being thrown my way.

I still relish the candy, because it's more common now, and of a higher quality, more often. I'd not appreciate any of this, without my requisite sacks of rocks — earned over my proverbial first million words of "practice" prose.

So don't feel like it's a thankless chore, if you're still getting rejections, or your indie work is dudding in the marketplace. For whatever reasons, you're still not connecting (yet!) with that football. It may take you a few more (or a lot more?) manuscripts, to hone your intuitive storytelling capabilities to the point that your prose is capable of doing what you need it to, in order to consistently entertain an audience. Be it the audience of the editor or agent, or the audience of the open marketplace. Again, thousands of new "drivers" merging onto the NASCAR oval every day. You're not alone. Most of those people won't stick. Bottom line. They won't get traction, and will move on to some other endeavor. The way to win on the oval, is to simply keep going around and around and around. Ensure that you never take yourself out of the race. Keep showing up on those porches and front stoops, your paper sack open and ready to receive what's coming to you. It doesn't make you a blockhead, if you try and fail. You're only a blockhead if you try, then fail, and assume that trying was pointless. Or that somehow, magically, everyone else who is getting candy, knows the secret launch codes or something.

There's no secret. Just effort. And patience. Don't expect it all to come to you at once. Accept the setbacks and the mistakes. They are only fruitless if you don't learn from them — if they have not shown you some way you can do better.

Because when the wins do come . . . believe me, you will experience satisfaction unlike almost any other.

cinema

The feature film of the evening was “Bud Abbott and Lou Costello Meet Frankenstein”, a 1948 comedy-horror film. This might be seen as an appropriate Halloween season flick, featuring the Universal comedy team in fine form battling against a creepy menace headed by the three major Universal horror icons, but it is a comedy that can be viewed anytime.

The movie was originally going to be titled “The Brain of Frankenstein”, a title clearly more descriptive of the actual plot, but the studio decided midway in the shooting that they needed the name of the two stars on the logo and the promotion posters, so the title was changed. Originally Lou Costello hated the whole concept of the movie and told Universal the script was a piece of garbage, but Universal had the team under contract and insisted he make the film. After the shooting got underway he changed his mind and decided that the story wasn't that bad at all.

The plot involves an effort on the part of Dracula to put a new brain into the body of Frankenstein's monster, one that would be easier to control, a mind to replace the brutish, rebellious criminal brain the mad doctor put into the construct's body originally. Lou Costello plays Wilbur Grey, the man Dracula's sexy female agent Sandra Mornay (played by Lenore Aubert) has picked as the perfect brain, one dumb enuf to be easily controlled. Sandra is a brilliant surgeon who has located Dr. Frankenstein's original notebooks and can handle the brain transplant. She woos Wilbur to keep him handy, and Wilbur is easily smitten. Wilbur's pal Chick Young (Abbott) can't understand what she sees in a guy like Wilbur.

The boys work at the railroad freight depot, and receive two long boxes intended for the local wax museum, the McDougal House of Horrors. The boxes contain the body of Dracula and the Frankenstein monster. Wilbur encounters the monsters in the storage room but can't convince Chick that they are alive. When the pair of monsters go missing the boys are charged with theft by an outraged McDougal. This causes the freight insurance company to send out a special agent to investigate,

Meanwhile, overseas, Larry Talbot (Lon Chaney Jr.), who is cursed with becoming the Wolfman when a full moon rises, is trying to stop Dracula's



plans, but has a hard time convincing our heroes that the situation is a real danger, even after arriving in town. then turning into a werewolf and trashing his local boarding house room.

The insurance investigator is beautiful young Joan Raymond (Jane Randolph) who doesn't think our heroes are thieves, but knows they are somehow mixed up in the plot to hi-jack the shipment of monster bodies. She turns on the charm with Wilbur too, and gets invited to the local town masquerade party.

The story is fairly simplistic. Dracula sets up in an island castle where experiments are already underway with the dedicated, but incredibly naive young Prof. Stevens (Charles Bradstreet). Naturally the castle has hidden chambers, a creepy basement, and the monsters roaming around.

