



TIGHTBEAM #280

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This is issue **#280** 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—

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

cover illustration by Jose Sanchez

LETTERS



Jon D. Swartz; 12115 Missel Thrush Court; Austin, TX 78750

The latest issue of *Tightbeam* was good reading from cover to cover, beginning with Steve Stiles' art. Though not in color, like some of your previous covers, his art is always appreciated.

Informative book reviews, telling me what to read and/or avoid reading.

Tom McGovern's take on *Lucifer* was right on. I watched the series the first season, and found it amusing, but haven't watched recently.

I liked very much the formatting you did on my Wilkie Collins article. I plan to submit similar articles in the future.

I wasn't familiar with the art of fan artist Sanchez, but will look for his work in the future.

Enjoyed your and Tom Feller's cinema reviews. Didn't remember seeing *She Devil*, but always liked Mari Blanchard in the 1950s, especially the "B" adventure movies she did. I still remember her in *Abbott & Costello Go To Mars*, which I saw in New Orleans on a visit there in the early 1950s. Surprised to hear that *She Devil* was based on a story by Stanley Weinbaum.

Been a fan of Jack Kelly since he and Jim Garner starred on *Maverick*. Also liked him in *Forbidden Planet*. (And I loved his sister, Nancy, in *The Bad Seed*.) I saw Albert Dekker in many films in the 1940s, beginning with *Dr. Cyclops*.

Your fanzine reviews were also appreciated, since I probably wouldn't see these particular zines otherwise.

All in all, a very good issue of *Tightbeam*.

###Jose Sanchez has had two covers on *Tightbeam*, (three, counting the cover of this issue) and some art in *TNFF* in addition to showing up in lots of other mostly print fanzines. I have another one of his full color art pieces scheduled for a near future issue of *Tightbeam*. It is interesting to watch an artist develop and fulfill his potential by developing many different styles and outlooks to art concepts. I think this is one of the things where fanzines can be really helpful; they allow places for artists and writers to hone their craft and get feedback from readers at the same time.

Speaking of fanzines, as mentioned in the zine review column, all the fanzines I mentioned will cheerfully send you a sample issue if you request it. Fanzine editors are generally anxious to reach a larger audience of interested readers.

Mari Blanchard was one of those beautiful female actors in the fifties trying to compete in a shrinking market. TV was killing the movie studio output, and a lot of artists who otherwise would have become A or B level stars were scrambling to survive. I thought her television work gave her a broader range of stories to display her talents, but unfortunately persistent cancer put an end to her career, and eventually ended her life at only age 47.###

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



It's yet another massive catch-up for me, with a big stack of zines and e-zines to tackle. Next up is *Tightbeam* 278, and I hope it makes it in for issue 279. With luck... (Ah, August 20...)

My letter...work right now is non-existent. I have had a number of interviews, and some second interviews, but each time, sorry, it was a difficult decision... I think I am the victim of ageism, having turned 58 last month. Still, there is the occasional bit of voicework and registration work, and I am trying to get back with a telemarketing pit. We are now in the midst of doing that promised book collection weeding, and I admit, each book is painful.

The books on George Lucas and Leonard Nimoy do sound interesting. I had thought some years ago that when an actor creates a character that proves to be iconic, they lend their acting skills to that character to give it a third dimension, but they wind up giving the character their visage, their face, whether they like it or not. Nimoy had to deal with the fact Spock had his face all the rest of his days. Bill Shatner will look like James T. Kirk for the rest of his life, and Mark Hamill will have to deal with the fact he looks just like Luke Skywalker. They are the lucky ones in that they have made a good living from those facts; not every character actor is so lucky.

Well, we certainly know who will play the 13th Doctor Who. (Where'd they get more regenerations? eBay?) And it is Jodie Whittaker, who will be the first female Doctor, to the delight and consternation of Whofandom. I certainly agree about "The Curse of the Fatal Death"...I have seen little Who, but I have seen that spoof, and it is a good laugh.

Fanzines...I have *Littlebook* 10, and must get a letter off soon. I have asked for DASFax in the past, without success. That's okay, I have so many zines to deal with these days, I don't need more.

We've been busy lately, with some steampunk vending and a little travel...we vended at a little steampunk event in neighbouring Mississauga this past weekend, and for the first time in about five years, we crossed the border to go to the US, and we attended a steampunk convention in a Detroit suburb. Great fun was had by all, and we hope we can return next year

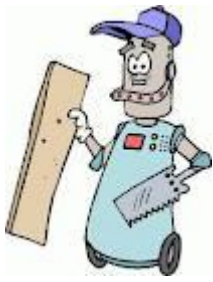
Thanks to you for this issue, and the big catch-up continues on. See you next zine.

###Actors who become completely identified with a character can make some money off the connection these days thru conventions, photo signings, guest appearances at auto shows and the like, but the people who are most successful at that are the people whose fictional character has the most longevity, and sometimes even that isn't enuf. Silent movie star William Boyd was happy to be identified later on as Hopalong Cassidy, and while Chester Morris was always identified with his movie role as Boston Blackie, he didn't let that interfere with his later career on the stage, or in movies and TV. But there are a lot more people like Adam West, whose three year gig as Batman dominated his life ever after and essentially derailed his later movie career. Go to any nostalgia convention these days and you'll find plenty of stars there signing autographs for money whose identification with a particular TV or movie role finished them in the business. That kind of character identification in the public's perspective seems like a dangerous double-edged sword for an actor.

Pruning back the collection goes easier if it has been an ongoing process. I've found that as I got older certain things that seemed good to me in the past, now strike as not so good at all. My rule has always been that I intend to ever reread/relisten/rewatch it again sometime in the future, then I keep it. But sometimes I realize I will never reinvest a minute of my time on the item again, so it goes into the deleted stack. Then too I find that some books or comics or whatever just weren't that hot the first time round, and I wonder why I've been holding onto them all this time. The recent advances in digital scanning makes other decisions easier. A hardback book takes up no space on a tablet reader, but it takes up a lot of space on the shelf in my house, so if I have the e-book version, I have no compulsions at all about deleting the physical book. But having to cut back the core material, the heart of my collection would be gut wrenching for me.###

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

Hey, that's a great cover by Steve Stiles. Lots of activity and it just pops out of the viewing screen. Seems like that could be Gollum in the foreground.



My, SUDENTENLAND is well into warfare, with Czechoslovak military situations well described, though as you point out, there is no real need for fealty to facts. But the author does have the matters involved well in hand, judging from your description. An alternative history warfare conflict, however, loses interest from the militarily-affiliated readers, I suppose, where much of the attention to warfare is apt to come from. It seems to me they'd be confounded enough by a standard fictional treatment of warfare, and an sf treatment might be one too many for them. But warfare does seem to be high on the popularity list for science fiction novels, and I suppose publishers will let us know if these books diminish in sales, so warfare must be considered right up there in current science fiction interest.

Wilkie Collins seems to me an integral writer of the type of ghost story where it is never made clear whether things are supernatural or not, whether people are ghosts or not, and whether people are dead or alive. He seems to function in the near-death or partially skeptical realm that also characterized the TV show GHOST HUNTERS. Perhaps he is a dominating influence upon uncertain fantasy.

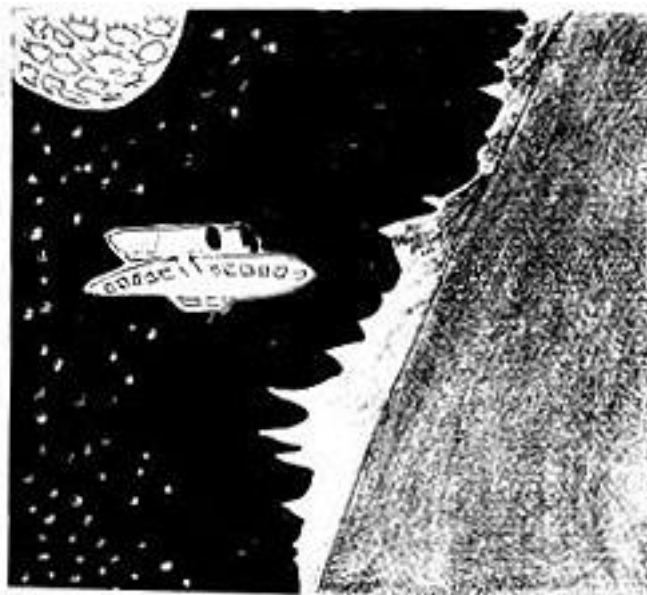
Those are very interesting reviews—I'll keep with reading them.

###Actually, that was Gollum in the foreground of the cover by Steve Stiles. He did a couple of Lord of the Rings themed illos, and that was one of them.

You are correct that military science fiction is a strong sub-category of the genre these days. Some of those kind of books that I have read have been good, mainly because they involved strong central characters like, say, Honor Blackwell, or had some interesting overall problem plot that the military action fitted into. Others that seemed to just be about future high-tech spaceship encounters or super-techno ground combat left me cold.