Many confrontations ensue with monsters and humans running round in circles. The final showdown inside the castle finds Dracula and Sandra about to operate on Wilbur when his friends dash to the rescue, and more chaos and mayhem ensues before the bad guys are defeated with the help of Prof. Stevens and Joan.

This was a very popular movie when it was originally released, and I recall seeing it several times in theaters when I was a youngster. I thought it was hilarious back then. I've seen it on TV and on a small movie screen and at science fiction conventions since then, so the thrill has worn down considerably for me by this point in time.

In general I don't think the hi-jinks of Abbott & Costello are particularly funny, but I may be in a minority here. Some of the plots in their other movies keep the action going and the story pace helps make their slapstick gags and Lou Costello's on-stage dumbness work. That's generally the case here where the chase scenes work better than the scenes where Wilbur's character is frightened by the appearing and disappearing monsters.

Apparently Costello was funnier off stage when there was no script to get in the way. Out-takes from this film have circulated among some collectors that show him and Abbott cracking jokes, engaging in whipped-cream pie fights and breaking up everybody on the set. Glenn Strange, who played the Frankenstein Monster that Costello was so funny that he started laughing during a number of his on camera scenes with Costello, which caused many retakes to be made, a major contributor to the \$32,000 cost overrun the film incurred.

Despite being permanently identified with the Dracula character, this particular movie was only the second time Bela Lugosi ever played Dracula on film. He had played a vampire, costumed to look very much like the Universal Dracula in two Columbia movies; "Mark of the Vampire" (1935) and "The Return of the Vampire" (1943), but the other Universal Dracula films had the vampire played by actors such as Lon Chaney Jr. and John Carradine.

Lugosi did the role one more time for a British B-comedy film in 1952 titled "Mother Riley Meets the Vampire". The plot was lifted directly from "Abbott & Costello Meet Frankenstein", and the film made it clear that the vampire was a fake. This was done to get the British film censorship board approval so the movie could be shown to children, the biggest fans of the Mother Riley comedy series. This allegedly humorous movie was particularly corny and sank like a rock in British theaters when it was originally released.

Amazingly enough in the early 1960s, when Bela Lugosi had become something of a cult figure after Universal released their old horror films to television as part of the two Shock Theater packages, "Mother Riley" was dragged out of the vaults and released to American theaters with a new title: "My Son, the Vampire", along with a fresh comedy song by Allen Sherman cut into the beginning.

"A&C Meets Frankenstein" was notable for being the last time Universal reunited their classic movie monster trio. In fact, while the characters of the Monster, Dracula and the Wolfman had been seen in "The House of Frankenstein" back in 1944, and again a year later with "House of Dracula"; the Dracula character in those movies had been played by John Carradine.

By the time this movie was made Lon Chaney Jr. had a reputation as an actor who was difficult to work with. This was partly temperament, but many believed his behavior problems were due to his heavy drinking. He had become so argumentative that after 1945's "House of Dracula" Universal cancelled his contract. On the other hand, he had no problem finding work in movies at other studios as an independent actor, and could always be counted on to turn in top-notch performances in any situation. In the 1950s he was one of Stanley Kramer's favorite actors. Kramer told the press that whenever his movies called for a role that was too difficult for most Hollywood actors, he called on Chaney.

It is more likely that Chaney was not happy with the Universal studio system, which often times ran rough-shod over veteran actors and tended to treat character actors such as himself as commodities to be used or traded like nameless pieces on a game board. He turned in an excellent performance for this movie, and went on

to do lots of television and stage work as well as appearing in dozens of feature films. As an interesting sidebar, Lon Chaney Jr. was the only actor to play all four of the major Universal horror monsters: the Wolfman, Dracula, The Mummy and the Frankenstein Monster.

The movie had a completed cost of just over \$800,000, of which \$105,000 went to Abbott and Costello (Costello got 60%, Abbott 40% according to their recently renegotiated partnership agreement). *Variety* reported that the film earned 2.2 million dollars in the initial 1948 release, a very good return on investment. Since then it was re-released to theaters several times, then to the 16mm film rental services, then to television, then to VHS tape, and onward to DVD, and most recently to DVD Blu-Ray. It has been one of Universal's most consistent money makers over the years, and was recognized by the American Film Institute in 2000 as one of the 100 funniest films ever made. In 2001 the Library of Congress named it a cultural significant picture and made it part of the National Film Registry.

So, I didn't think it was that funny, but clearly I'm in the minority here.

---review by Bob Jennings



Doctor Strange

I was never a big fan of *Dr. Strange* in the comics, but I was eager to see this movie because Benedict Cumberbatch, who plays Sherlock Holmes in the BBC TV series *Sherlock*, and played Khan in a recent *Star Trek* movie, was starring as the title character. Steven Vincent Strange is a brilliant, but arrogant, surgeon who loses the use of his hands in an automobile accident, because he was texting while driving. Eventually he travels to Nepal in search of a treatment to restore his hands to their condition before the accident. Instead, he finds a school that teaches him to become a sorcerer. I found the story to be entertaining, while the special effects are excellent.

Tilda Swinton plays the Ancient One, who is his principal instructor. She is excellent, as usual, but the casting has become controversial because the character is Tibetan in the comic book. Asian actors have long complained that they are underrepresented in major films. It has been reported that the filmmakers changed the ethnicity of the character so as not to offend the Chinese government and take a chance on being banned in China, which has become a major movie market.

---review by Tom Feller

Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them

The title of this movie comes from a textbook that Harry Potter studied at Hogwarts and from an illustrated companion book that J.K. Rowling published for a charity in 2001. The author of the textbook is Newt Scamander (Eddie Redmayne) who journeys to America on a steamship in 1926 and finds himself embroiled in a struggle between two factions of wizards and the rise of an anti-witch organization in the U.S. He also makes friends with a No-Maj (American for "muggle") named Jacob (Dan Fogler). The screenplay is by Rowling herself and is the first in a projected series of five films. The special effects are excellent, although the monsters are a little over the top, and this film is a lot of fun.

---review by Tom Feller



Arrival

I believe I have read “The Story of Us” by Ted Chiang, his 2000 first contact story this movie is based upon, but don’t remember much about it except that the main character was a linguist (Amy Adams) who learned to communicate with the seven-limbed aliens who have landed (sort of) in Montana and eleven other places around the world. The original story is told in the form of a letter to her daughter (played by various actresses of different ages), but the movie utilizes a series of flash forwards instead. The film is a rarity, a cerebral science fiction movie in which what little violence there is takes place off-stage. Jeremy Renner plays a physicist and Forest Whitaker an army colonel who assist the linguist. They are all excellent, and the story, although it drags in the middle, is very dramatic as they are racing against time, because panicked nations are about to start a war with the aliens, eventually called “Heptapods”. This is definitely one of the best SF films I have seen this year.

---review by Tom Feller

DR. WHO : New Beginnings (3-DVD set: The Keeper of Traken, Logopolis, Castrovalva)

If you are a Doctor Who fan, you will want this set. This is a twelve episode collection that spans the transition of The Doctor from Tom Baker to Peter Davidson. In “The Keeper of Traken” The Doctor’s fellow Time Lord nemesis The Master returns with his typical ‘Pinky and the Brain’-esque plot to take

over the universe. The most interesting element is The Master has a fully-functioning TARDIS with a working chameleon circuit. The Doctor doesn’t discover who he is facing until The Master has a source of unimaginable power within his grasp.

“Logopolis” answers the age-old question of what happens when you materialize a TARDIS inside another TARDIS. Doctor and Master are forced to become allies with The Master’s plan threatens to undermine the basic reality of the Universe, with fatal consequences for The Doctor.

In “Castrovalva” The Doctor’s regeneration is failing and he needs to retreat to a haven away from mental interference. He is drawn to what seems to be the peaceful planet Castrovalva, but it’s really a diabolical trap set by The Master.

By this point in the long run of Doctor Who, Tom Baker was into his seventh year of playing The Doctor. While Baker was worn out both physically and emotionally by the role, he was also reluctant to give it up. His battles with John Nathan-Taylor, the new producer of the series, generated enough discontent for Baker to suggest that it might be time for him to go, and nobody contradicted him.