I have to say I have never been a big fan of alternative-history military stories. Tales such as "Sudentenland" may be well written and meticulously researched, but I just don't see the appeal of the whole setup. On the other hand, plenty of people do like them, and George Phillies, who reviewed that title, liked it a lot. There is even an Alternative History category for a lot of the major SF book awards these days. It's just not my cuppa' tea.

Wilkie Collins named his ghosts in many of his stories, but you are right; he often preferred to keep the reader guessing about whether the supernatural element was real or a figment of one of the character's imagination. Either way my impression from reading his stories is that the supernatural elements were very real and exerted a direct influence on the events of the stories where they appeared. That fact that most of Collins' stories and novels are still in print and still being read is a positive endorsement to how good a writer he was.###





The Hugo Award Finalists

by

Tom Feller

I downloaded the Hugo Award packet and managed to read 23 out of the 24 finalists in the fiction categories before the voting deadline. The final ballot is a preferential one in which you could rank them from 1 to 6. “No Award” is an option.

Short Stories

The City Born Great by N.K. Jemisin--

The premise of this urban fantasy story is that when a city reaches a certain age and critical mass, it becomes alive, and that city is now New York. The unnamed narrator, a homeless, gay African-American, is a graffiti artist who serves as the midwife. He is assisted by the mysterious Paolo and opposed by some sort of Lovecraftian creatures who have infiltrated the police force. My ranking: 2. Other voters: 3

A Fist of Permutations in Lightning and Wildflowers by Alyssa Wong—

The main characters of this multi-universe fantasy story are two sisters, Hannah and Melanie, who have the power to change reality. Hannah is the more active of the two, trying to change the world but only succeeds in killing herself and destroying the world in one of the universes, but Melanie keeps try to fix her mistakes. My ranking: 5. Other voters: 4

Our Talons Can Crush Galaxies by Brooke Bolander—

A serial killer makes the mistake of killing a feminine god who is slumming as a human being. She doesn't really die bur instead takes her revenge. It is more a polemic than a story, but at least it's short. My ranking: 6. Other voters: 5

Seasons of Glass and Iron by Amal El-Mohtar—

This fantasy story is a combination of two fairy tales: “The Enchanted Pig” and “The Princess on the Glass Hill”. There are two main characters, both female: Tabitha who is on a quest to walk until she wears out seven magical pairs of iron shoes in order to lift a curse from her husband and Amira sits on a glass mountain to protect her virtue and will marry any man who can climb it. One day Tabitha reaches Amira's mountain and has no problem scaling it. This story won the Nebula in this category, but I found it to be mediocre. Just because a story is an allegory does not make it good. My ranking: 3. Other voters: 1

That Game We Played During the War by Carrie Vaughn—

This story is set on a human colony planet or so far in the future that even the names of the continents have changed. The people of Gantt, who are telepaths, and the people of Enith, who are not, have just concluded a war. During the war, Calla, an Enith nurse, formed a friendship with Valk, a Gantt officer, first while Valk was a prisoner of the Enith and later when Calla become a prisoner. Calls taught Valk how to play chess. It is an unusual contest, because Valk is a telepath who can read Calla's mind during the match, and Calla learns to move the pieces at random. They meet again after the war and resume their games.

My ranking: 1. Other voters: 3

An Unimaginable Light by John C. Wright—

The two main characters of the story are a robot and a human being, respectively. Most of the story consists of a dialogue between the two, much of it hostile. Among other things, they discuss the implications of Asimov's Laws of Robotics which was quite interesting. It is set in the 23th Century when robots have taken over all the work. It would seem to be utopian, but it isn't, and there is a fairly predictable twist ending. My ranking: 4. The other voters ranked it below No Award at #7, which I did not think was fair, because I felt it was at least as good as two other stories in the category.

Novelette

Alien Stripper Boned From Behind by the T-Rex by Stix Hiscock—

The narrator of this story is Kelly, the stripper referred to in the title. She is a humanoid alien from the planet Fylashio marooned on Earth because her spaceship needs repairs. To make a living and to save the money to repair her ship, she works as a stripper. She has green skin, antennae, three breasts, and a tongue that reaches about three feet. The other title character is Tyrone, a male humanoid descended from the Tyrannosaurus Rex. The story is divided into three parts. In part one, she describes her act; in the second, she and the T-Rex meet in the strip club's bar afterward; and in the third, they have sex. That's it. The author spends a lot of time on their back stories, which makes the story itself even more disappointing. There is no conflict to speak of, except when the T-Rex defends her honor against a male patron, and no obstacles in the way of them being together. By the way, the author is a woman using a pseudonym. I elected to exercise the nuclear option and left it unranked and voted No Award at number 6. The other voters agreed with me and ranked it #7 below No Award.

The Art of Space Travel by Nina Allan—

This story is set in 2077 on the eve of the second Mars expedition. The first one in 2047 killed all the members. The main character is Emily, the executive housekeeper of a hotel near Heathrow where two of the astronauts will be staying for one night. She is also the caretaker of her mother, a former metallurgist suffering from dementia, but does not know the identity of her father. It is a good story, but it could have easily been re-written for a mundane market and it would have been exactly the same story. My ranking: 4. Other voters: 5

The Jewel and Her Lapidary by Fran Wilde—

The dictionary definition of "lapidary" is someone who cuts and polishes precious stones. In this story, "jewels" refer to members of the royal family of a small kingdom called the Jewell Valley and "lapidaries" their magically bound servants. Precious stones mined in the kingdom have magical power and have enabled the kingdom to defend itself without an army. Unfortunately, one of the lapidaries to the king betrays him to the neighboring Mountain kingdom and Nal, its queen. He then assassinates all but one of the royal family, a teenage princess named Lin, and her teenage female lapidary, Sima. To complicate matters, Sima's father is the traitor. The two girls find a way to resist. My ranking: 3. Other voters: 4.

The Tomato Thief by Ursula Vernon—

This fantasy is set in the southwestern U.S. desert and combines elements from Native American and Russian folklore and adds a new one called the Railroad Gods, who truly control the operation of railroads. The main character is Grandma Haarken who manages to grow tomatoes in her rural home, but is troubled by a tomato thief whom she catches and discovers is an enslaved shape-shifter. Haarken then goes on a quest to free the shape-shifter. My ranking: 2. Others voters: 1

Touring With the Alien by Carolyn Ives Gilman—

One day in the near future, alien spaceships land at various spots around North America, much like in the recent film *Arrival*. It turns out that they have visited us before, but secretly, and abducted children who are now grown up and serve as their interpreters. One of the aliens wants a tour of the United States, and a female truck driver named Avery is recruited to drive the alien, called Mr. Burbage for Avery's convenience, and

Lionel, his interpreter, around the country *incognito*. Like the typical road trip story, the three characters form a bond. The alien is one of the most unique I have encountered in a long time. My ranking: 1. Other voters: 3

You'll Surely Drown Here if You Stay by Alyssa Wong—

This “weird western” story is set in the American West in the 19th Century, but one in which magic dominates. The main character is Ellis, who an orphan boy with magical powers who is in love with Marisol, a prostitute. They work in the same brothel. My ranking: 5. Other voters: 2.

Novella

The Ballad of Black Tom by Victor LaValle—

The title character of this story, Charles Thomas “Tommy” Tester, is a 20 year old African-American man who lives with his disabled father Otis in Harlem in 1924. He supports them both as a street hustler, usually in disguise as a blues/jazz guitar player. In reality, he is a poor singer and only knows three songs on the guitar, although he learns a fourth during the story. One of his jobs is working as a courier for the mysterious Victorian Society, but when he delivers a book of esoteric knowledge to a mysterious woman in Queens named Ma Att, he deliberately rips out the last page, rendering it useless. Ma Att then hires both a police detective named Malone, the narrator from Lovecraft’s “The Horror at Red Hook”, and a private detective named Howard to harass Tommy and retrieve the page with disastrous consequences for the Testers. Then Robert Suydam, another character from the Lovecraft story, hires him as the entertainment for a party and is willing to pay him far more than his music is worth. The party doesn’t go as Tommy anticipated, of course, and he becomes his employer’s lieutenant in Suydam’s attempt to wake-up Cthulhu. My ranking: 4. Other voters: 4

The Dream-Quest of Vellitt Boe by Kij Johnson—

The next novella is set in a world of magic that parallels ours and is a sequel to H.P. Lovecraft’s “The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath”. Those natives aware of us call our world the “waking world” and theirs the “Dreamlands”. The title character is a 55 year old female mathematics professor whose star student Clarie Jurat, also a female, has run away with a man from our world. Because Jurat’s father is a trustee of Boe’s university, Boe goes on a quest to find the girl and bring her back. To add to the urgency, Boe discovers that Clarie is also the granddaughter of one of the elder gods who will destroy the college and much of the surrounding country when he learns that she is missing. This is a very low tech world, and Boe has to walk most of the way. During her journey, she meets one old friend and one former lover, and we learn that she was quite an adventuress as a young woman. The former lover, by the way, is Randolph Carter, a recurring character in Lovecraft’s *Dream Cycle* stories. My ranking: 5. Other voters: 2

Both LaValle, an African-American man, and Johnson, a woman, both became fans of Lovecraft when they were children. They stayed fans even when they got older and realized how racist and sexist Lovecraft was. “The Horror at Red Hook”, in particular, is widely considered to be Lovecraft’s most racist story. Both stories are critical responses and, at the same time, tributes to Lovecraft.

Every Heart a Doorway by Seanan McGuire—

Eleanor West runs a boarding school for children and teenagers who have gone through a portal to a fantasy world but then need a place to adjust to living in our mundane world. Although the worlds are all different, the one thing the kids have in common is that they all want to go back. (There is another school for such kids who do NOT want to go back.) Eleanor, who herself went through a portal as a child, is assisted by Lundy, a woman who is aging backwards and serves as the school’s therapist. The point-of-view character is Nancy Whitman, who has recently returned from a world populated by dead people and no longer fits in with her old family and school. Since she is the newest student, we learn about the school and the other characters through her eyes. Her roommate is Sumi, who some time ago returned from a world resembling Alice’s Wonderland. Her other friends include Christopher, who was in a world populated by skeletons, two sisters named Jack (short for Jacqueline) and Jill, who were in a Hammer horror-like world where Jack apprenticed to a mad scientist and Jill was mentored by a vampire, and Kade, who went through a portal as a girl and came back as a boy after slaying a goblin king. The plot is driven by a murder mystery, and it is the first story in a new series. C. S. Lewis and *Narnia* are mentioned, although the character discussing them dismisses Lewis, because

Lewis was a Christian and never actually went through a portal, only hearing rumors about them. My ranking: 3. The other voters ranked it #1, but I can't really disagree, because this was a very competitive group this year. It is also this year's Nebula Award winner in this category.

Penric and the Shaman—

This is a sequel to "Penric's Demon", which was nominated for the Hugo last year, and takes place about four years later. It is part of her *World of the Five Gods* series, also known as her Chalion series, which includes the novel *Paladin of Souls*, winner of both the Hugo and Nebula in 2002. The new story improves upon the previous story, which spent a lot of time explaining how Penric become a sorcerer. Penric is now working for a "Princess-Archdevine" as a temple scholar when he is recruited by Oswyl, a "Senior Locator", to hunt down Inglis, a shaman who is accused of murder, taking them into this world's boondocks. However, the whodunit part of the mystery plot takes a back seat to the why and how. Penric, Oswyl, and Inglis are the point-of-view characters, although there are also interesting supporting characters, such as Desdemona, the demon that shares Penric's body. They are all interesting and well written. This story also reveals more about the series's magic system, especially as to how it relates to sorcerers and shamans. My ranking: 2. Other Voters: 3

A Taste of Honey by Kai Ashante Wilson—

This is essentially a gay romance with a non-linear plot set in a fantasy world, which is the same one as the author's highly regarded *The Sorcerer of the Wildeeps*. One of the lovers, as well as the point-of-view character, is Aqib, an animal trainer and cousin of the royal family of Olorum, which is based on the countries of sub-Sahara Africa. To use role-playing game terminology, Aqib's animal empathy is so high as to almost be a superpower. His father is the Master of Beasts, that is, the head animal trainer for the royal court, and Aqib is being groomed to succeed him. Aqib is very much a snob, referring to servants and working class people as "menials" and rarely learning their names. The other lover is Lucrio, a soldier attached to a visiting delegation from Daluca, which appears to be based on Imperial Rome. He is actually more democratic than Aqib, as shown when he learns the names of the servants. Homosexuality is forbidden in Olorum, and Aqib is expected to choose a wife who will advance his family's social and economic status. Another interesting facet of this world is that in Olorum, mathematics and science are considered to be "women's work". The twist ending ruined the story for me, which is unfortunate as the story had been quite interesting up until that point, although there was more emphasis on romance for my taste. My ranking: 6. Other voters: 5

This Census-Taker by China Mieville—

Only two characters in this novella who have names are Samma, a girl, and Drobe, a boy. They are leaders of a group of homeless children and live in an abandoned house on a bridge over a ravine between two parts of a town. The narrator is an even younger boy who lives on a hill on the outskirts of a town with his parents, and he tells the story in the form of a disjointed memoir. His father is a foreigner who makes magical keys, and his mother grew up in the town and home schools the narrator. They throw their garbage into a pit in a near-by cave. The father occasionally kills animals and possibly other people and also throws the bodies into the pit. The story is set in either a fantasy world or a future one that still has electricity for lights but no telephones, television, or Internet. Some reviewers believe this story is a minor addition to his *Bas-Lag* series, which consists of the novels *Perdido Street Station* (2000), *The Scar* (2002), and *Iron Council* (2004). The current story is not really horror, but it is definitely creepy and feels Kafkaesque. The ending is ambiguous but this may be intentional, because otherwise the story is beautifully written. My ranking: 1. The other voters really disagreed with me and ranked it #6.

Novel

All the Birds in the Sky by Charlie Jane Anders—

One of the trends in recent years has been to intentionally blur the distinction between science fiction and fantasy, and this is an excellent example because it is quite successful in combining the genres. The two main characters of this novel are Patricia Delfine, a witch, and Laurence Armstead, a techno-geek who builds a supercomputer and artificial intelligence named Peregrine in his bedroom closet. They are both misfits and

meet in middle school, where they become best friends. Unfortunately, they come to the attention of Theodolpus Rose, a professional assassin who becomes their school's guidance counsellor. However, I was surprised at how little the author used Rose and the assassins guild he belongs to. Nonetheless, Patricia and Laurence survive middle school and go their separate ways for ten years. Patricia runs away from home to attend a school for witches, and Laurence goes to a math-science magnet high school and then to MIT. When they meet again in San Francisco, Patricia is a secret superhero using her magical powers to do good deeds, and Laurence is working on an anti-gravity and wormhole project for an equivalent of Steve Jobs/Mark Zuckerberg/Elon Musk. It takes them a while to become romantically involved, because Patricia has a friends-with-benefits relationship with a web comics artist and Laurence has a girlfriend who looks like a supermodel but instead designs robots for a living.

Since Patricia went to a school for witches, the author invites comparisons with Harry Potter. For instance, while Harry can talk to snakes, Patricia can talk to birds and, on two occasions, talks to cats. Harry is known to the teachers at Hogwarts as soon as he was born, but Patricia does not come to the attention of the teachers at Eltisley Maze until she turns herself into a bird. Another difference is that Eltisley is far from the nurturing environment of Hogwarts, but rather more of a sink-or-swim situation. When Patricia and her friends undertake a Harry Potter-type adventure, they fail miserably with one of them being killed and another having to leave school. My ranking: 3. Other Voters: 2. This novel won the Nebula Award.

A Closed and Common Orbit by Becky Chambers—

It may sound like an oxymoron, but this novel is a rare instance of character-driven space opera. It is an immediate spin-off of the author's *The Long Way to a Small, Angry Planet* featuring two characters from the original novel, although neither was a point-of-view character. Pepper is a 30 year old human female technician, and Lovelace is an artificial intelligence (AI). Lovelace has transferred herself from the spaceship in the first novel to a robot which is designed to pass as a human female and renamed herself Sidra for reasons explained in the first book. However, it is illegal in the multi-species interstellar civilization called the Galactic Commons for AIs to inhabit robots. She is hosted by Pepper and Blue, a human male artist and Pepper's significant other, in their home on the inhabitable moon named Port Coriol. Sidra makes friends with Tak, a tattoo artist and a member of a species called Aeulon. A second story line is set 20 years earlier and focuses on Pepper when she was a clone named Jane 23. She works as a slave for a salvage concern and develops a knack for fixing things before escaping from her handlers and finding refuge in an abandoned spaceship inhabited by an AI called Owl. Eventually the two story lines come together.

My ranking: 2. Other Voters: 4

The Dark Forest and Death's End by Cixin Liu—

Dark Forest is the second book in the author's *Remembrance of Earth's Past* trilogy and is the only one NOT nominated for the Hugo Award. This is unfortunate because it is just as good as the other two despite the clumsy dialogue, although that may be the fault of his translators Joel Martinson and Ken Liu, and frequent infodumps. It is set immediately after the events of *The Three Body Problem* when humans learn that they will be invaded by the natives of the Centauri system, who are called the Trisolarans because their star system has three suns. The Trisolarans, like the Martians in *War of the Worlds*, want our planet and have no qualms about exterminating us to get it. Another way this novel is old-fashioned is that there are human worshippers of the Trisolarans much like the Cthulhu worshippers in Lovecraft's fiction. There are also direct references to Asimov's *Foundation* series and Clarke and Kubrick's *2001*. The aliens are so confident that they are unconcerned that they have given us 400 years warning, which is the time it will take them to reach us at sub-light speeds.