The stories stand up pretty well and are executed nicely, within the extreme budget constraints of the BBC in 1994. Tom Baker is still playful as The Doctor even if the preference is given over more to sarcasm than whimsy. The effects require one to either approach the show as a kid or with your eyes squinted and head sideways.

The Doctor’s death from a fall is rather mundane for such a fantastic show, but at least The Doctor goes out having defeated The Master once more. The regeneration metamorphosis from Baker to Davidson is likewise low-tech compared to the pyrotechnics of the current series, but we must remember this was 1984.

---review by Gary Robe





FANZINE REVIEWS

by

Bob Jennings

A regular feature of *Tightbeam*

In my opinion fanzines are one of the pillars of fannish existence, as much the heart and core of fandom as conventions, correspondence and clubs. Despite the popularity of the Internet, there are still many fanzines being physically printed and actually mailed out to interested fans. I will try to take a glance at some of the print fanzines that I have received

since the last issue of *The Insider* was mailed out. Copies of print fanzines intended for review should be sent to---**Robert Jennings; 29 Whiting Rd.; Oxford, MA 01540-2035**

Most of these fanzines are available to interested parties for "the usual", which is fan shorthand for sending the editor/publisher a letter of comment, or a copy of your own print fanzine in trade, or contributing written or artistic material for publication. Most editors will cheerfully send you a copy of their zine if you send along a card or letter asking for a sample copy, or, if you want to be a nice guy, you could enclose a couple of bucks to help defray the cost of postage



DASFAX November 2016

8-1/2x11", 8 pages; published monthly by the Denver Area Science Fiction Association; c/o Tay Von Hageman; 4080 S. Grant St.; Englewood, CO 80113; comes with club membership, membership fees are \$15 per year, or available for The Usual.

This is the newsletter of the Denver area SF club. The group is unique in that almost every meeting features a guest speaker, often a popular SF/fantasy author. There are also club wide games, discussion groups, and the meetings are usually followed by a party at one of the member's homes. The first Saturday of each month there is an Alternate Meeting, which is another party hosted by a different club member.

This issue features a very abbreviated editorial since club director Rose Beetem is deeply involved in the planning for MileHiCon. The nuts and bolts of the club and the officers are listed as well as upcoming club events.

The heart of every issue of this fanzine is the feature article written by 'Sourdough Jackson', a long time club member, and a long time fan who discusses science fiction and fantasy as part of his "Writers of the Purple Page" series. The subject range is very widespread, but usually the focus is on previously published material, as in, pre-2000, and more often, pre-1975 stuff, but that emphasis is certainly not a hard and fast rule. The observations and analysis is always interesting, often insightful.

This issue carries part two of his examination of the dream books of tomorrow; books that discussed rockets and space travel and tried to predict what would happen when the human race reached the moon, or even other planets. The discussion centers on Willy Ley's pivotal book "Rockets, Missiles, and Space Travel". This was a significant book for millions of readers, tracing the development of rocket science from ancient times

up until the present, including theory, math about how rockets and space travel would work, predictions of what would happen in outer space and on other planets, and all of it written in an engaging, easy to understand style.

Willy Ley was a writer of science articles for SF magazines such as *Galaxy* for many years, but he was also one of the original members of the German Rocket Society in the late 1920s-early 1930s. The VfR did a tremendous amount of original research and development on the science of rocketry. Ley bailed out of Germany in 1935 after the Nazis came to power, moving to the United States where he worked as a special effects advisor for the movies, and continued to write science articles for newspapers and magazines.

As Jackson notes, the first edition of Ley's book came out in 1944, but as current events in science and rocket development continued to unfold Ley updated his book several times over the years. Often this meant that the information was contained in appendixes, since it cost a lot of money to reset the type for a book back in those days. It was much easier just add a lot more pages at the end of the book to incorporate the new information as appendixes and enlarged footnote additions. The final edition of the volume came out in 1968, just a year before Ley died.