The United Nations Security Council has become the Planetary Defense Council, and one of their projects is called the Wallfacer Project. The name refers to a keeper of a plan known only to himself, and it consists of four individuals, all men, who have been given enormous resources to "think outside the box". The first three are British neuroscientist Bill Hines, who wants to develop the human mind, former U.S. Secretary of Defense Frederick Tyler, who plans to build a fleet of one-person space fighters, and former Venezuelan president Rey Diaz, who intends to build super bombs. The last is Luo Ji, a Chinese astronomer and sociologist who is also the primary point-of-view character. He ostensibly does nothing but fall in love, start a family, and think. Fortunately, his security detail is headed by police detective Shi Qiang, a character from the first novel,

because Ji is the one the Trisolarians consider the greatest threat and therefore a target of their assassins. Another major character is Chinese naval officer Zhang Beihai who works on the more conventional plan of building space battleships.

The first hundred pages of *Death's End* overlap with the second, but they concern different characters. The first is Yun Tianming, a Chinese engineer who is diagnosed with terminal cancer before his thirtieth birthday. He is recruited to take the main part of the Staircase Project, a mission that has a potentially big payoff but a low probability of both success and survival. When he was in college, he fell in love with Cheng Xin, a female Chinese aerospace engineer in his class. She is beautiful, brilliant, and, in the words of another character, "nice to everyone". She is one of the planners of the mission, which brings them together briefly, and the main point-of-view character of most of the book. This volume also includes a fairy tale, which Xin must interpret to save humanity. I found it very hard to put down toward the end, especially since I was hoping that Tianming and Xin would end up together.

Liu's view of the universe is very dark, especially for someone, like me, who grew up on *Star Trek*. Instead of interstellar civilizations cooperating with one another, they compete for scarce resources. One reviewer called it *The Hunger Games* on the galactic level. Technologically and scientifically more advanced species routinely wipe out less advanced ones to keep them from leapfrogging them. Humanity itself is not shown favourably either, alternating between periods of overconfidence and arrogance and ones of despair and panic. I found the ending quite satisfying, reminding me somewhat of Poul Anderson's *Tau Zero*. Some reviewers have compared the trilogy as a whole to Olaf Stapledon's *The Starmaker*. I was impressed that the author explains both the Fermi Paradox and the existence of dark matter while telling his story and that those explanations are essential to the plot. My ranking: 1. Other Voters: 5

Ninefox Gambit by Yoon Ha Lee—

This is another work that intentionally blurs the distinction between science fiction and fantasy but in a very different way. It is set far, far in the future when humanity has spread out into the stars but lives under a highly-regimented theocratic, totalitarian, and militaristic regime called the Hexarchate. The official religion and its heresies are based on mathematical calendars that might just as well be magic, and people are divided into six factions based on their skill sets. Captain Kel Cheris gets into trouble when she uses heretical tactics during a battle, although she is victorious. She is then given the opportunity to redeem herself when she is assigned to "host" the personality of Shuos Jedao, an undead, insane but never-defeated, general and mass murderer who officially died four hundred years previously but is kept in a device called the "Black Cradle" until he is needed. The dialogues between them take place completely in her head, although the people around them can occasionally hear one them verbalize their arguments. Their mission is to put down a rebellion by heretics on a space station, who are represented by a series of e-mails inserted into the story.

While the plot is relatively simple, the style is very demanding of the readers, who are abruptly dumped into this universe without preparation and have to deal with a steep learning curve until they get comfortable. I was not even sure that the main characters were even human until well into the book, and there are no data dumps. Reviewers have compared it to Ann Leckie's *Ancillary Justice*, because of the demanding style, but at least in this novel you can keep track of which characters are male and which are female even if they all appear to be bi-sexual. If you are willing to persevere, it is worth the trouble. My ranking: 4. Other voters: 3.

The Obelisk Gate by N.K. Jemisin—

Last year I ran out of time and only read four of the five novel finalists before the voting deadline, so of course the one I did NOT read was the winner. It happened again this year as the one novel finalist I did not read this before the voting deadline was **the winner**.

Too Like the Lightning by Ada Palmer—

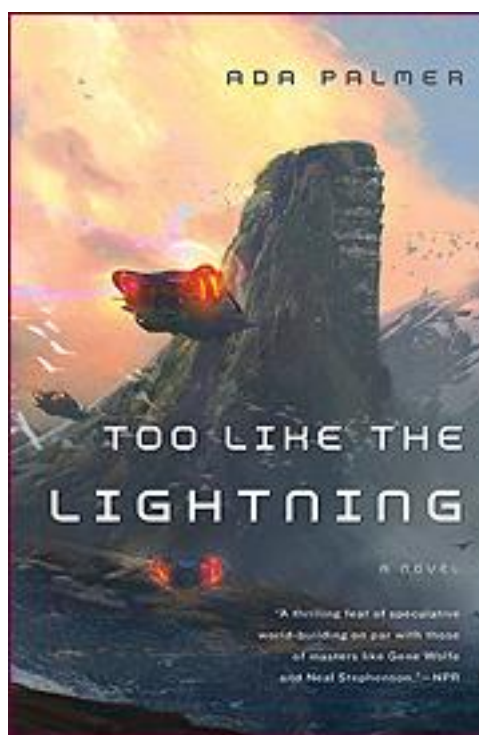
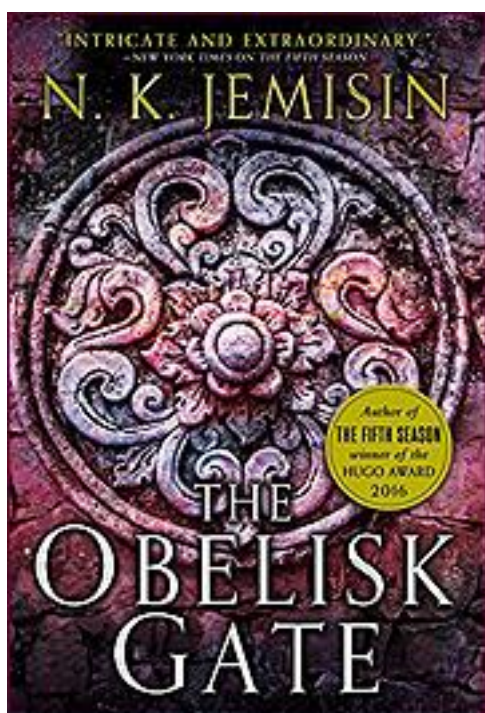
Like *Ninefox Gambit*, this novel is also stylistically challenging, although to not as great an extent. The style is pseudo-18th Century, which also fits because several of the major characters often dress in 18th Century style costumes and there are many references to the thinkers of the Enlightenment such as Voltaire, Rousseau, and Diderot. Fortunately for me, I have read a lot of 18th Century philosophy and literature during college, so I was able to adjust quickly. More problematic is that the author follows Ann Leckie's *Ancillary* series in confusing gender. The same character can be referred to as either "he" or "she" depending on the situation

regardless of their biological sex. I also found her use of “they” with singular verbs to be irritating. In her defense, those usages occur either in dialogue or first-person narration so they can be justified as a change in the English language.

In the 25th Century, there are no nation-states, except for Spain. Instead, 98% of the world’s population belongs to one of seven “hives”, differentiated by shared interests. For instance, the Utopians are scientists and engineers, who monopolize space exploration and are terraforming Mars, and the Humanists were formed by a merger of the artists and athletes. This distinction is not absolute, however. One major character is a scientist but a member of the Humanist hive. Although it is not described in detail, there is a form of supersonic travel that allows the characters to cross the Atlantic in about an hour.

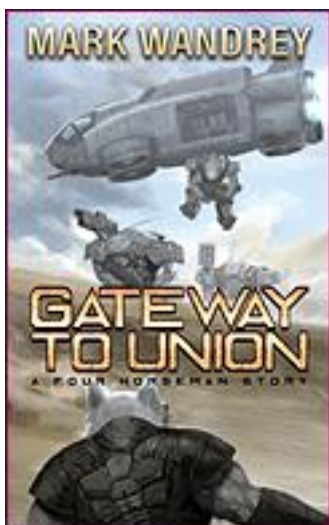
The main point-of-view character is Mycroft Canning, and the Sherlock Holmes reference is intentional. He is a “servicer”, because he was convicted of a crime, which is not specified until well into the story, and the revelation is an important plot point. The Earth no longer has prisons but convicted felons are sentenced to become the menial workers and servants of the world. Because of his abilities, the leaders of the world seek him out for advice and to perform certain tasks, but because of his social status he also functions as a “fly on the wall”. He has also attached himself to a “bash”, a form a group marriage that somewhat resembles the line marriages in Heinlein’s *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress*. Another major character is Carlyle Foster, a “sensayer”, which is a combination priest/psychologist.

The plot takes the form of a political thriller, and the McGuffin is a document known as the “7-10” list, an annual compilation of the ten most influential people in the world with every hive represented by at least one person. The story does not so much end as stop, because not only is it the first book in a series but also the first volume of, at least, a two volume novel. Because of the absence of an ending, I ranked it #5. The other voters agreed with me and ranked it last. However, I was sufficiently impressed by a debut novel that I ranked her number one for the John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer. The other voters must have agreed with me again and made her the winner of that award





BOOKS



Gateway to Union A Four Horsemen Story By Mark Wandrey; Published By: Seventh Seal Press Copyright © 2016 Mark Wandrey All Rights Reserved

Since this is a prequel to a series with three released volumes (probably four by this time), most spoiler warning don't apply.

On September 5, 1977, nobody stopped the launch of Voyager 1. And that was the last time anybody on Earth had a chance to influence the future in a meaningful way.

Think of it as the baseball, springing from the bat, going directly for Mrs. Chesterweez' picture window. You know it's going to happen, and there isn't anything to do at this point, except maybe try to run for cover.

The aliens were out there, all right, and they weren't very impressed with our gold record carried on that rocket. They already had all the information they wanted. They didn't have all the information they NEEDED, but that's okay. It would come to them. In time.

Although they had found us, we didn't find them until they appeared at the L5 point, and things really didn't get hot until we realized it wasn't a small moon, it was a spaceship.

Cue massive excitement at Mission Control.

Then the aliens announce to the world, all frequencies & languages, that they have come to invite us to join the Galactic Union, now that we are interstellar travelers.

Cue massive excitement everywhere!

But there is a catch. A couple of them, actually. First, a majority of governments have to agree to join the Galactic Union, if we want to get any of the whiz-bang super-duper advanced technology. Second, we REALLY don't have anything they are interested in, other than some raw materials. So, the shiny toys are not for us.

Until, sort of by accident, they discover we can fight. And then, it turns out there IS something Earth can provide for the Galactic Union: mercenaries.

Interested readers can get the prelude story "Gateway to Union" for FREE and discover other titles by Mark Wandrey at: <http://worldmaker.us/>

---review by Papa Pat Patterson

Shattered Crucible -- A Four Horsemen Story By Chris Kennedy. PUBLISHED BY: Chris Kennedy Copyright © 2016 Chris Kennedy All Rights Reserved

After recovering from the shock of first contact, various organizations jumped at the chance to earn big alien bucks by taking mercenary contracts. There were one hundred of these organizations in all.



The episode is referred to as Alpha Contracts. The term has the same sort of chill associated with it as 9/11, Pearl Harbor, or Hiroshima Day. Not all the contracts were taken by commercial military contractors. Nation states wanted access to the alien technology as well, and they already had standing armed forces, just waiting to be deployed.

For some of the operators, there was a really bad smell to the missions they drew. However, as Lazarus Long has been quoted as saying, “Of course the game is rigged. But you can't win if you don't play.” They took the missions; they KNEW they were good troops, with good equipment.

What they had know way of knowing is that almost none of their training was going to do them a bit of good, in an alien environment, against beings with unknown characteristics, wielding weapons which used technology they had never seen before. For most of them, all of their training, all of their teamwork, just meant they had someone beside them when they died.

But, a few, a very few, made it back.

Get the free Four Horsemen prelude story “Shattered Crucible” and discover other titles by Chris Kennedy at: <http://chriskennedypublishing.com/>

---review by Papa Pat Patterson



Flip by Martyn Bedford, with cover photograph by Robert Recker; 296 pages, plus unpaginated appendix and acknowledgements; Walker Books (UK); 2013 (originally 2011); paperback; prices vary depending on imprint and format, including ebook, audio, braille and large print editions.

Imagine waking up one morning in an unfamiliar bedroom, in a house you don't recognize, in a different city from where you live, and in someone else's body! This is what fourteen-year-old Alex Gray is shocked to discover when he wakes up in the body and home of another fourteen-year-old boy he's never met, named Philip 'Flip' Garamond. How did this happen and what became of his own body and of everyone he knew before? The last thing he remembers is that he was rushing home one evening after spending time with a friend at the start of the Christmas break, but now it's the summer and he has to get up for school! As Alex awkwardly gets to grips with his new identity as a boy who is popular at school and has different interests (cricket and basketball compared with Alex's preference for chess and playing the clarinet), he determines to find a way back to his original body and his former life.

Alex is an intelligent, thoughtful and determined teenager. Although he has moments of sadness and despair, he nonetheless adapts to his situation as best he can while not giving up on finding a solution to his peculiar problem. He soon realises that nobody he once knew as himself now recognises him or would accept him as being in Philip's body. Likewise, he also finds that he needs to act (in so far as this was possible) as Philip whenever he is in the company of the Garamonds or at Philip's school, lest he get into trouble with the police or end up getting psychiatric treatment. His use of the Internet reveals that something traumatic had happened to him some months beforehand and it helps him find a small discussion group of people with similar experiences to his own, one of whom (Rob) he befriends offline. At school, he also forms a friendship with Cherry, a girl who detects and likes the changes she sees in Philip's apparent behavior. This friendship creates another dilemma – what will happen to it if Alex reconnects with his original body?

Set in the United Kingdom, where school uniform is de rigeur and the summer holidays don't begin until July, readers will encounter colloquialisms such as “bladdered”, “gurning”, “scallies” and “squiffy”. The author, Martyn Bedford, also doesn't shy away from using slang like ‘arse’ and ‘boobs’, words that commonly belong to the adolescent lexicon but are often curiously absent from North American novels aimed at young adults (such as Michael Grant's *Gone* series).

Beyond this, the book is well-rooted in contemporary British popular culture. Readers in Britain and Ireland would be familiar with such things as Tango (a fizzy drink) and Monster Munch (a savoury snack),

Costa (a café chain), Big Brother (the Channel 4 reality television series), and the mainly British rock bands that Alex and his friend David like (the Arctic Monkeys, the Fratellis and the Kaiser Chiefs), though The Killers, an American band that had signed its first record label in the UK, is another favourite of theirs. More internationally renowned celebrities like Shakira and Penelope Cruz are mentioned too but in the context of describing the physical appearance of girls that Alex-as-Philip encounters.

Although this is Bedford's first young adult novel, he had already established himself as a writer with five adult novels, including *Acts of Revision* (1996) and *The Island of Lost Souls* (2006). In *Flip*, Bedford's style of writing is often humorous, involving ironic exaggeration ("...she silenced them with a look that could slam a door from ten metres" [p. 184]), minor dilemmas familiar to many teens ("Even the salad was edible, if you pushed the tomatoes and bits of beetroot to the side of your plate. And the spring onions. And the radish." [p. 55]), descriptions of people (the school nurse had "pointy fingers" and "Her forearms, [Alex] noted, were as hairy as a man's" [p. 187]), discussions about subjects such as the methodology and etiquette of lighting farts (p. 215), and the sarcastic put-downs and comebacks whenever Alex-as-Philip bickered with Philip's sister. The writing becomes more serious whenever Alex considers the prospect of living the rest of his life as Philip or in considering how he might return to normality.

Although the book does not push any religious agenda or is deeply philosophical, it nevertheless touches on concepts of personal identity -- how we see ourselves versus how others see us. On the one hand, we have a public persona -- our physical appearance as well as our familial, institutional and geographical associations -- which root us in place and time. We identify ourselves by these associations as much as the people we interact with. On the other, we have a private self in which many of our thoughts, ideas and interests are not shared with others, and we may find our perception of the world around us differs from them also. *Flip* accentuates these differences because Philip's family, friends and teachers have developed expectations in the behaviour of the person they see and hear, yet Alex, who now occupies Philip's body, thinks and would like to act completely at odds with these expectations. In the process, Alex comes to appreciate his old, familiar, life better.

In conclusion, *Flip* is a fun and fast-paced, yet thought-provoking, contemporary fantasy adventure that will appeal to adults and young adults alike.

--Review by Greg Fewer

The urge by modern writers to add to, change, or even reinvent classics from the past seems to be a common affliction in the science fiction field. One of the most popular titles for re-examination has been "The War of the World", by H.G. Wells. Here are some brief looks at three new books dealing with that title and theme...

War of the Worlds, New Millennium, by Douglas Niles. The Martians land now rather than then. They are substantially immune to chemical explosives, but not to nuclear weapons, but there are considerably more Martians than we have H-bombs. The ending is not quite the same as the original.

The War of the Worlds, Aftermath by Tony Wright. This volume is a true sequel to the Wells novel. The same narrator is once again a witness. As in the original, he is mostly a witness. Unlike Wells, Wright at least assigns the narrator a name. We have Martians with immune systems that let them survive, submarines, an underwater Martian base, English war machines, details of the great disaster of the Kensington laboratories, etc.