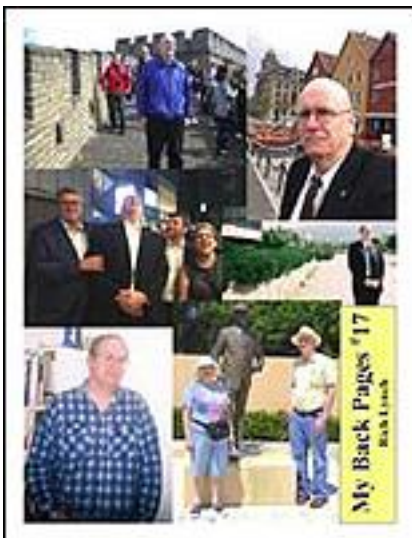
Jackson notes that this book had an enormous impact on whole generations of young readers, including people who were not science fiction fans or attracted to the idea of space travel. The easy to understand writing style, along with the sequential development of the information presented made it an easy read for most readers, even younger people, and the book proved to be a lifelong steady seller for Ley and Viking Press.

Jackson discusses some of the unknowns and oddities many readers might not be familiar with. For instance, Robert Goddard, acknowledged these days as a pioneer in rocket development, gets short wordage because he was ultra-secret about his rocket experiments to the point of being nearly paranoid. His research was not made public until the late 1930s. Russian scientist Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, recognized as the man who virtually invented liquid fuel rocketry, was unable to exert much influence outside of the USSR until the 1940s because nobody interested in the field of rockets could read Russian, and in addition Tsiolkovsky had no articles printed in foreign journals until well after that period.

Despite glitches, setbacks, and a hostile attitude by governments and indifference by the public at large, rocketry advanced, and then took a left turn when the military decided that the real practical use for rocket science was as weapons delivery systems. The military applications, and government money spent on advancing those applications, have undeniably been the primary driving force for rocket and space science since the 1940s. But, as Jackson notes, the dream of travel to the moon, and to the other planets, of reaching for the stars; that never died, and without the work of the dedicated amateurs who believed that the human race would someday travel in space, none of it would have been possible.

This is another interesting and well developed article. *Dasfax* carries another long article every issue.

You do not have to be a member of the Denver club to get copies of this fanzine, although supporting memberships are offered at very reasonable rates and would certainly be appreciated.



MY BACK PAGES #17

8-1/2X11"; 32 pages; irregular from Rich Lynch; P.O. Box 3129; Gaithersburg, MD 20885---The Usual

This is one of the most attractive, well produced fanzine I've seen this year. The layout is quite professional, and the issue abounds with full color photographs on almost every page. The appearance is visually stunning.

Each issue of this zine is composed mostly of articles Rich wrote in the past that were primarily presented to a limited audience, as thru a science fiction apa, for example. Some of them are relatively recent write-ups, others are drawn from his long history as an active science fiction fan.

Rich has a government job dealing with environmental issues that requires him to travel frequently, and frequently he is directed to go to far distant locations. Hey, let's say it right...he gets catapulted to some incredibly remote places on this planet to deal with conferences and scientific forums. Sometimes he gets a day or two or even three off before or after the event, and he makes full use of the time to explore the local area and examine the history and sights. He often discusses these junkets around the country and around the world, accompanied by color photos of

scenes, people, relics, buildings, oddities--all kinds of fascinating things.

Not content with this globe-trotting existence, he and his wife Nicki also take local jaunts on their mini-vacations to places like Philadelphia, New York City, to concerts, and of course, to assorted science fiction conventions hither and yon.

And he writes well about his adventures. I have to admit that travel reports by most people tend to be pretty dull stuff. They tend to be mainly lists of people seen, foods eaten, travel problems and the big event of the excursion. For whatever reason fans seemed obsessed with the foods they gobbled down at conventions or on travel jaunts, and they report it avidly, as tho anybody else actually cared about what they had for lunch that particular day. Rich doesn't do any of that. He concentrates on things that a general reader would find intriguing or amusing and writes about them in a casual yet detailed manner that makes even the most obscure and unique thing interesting. It takes a good writer to do that.

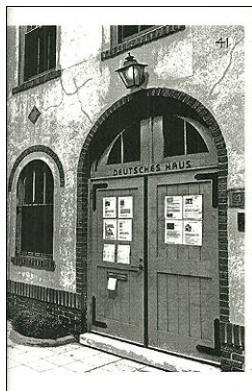
This issue details his final steps in his walk across America. Not exactly a true-to-life hike; as Rich explains it, a few years ago one of his colleagues suggested he should get up from his desk and walk around a bit, get some exercise. He thot that was a good idea, so he decided to walk about a mile each day, primarily strolling thru the corridors of the building where he works during lunch hour. To make the exercise more interesting, and one suspects, to make sure he kept on with what must have been a pretty boring regnum, he decided to create a chart of his one mile a day walks as a trip across America, started from his office, swinging down south, across Texas, and out to California. He kept track on a map, and added notes of his virtual travels, including investigating local historical sites and points of interest he might have visited had he actually been physically hiking in those locales. These write-ups were presented in his SFPazine over the course of several years, and now he has finished his trip across the country, and writes about the virtual journey complete with notes, photos, interesting points he could have visited and much fascinating natter related to the process.

This may seem like a dull-as-dirt commentary, but Rich has turned exercise into a unique event and manages to instill his enthusiasm into the article. Quite interesting. Not, however, persuasive enuf to get me to go out and decide to walk a mile or so a day around my house and yard, mind you, but still very interesting reading.

There are real life travel articles here as well, with full color photos to go with the commentary. Included are coverage of his trips to Regina, Saskatchewan in Canada, and Pittsburgh. He even manages to add in some pertinent info about his environmental job and carbon sequencing.

There is also a personal remembrance about recently deceased British acti-fan Ron Bennett. A major fan personality during the 1950s and 1960s, Bennett published the almost legendary fanzine *Skyrack* from 1959 to 1971. This is followed by commentary on waltz king Johann Strauss, Jr., and some thoughts (whines and gripes mostly) about last year's monster blizzard and how it affected Rich and his family. All good fun stuff.

In years past Rich and Nicki won multiple Hugo Awards for their fanzine *Mimosa*. *Mimosa* is no longer being published, but folks who appreciated that publication would do well to check out this issue of *My Back Pages*.



THE KEN CHRONICLES #41

5-1/2x8-1/2" fold over saddle stitched;
26 pages; published quarterly from Ken Bausert; 2140 Erma Dr.; East Meadow, NY
11554-1120; \$2.00 or The Usual

This is Ken's perzine. As he says right up front "it's all about me!" While some personality zines wallow in self indulgent spiels of inner musings that sometimes border on self pity and offer very little to interest the casual reader, this one does none of that. Ken is a very entertaining writer who has been around the hobby for a long time, so when he discusses something he manages to find points that will interest all the readers, including those who might have no initial knowledge at all about the subject matter.

This time round the issue covers nostalgic reminiscences about old neighborhood restaurants from his youth, plus his efforts to locate some of his old high school friends. Unfortunately he discovered some of the old gang had passed away.

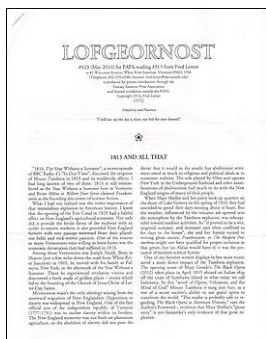
There is a section on his travels to and around Florida, a state he seems inclined to move to in the near future. He and wife Roz already spend close to half a year in the sunny state as it is, with condo-time share plans, and as he noted several times, his current Long island neighborhood is increasingly being overrun with crippling traffic and very noticeable overcrowding.

With the thought in mind that he might like to sell his house and move in the near future, he has been upgrading his home improvements by making them part of the town record. In the past he did most of his own repairs, including new decks, new add-ons, new garages, and completely refurbishing his mostly unfinished upstairs. But altho he got all the necessary permits originally, he sort of neglected to notify the town that the house was upgraded for human occupancy after each project. Originally he thought this would raise his tax rate, but the taxes went up anyway, and he can't sell the house to anyone until the whole structure has been cleared and certified by town inspectors as being suitable for human occupancy. Ken relates that this updating process has taken nearly a year and a half and has cost over ten grand. Plus he had to make some adjustments to his eaves and deck and electrical system, when town inspectors detected problems that could

have caused accidents, or worse. I dunno, seems to me it would have been simpler and cheaper just to have the inspections done back when the individual projects were completed over the years. The fees would have been less, and there would be no emergency catch-ups to do now. I guess you learn by experience. At least that's what they say anyway.