Osprey Books - The War of the Worlds: the Anglo-Martian War of 1895 by Mike Brunton.

Osprey Books focuses on detailed military history, with emphases including uniforms and technology. Here they turn to the military technology in a work of fiction, Wells' War of the Worlds. The novel is retold from the perspective of the British military, which is portrayed as recognizing they had a serious challenge but were not sure they had a solution. Hiram Maxim makes a cameo appearance with a large calibre version of his Maxim gun. Excellent figures portray the outcome as though it had been a real military campaign.

---reviews by George Phillis

Funny Book Fancier

by

Bob Jennings

Having just finished stuffing a short comic box of relatively recent titles, I thought I might as well share my observations on the funny book titles I've been accumulating the last seven months or so. Those who have no interest in comics can easily skip over this section. Those who do like comics might be interested in comparing notes. Or not. The enjoyment of comic books, like the appreciation of science fiction/fantasy books, or any other kind of entertainment is highly subjective, so your views may not be even remotely in agreement with my own, but who knows? Comparisons and observations can sometimes be fun.

At the back of the box is a seven issue run of *Motor Girl*; 1 thru 7, the series by Terry Moore, most famous for his work on *Strangers In Paradise*, and more recently, *Rachel Rising*. I have never been a big fan of *Strangers in Paradise*, but I was attracted to the setup for *Motor Girl*, and so far I've been satisfied with the series.

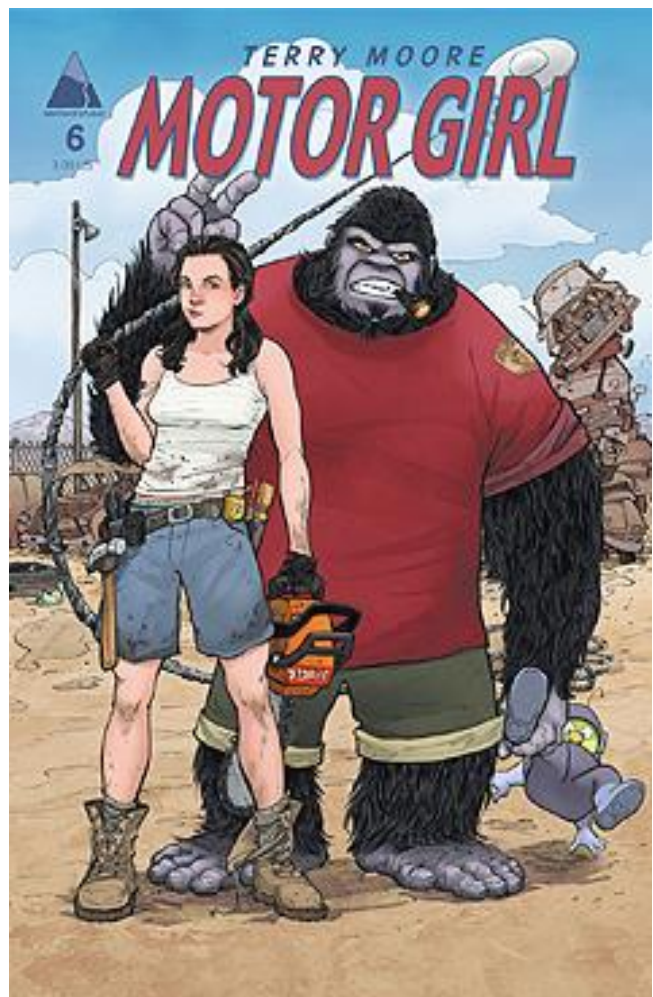
Samantha is a female American combat veteran who served three tours in heavy combat. Severely wounded with, among other things, a head injury, she barely survived to be mustered out. She is a female mechanic working at a junk yard/garage in the middle of a desert in the west.

Her companion is an imaginary six foot tall gorilla who has human intelligence and drinks beer with her. She sees things that other people cannot see, or perhaps, things they don't want to see. A flying saucer crashes near her garage. She repairs it, and now other alien visitors and foreign spies stop by to use her skills, and to tap her connections with the visitors from off planet. She refuses to cooperate with those overtures by spies and government spooks, which gets her into trouble, but she can take care of herself.

This just scratches the surface of the assorted plots all going on at the same time. I give this high marks for having an intelligent, well

developed plot framework that unfolds logically and keeps this reader interested every single issue.

Bad points: the black and white art is good enough, but hardly impressive. It is cartoonish and sparse, with very little detail. Sometimes other people besides the five main characters look very amateurishly drawn. In addition Moore falls into the lazy artist trap of using large panels, and few panels per page, so the story does not advance at the pace the setting and the characters really



deserve. This is an ongoing complaint I have with most modern comics, but it seems especially aggravating here. At \$3.99 a pop, the story should have moved a lot faster, and with more panels per page it would have. Still, I like this series and the unlikely heroine a lot and I certainly intend to keep reading it.

Next up, some comics I tried and bailed out on, beginning with the new *Betty Boop* comic. I wanted to like this book, I really did. I like the Betty Boop animated cartoons, and I have the hardback reprint of the entire Betty Book Sunday comic strip from the 1930s which I reread every few years because I really like it too.

But I didn't like this new comic book. The artwork with its sepia and b&w art is good enuf, altho it seems a bit stilted to me. The stories on the other hand are forced and just plain dumb. The writer is trying to be cute and precious while telling some kind of story, and fails miserably at all of that. I managed to cancel the title after two issues. If I could find a way to sell off these two issues right now I'd do it, but Atomic Ave and other sites shows lots of copies going for fifteen to fifty cents a copy for issues that retailed new at \$3.99 each, so I guess a lot of other people agree with my assessment of this new series.

Another title I bailed out on was *Die, Kitty, Die*. The concept here was intriguing, and the art for the promo was very good, but it failed to deliver on its potential. The setup is that Kitty is a cartoon witch who has a very popular comic book starting back in the 1950s, but now her sales are way down, and her greedy, publicity crazy publisher wants to kill her off, graphically, so he can get a final issue jump in sales and stop publishing her comic. Kitty happens to be a real witch, who allows herself to be merchandised as a comic character, so how do you kill off a witch anyway?

Fernando Ruiz and Dan Parent, two former Archie Comics artists came up with the idea, and got money from a kickstarter campaign to start up this parody series. The sexy Kitty is caught between the supernatural world of witches, and the super-crazy world of comics, to quote the promo hype.

Sounds pretty good, right? Unfortunately, it isn't. The humor here is forced, and even the best of the stories seemed flat to me. The comic uses a flip-book style, with one story per issue in the classic 1950s Archie style art, and the other using whatever modern style the artists are trying to satirize that issue. Stories are average at best, and are often predictably boring. I gave this four issues

before throwing in the towel. To quote one reviewer, "this is not particularly subtle or fresh satire." That's an understatement. Even good concepts need good writing, and this series doesn't have it.

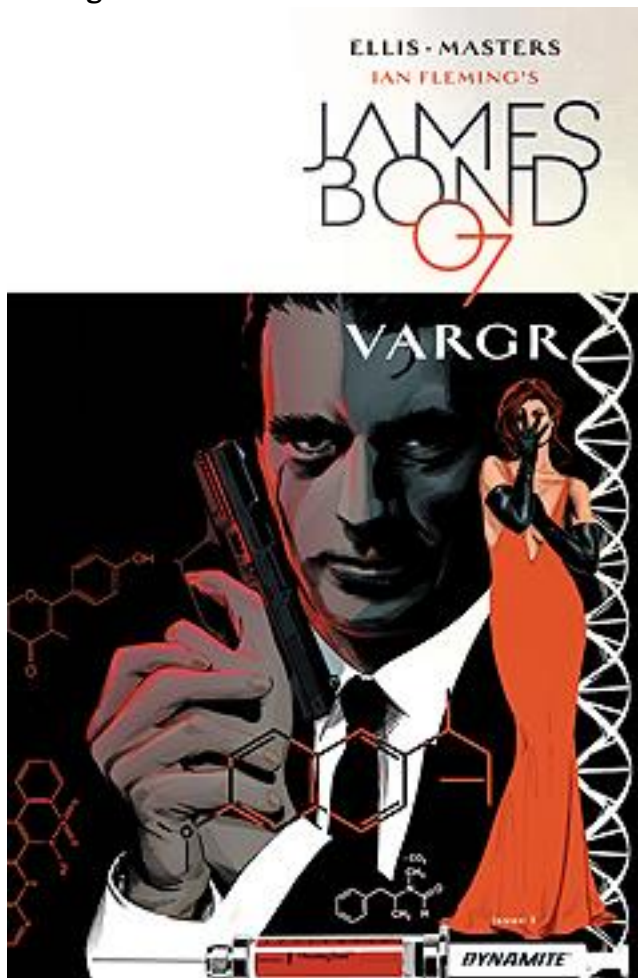


Next, a nine issue run of *Astro City*. What can I say about *Astro City*? It is simply the best super-hero comic book being published in the world today. Kurt Busick is the writer, Art Adams is often the artist, and it's a combination made in heaven. I don't read many super hero comics these days because after a lifetime of reading the things the plots seem endlessly repetitive to me. But *Astro City* is unique; absolutely different from any other super hero comic ever produced

The premise is that there are a lot of super heroes, and super villains around. Not just ten or twelve, but dozens, hundreds of them, all trying to survive in this part of the universe. The series deals with the personalities of these people, their personal problems, the individual back stories of conflict, pain, triumph, their struggles and failures, all set against the back-drop of the *Astro City* universe.