There are plenty of photographs thruout, plus nattering about the old Western Union Telegram service, airline fares, books he has read recently. There are also some letters and some fanzine reviews. None of the fanzines he discusses are involved in any way with science fiction or comic fandom.

This was another relaxed, fun read all the way thru. Give this mag a try, you'll enjoy it.



LOFGEORNOST #125

8-1/2x11"; 7 pages of small type; Quarterly from Fred Lerner; 81 Worcester Ave.; White River Junction, VT 05001---available for the usual

This is Fred's FAPazine, but it contains no mailing comments and has extensive distribution outside FAPA. Each issue features a long essay by Fred generally concerning some science fiction theme, followed by natter that is often related to the central essay. From time to time he also runs long travel reports about his vacation excursions. *Lofgeornost* never runs illos of any kind.

This issue's lead article discusses fantasy novels, and fantasy stories that sometimes qualify as fantasy even if there are no fantastic events in the stories. Some lost race stories set in unknown, forgotten parts of the world, or lost city states

descended from ancient Atlantis or some such legendary place are often said to be fantasy. The stories may contain lots of escapist high adventure, but Fred concludes that without some kind of fantastic element, something that is beyond the realm of the known and ordinary, either magic, or super science, or mythical beasts, something that is unique and different from the real world, then these stories do not qualify as true fantasies. That's not to say that books such as "The Prisoner of Zenda" or "The Mouse That Roared" can't be rollicking good fun, but just because the tales are set in some strange imaginary place does not in and of itself qualify those stories as fantasies.

Fred also takes a look at the explosion of micro-breweries and the sudden interest in single malt whiskies. He says he enjoys single malt whiskey and is pleased with the number of new companies producing the stuff. Good for him, somebody must like it, otherwise new distilleries would not be popping up as fast as they have been in recent years. I have to wonder tho, how much of the single-malt whisky craze is due to actual interest among serious drinkers and how much of it might be snob appeal. Single malt whiskey is an acquired taste, and having tasted single malt whiskey once in my life I find it hard to understand how anybody could acquire a liking for the stuff. Still, it's a big wide world out there, full of lots of people with lots of individual preferences.

Fred also discusses books he has reread and some he would like to reread. He makes mention of a quote that the true heart of a man is not the books he reads, but what he rereads. This may have all been well and good in past decades, but in this year of 2016 I personally find it impossible to even keep up with all the new material I would like to read, and I think that is probably true for most science fiction readers. If you don't have the time to even finish all the new stuff you would like to read, how can anybody manage to budget the time to reread older material? It's an impossible equation so far as I'm concerned.

There are also a few book reviews, all of them are insightful and interesting. The letter column this time is rather short, mostly made up of comments about Fred's discussions of world spanning political fantasy epics like Game of Thrones. Hopefully the depth and variety of the letter column will pick back up next issue.



This fanzine only comes out four times a year, but it is always worth the wait, and this issue was thoroughly enjoyable

OPUNTIA 354

published twice a month by Dale Speirs; Box 6830; Calgary; Alberta; CANADA T2P 2E7---a previous print zine that is now exclusively distributed in e-fanzine format, with many issues also on display at the efanazines.com website.

Technically a FAPazine, *Opuntia* enjoys a considerably circulation beyond that amateur press group. Whenever Dale does include some selected mailing comments, he makes sure his references and responses are framed so that someone who is not a FAPA member can understand what is being discussed. With only rare exceptions, everything in every single issue of

Opuntia is written by Dale Speirs himself.

This time round Dale has color photos of Christmas trees set up by Calgary businesses. Businesses try to outdo each other in the style and splendor of their trees, but on December 22 every single sponsored tree will go to a family in need, so all the competition serves a useful purpose in tune with the spirit of the season. Dale has been running a lot of photo essays in *Opuntia* of late, showing off his skills with camera and composition. This is another good set.