There is no such thing as a typical *Astro City* story plot. Sometimes there are story arcs spanning three or four, or even five issues, but there are also plenty of stand along stories; adventures about the odd and unusual, and every single story concentrates mostly on the people involved in the adventure.

Busick believes super heroes and super-powered bad guys should not be one-dimensional, or even predictable. The people part of these adventures and the odd plot twists are what make this work so well. Almost all the back issues have been collected as graphic novels which have been kept continuously in print, and continue to sell very well. The series is constructed so that anybody can jump into this series at almost any point. Anybody with any interest at all in comic books should be reading this series.



Next I see a bunch of James Bond comics from DE/Dynamite. Instead of running one series, the publisher likes to have two, or even three, mini-series or maxi-series running at the same time so that every month there are at least two, sometimes three Bond comics out at one time.

There are also occasional one-shots to keep the character very much in the public eye.

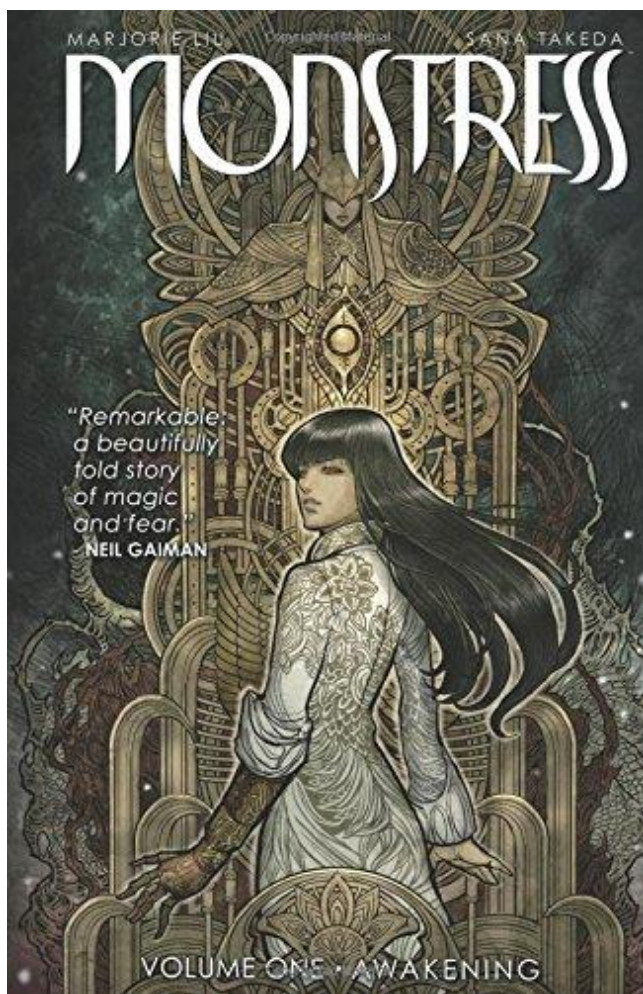
I've mentioned this series before in these pages. The art is good, and so are the stories. There is a bit of the James Bond incredible & well-nigh unbelievable luck in each title run, but not nearly as much of that ridiculous stuff as you would find in any of the James Bond movies.

Story plots tend to deal with very large problems that threaten large numbers of people, such as a crime cult that wants to release a killer virus that will wipe out most of Japan and a lot of south-east Asia as well, or the development of a super corporation that wants to become the hidden government of Europe so they can really milk the money cow legally while killing anybody that gets in their way. Real life espionage is hardly this fantastic, but, we're dealing with James Bond here, so these kinds of stories tend to go with the territory.

My problem, again, is that the panels are very large, with few panels per page. The art is sparse modern realistic, which is OK, but I personally would prefer a bit more detail. The typical five issue mini-series costs a total of \$19.95. Then each series is offered as a graphic novel, usually at a lower price than if you had bought the individual issues. To make it even more aggravating, many internet sellers, including Amazon and Barnes & Nobel, sell those trade paperbacks at a discounted price.

My decision to stop buying the individual comics was made a couple of months ago. Of course there were still a few issues in the pipeline, but for all future Bond comics, I will be buying the trade paperbacks, and saving myself significant amounts of money in the process.

Next is a long run of *Monstress* comics. If *Astro City* is the best super hero comic being published in the world today, then *Monstress* is clearly the best science-fantasy comic being published anywhere. I use the term science-fantasy because altho there are strong science fiction underpinnings to the ongoing story, there are stronger fantasy elements, including what appears to be magic, what appears to be demons, what appears to be magical transformations, and what appears to be magic summoning powers that might be able to breach reality. I use the words "what appears to be magic" because the world of *Monstress* operates on its own internal but strict logic, so what appears to be magic may just be a different kind of science, and some of the people



The Cumea are the bad guys. Some Arcanics can pass for human, but most have mixed human and animal features. The Cumea cult traps Arcanics and experiments on them performing live vivisection for reasons that are not made clear until way over in the run of the series.

The heroine is Maika Halfwolf, a teenaged Arcanic who appears human, but she has a withered left arm from shoulder to elbow, and nothing below that. Maika is determined to learn more about her mother, who had many secrets and apparently also had strange powers, and then she plans to avenge her mother's death. Toward that end Maika allows herself to be captured by the Cumea and taken to their citadel, where instead of being carved up on a Cumea lab table, some of her own unique powers are revealed and she escapes, after taking partial revenge on one of the Cumea priestesses who killed her mother. It turns out Maika has a mysterious psychic link with a magical monster of enormous power, a fact that makes her dangerous to humans and Arcanic alike.

using this stuff may be science-fiction style mutants.

The story is set in a universe generally lacking in modern technology. Think of the world of the early 1700s, that appears to be the level of civilization in this series. This world is peopled by normal human beings, and Arcanics. The Arcanics are mutants, some of whom possess special powers that humans tend to regard as magic. After a deadly war between the normals and the Arcanics an uneasy truce exists with territories roughly assigned to each species. Upsetting matters is The Cumea, a quasi-religious order of sorceresses that wants to rekindle the war between the species in order to expand and further consolidate their political and economic power.

The societies here are matriarchal. The implication is that there are not that many men around due to the carnage of the past human/Arcanics war. All of the characters, including the heroine, are flawed characters with desires, weaknesses, and hidden strengths that make this one of the most realistic and intriguing comic series I have encountered in a long time. The plot and story is developed like a novel, except it is a comic with beautiful, fully detailed artwork adding a vivid visual dimension to the story. The art is provided by Sana Takeda, with a richness of depth and detail that is all too rare in comics these days.

Response to *Monstress* has been very good. Early issues now sell for serious money, but luckily the early issues have been reprinted in two graphic novels. Volume 1 reprints issues 1-6, volume 2 reprints issues 6-12. These graphic novels have a retail price of \$9.99 for volume one, and \$16.99 for volume two; but luckily again, they are heavily discounted at most internet book selling sites. Amazon, for example, offers Volume 1 for a mere \$7.65.

I cannot recommend this series too highly. It is one of the best comic series I have encountered in years, and, I am certainly not alone in my appreciation of this series. A day ago the Locus website posted the winners of the Hugo Awards, and the first *Monstress* graphic novel won the Hugo for best comic series. *Monstress* is also on the DragonCon ballot, and if there is any justice in the fan world, it will win there too.

Buy this series. Start with the two graphic novels, and then pick up the regular issues. You will not be disappointed.

Next in the box is the run of DC's crossover comic *Batman/The Shadow*. I have to say this was



one of the biggest disappointments of the year for me. I anticipated a crackling good series with two of the most famous vigilantes American fiction has ever produced joining forces to solve some sort of extraordinary problem.

The set-up seemed promising. Several bizarre and brutal murders occur in Gotham City, and all the evidence points to Lamont Cranston as the killer. Except that Lamont Cranston has been dead for over fifty years. Batman tries to unravel the mystery, and discovers Cranston, a.k.a. The Shadow, is very much alive, and still seemingly young, even if all the surviving members of the Shadow's original team are either dead or decrepit oldsters. The Shadow warns Batman to stay out of this mystery. It is both dangerous, and it has supernatural origins that only The Shadow can deal with. Naturally Batman ignores all of that and sets out trying to both solve the murders and also solve the mystery of Lamont Cranston.