The issue is full of oddities, a genuine mish-mash even wider than most issues of *Opuntia*. A year or so ago Dale did a mini-essay on unique manhole covers in Calgary (yes, decorated manhole covers; generally donated by some corporation that gets to have its name and/or chosen image stamped into the top). He relates that a Chinese company that manufactures manhole covers has picked him as a potential customer because of the article, and has been sending him regular email messages offering their services. He reprints one letter this issue. Internet search-bots have now reached a new low of efficiency (or high, perhaps, if you are really a potential buyer for these products). This reminds me of a friend, a young unmarried male in his twenties, who started receiving bi-monthly print catalogs for maternity clothing. He couldn't convince them to stop sending him their unwanted mail either.

There are several different articles this issue. The lead discusses the subject of invisibility in fiction; specifically, invisibility that you can't get rid of. Being invisible forever wouldn't be much of an existence. Most people would probably count eternal invisibility as a major league curse. Dale checks some old radio shows, and magazine stories to see how various authors handle the situation.

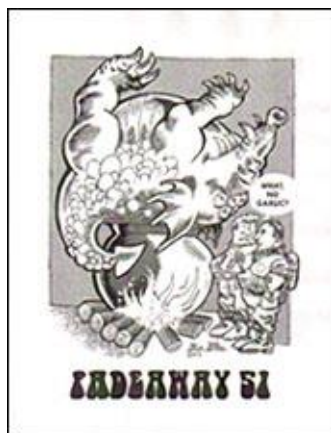
You can't fault this fanzine for not offering a wide diversity of material, even though Dale writes all of it. There are also sections devoted to fictional treatments of earthquakes and how realistic they are, coverage of old time radio programs and print fiction that happens to deal directly with wire or tape recording, reviews of technical books about prehistoric bacteria and their relationship to oxygen in the planet's atmosphere, the evolution of caffeine levels in plants thru history as recorded in developing ecological records, child-parent testing of hypercholesterolemia in primary care medicine, tidal evolution of the moon from a high-obliquity high-angular-momentum-earth. Oh, and a list of print fanzines he has received in the past few weeks.

Something for everyone seems to be Dale's aim. I have to admit that my eyes sort of glazed over trying to follow the theme of discussion about several of the highly technical books he reviews, and I also have to say that his comments about some old time radio programs are at odds with both my own personal experience/opinion, and the opinions of most other OTRadio fans.

For example, he thinks "Dangerous Assignment" the spy-adventure series starring Brian Donlevy, is hackneyed and pedestrian formula fiction, but the program aired on the radio for four years, then transferred over to television for an additional three year run. He has unkind things to say about the "Life of Riley" radio show that ran for eight years on radio, and also had a nine year run on TV, plus being adapted into a hit movie and was also turned into a comic book series. Clearly, a lot of people liked these programs, even if Dale did not. It might be well to keep that in the back of your mind when reading Dale's reviews and commentaries. Sometimes his viewpoints are wildly different from those held by the rest of the population.

But, that doesn't make this issue of *Opuntia* any less fun to read. This used to be a print fanzine, but the economics of printing, and particularly the very high cost of postage in Canada has made *Opuntia* a permanent e-zine. Copies of this issue can be seen on the efanzines.com website.

SHAMELESS PLUG DEPARTMENT!



I want to take the opportunity to mention my own fanzine, *Fadeaway*. Issue #51 is now out, 48 pages long, featuring an by Dale Nelson on the joys of exploring two different used book stores of yesteryear that had strong SF/fantasy sections; a look at a penny-dreadful fantasy novel from a hundred-fifty years ago, a detailed glance at a significant science fiction film made in 1928, plus a long meaty letter column. A sample copy will be sent free to anyone who has not previously received a copy. You can contact me direct at fabficbks@aol.com.

ART CREDITS THIS ISSUE: Michael Fry—page 2; Denney E. Marshall—page 4; Al Allison---page 5; Mark Tatulli---page 6; Doug Bratton---page 26



Lex Luthor never bought Kryptonite on Ebay again.

DEADLINE FOR OUR NEXT ISSUE IS 16 FEB 2017