Alas, that interesting set-up is the high point of the entire six issue mini-series. Writers Scott Snyder and Steve Orlando decide to invest

The Shadow with fantastic supernatural powers, and they decide to rearrange his well-known history to give him a fantastic supernatural-linked origin. Riding all the clichés, they also decide that The Shadow needs a malignant supernatural evil force to counter-balance his efforts thru the years to work for justice. This character, called 'the Stag' is butchering people right and left, and the goal is to kill The Shadow and Batman as well.

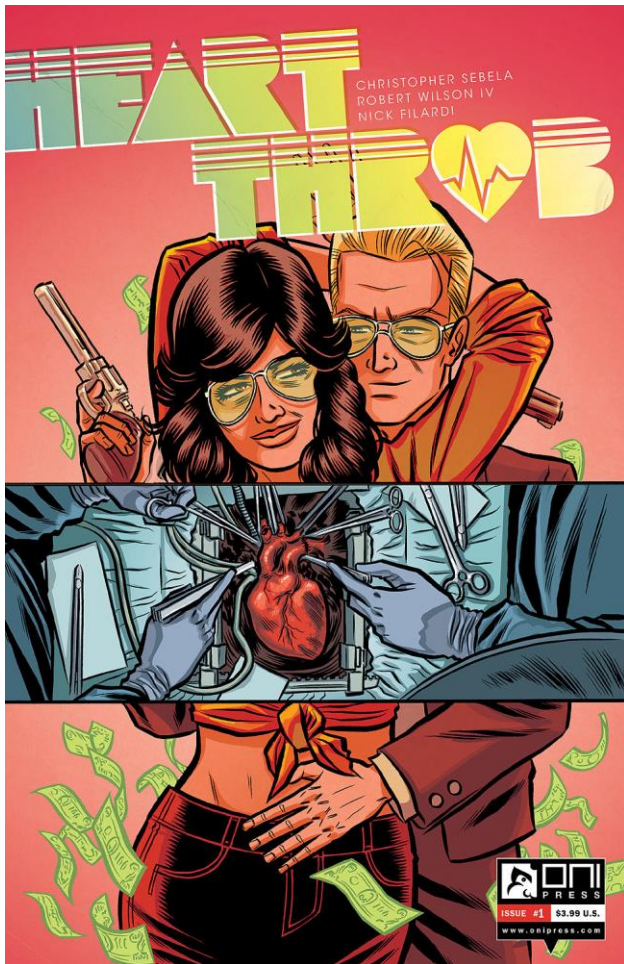
Even if I hadn't read this same story plot a couple of hundred times before in comics and prose fantasy stories, the inept handling offered here would still have turned me off. The first issue is the best issue, since it offers the framework of what soon proves to be a very tired, and very trite plot that telegraphs every single element of the coming story points well in advance. And of course, in an effort to appeal to the widest range of readers, they interject the Joker into the plot as a willing ally of the supernatural monster of evil.

The story bogs down early and stays mired in trivialities. Batman emerges as a stubborn nut case who first refuses to believe in the supernatural stuff despite plenty of evidence to the contrary, then as a prissy prude who is horrified that The Shadow actually kills bad guys, especially when the bad guys are trying to kill him or some innocent party. The Shadow comes across as an ill tempered know-it-all curmudgeon who knows what is happening with the Stag, but can't seem to do anything about it. He can't even fend off Batman and his prying into the history of Lamont Cranston. Frustrating and boring are apt descriptions for this mini-series that spends most of its time running around in circles and accomplishing nothing in the way of either plot or character development.

The art here is provided by Riley Rossmo. Except for the covers, I found the art clunky, amateurish, and sometimes barely beyond the kind of cartoon-work a high school kid might have produced. The figure and facial art is so erratic that it is often difficult to tell who the major characters are from page to page. The color work tries to be moody but ends up merely being muddy.

I'm sure DC will soon present this mini-series as a graphic novel. I suggest you avoid it. Dynamite holds the comic book license for The Shadow character and is offering their own crossover series that begins next month, titled *The Shadow/Batman*. I hope their take on the subject will be better, but I have my doubts.

Well, to wash away the bad memories of that mini-series, we have the first *Heartthrob* mini-



series, five issues long, and the first three issues of the “second season” of the series. This is a sterling comic title with good writing and OK but not impressive artwork.

Written by Christopher Sebela, the star of the series is Callie Boudreau, a young woman who has been a victim of serious illnesses most of her life, particularly a bad heart that kept her out of the normal childhood activities. As an adult she has to be careful with her health, and working a stressful job at a slimy medical insurance company that routinely cheats its customers and providers, and goes out of its way to deny expensive life giving medical treatment to people who need it the most has not improved her mental outlook. Then, a last ditch opportunity comes along, a chance to replace her bad heart with a donor heart in a risky operation. The risky operation is successful, leaving her with plenty of debt, but alive and much better.

Her mental attitude changes with the transplant. She finds she has developed a taste for liquor, she can no longer put up with her crappy excuse for a boyfriend, and she has odd urges to

break out of her dull routine and try exciting, dangerous things. That’s when she discovers that her new heart actually came from a notorious criminal, a professional thief by trade who begins to make himself known to her as a ghost figure, that soon becomes very real to her. The figure of Mercer becomes solid enuf to becomes her lover. He also suggests she stop waiting for her life to change for the better. If Callie wants a better life, why not go out and steal it.

And so she does. Aided by Mercer’s plans and suggestions, Callie embarks on a life of dangerous crime. She robs small stores first, then graduates to bank heists. Then she plans the big score, robbing the insurance company she worked for.

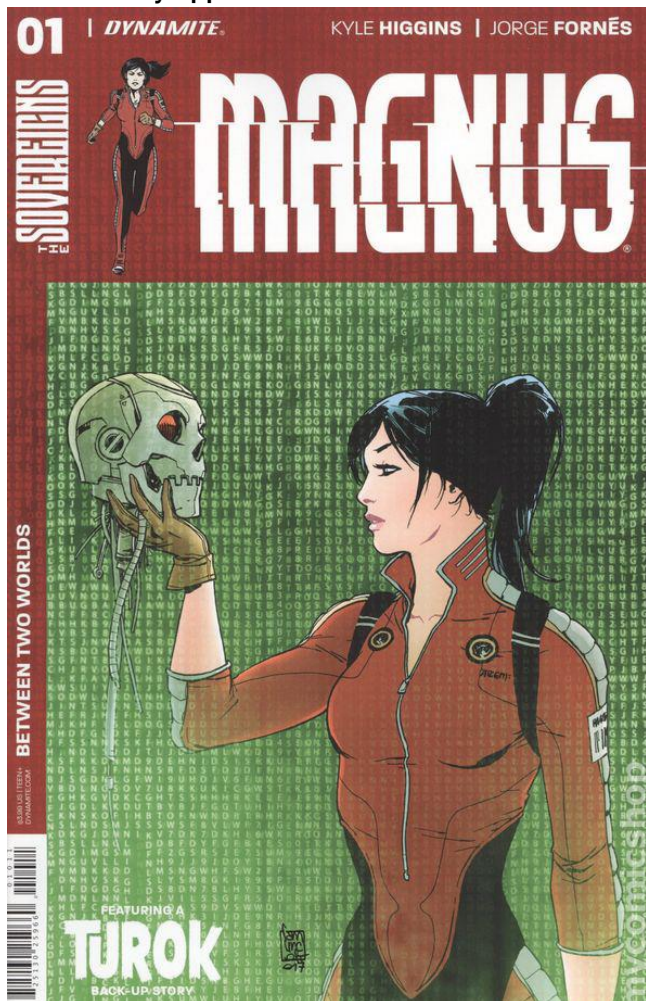
The law, meanwhile, has not been idle during her daring activities. She has gathered a small group of associates, specialists in various parts of crime activities, and they are willing to go along with her crazy plans and her crazy lover that nobody except Callie can see, so long as the robberies are fast, successful, and lucrative. But of course, life in the fast felony lane is never smooth, and that becomes the crux of the story.

This is an excellent series, well written, with a group of interesting characters set against the world of high-risk robbery. The odds are against Callie, and she knows it, in fact, she relishes the reckless thrills. The excitement, the danger are almost more addictive than the idea of raking in impressive amounts of hard cash for very little actual work on the part of her and her gang. Her relationship with the spirit of Mercer also undergoes changes, as she becomes more accretive, and he becomes less of the instigator and more of a secondary partner.

The art here is provided by Robert Wilson IV. It is good enuf, but it is nothing special or exciting. He is strongest with backgrounds, things like cars and machinery. He is weakest with human faces. Unfortunately this is a series that requires a lot of facial close ups, with a multitude of different characters coming and going as the story progresses, so it is essential that the reader easily recognize everyone, and unfortunately that is not always easy with Wilson’s artwork.

This is another series I can recommend wholeheartedly. It features strong characters involved in a twisting plot thread that is always fresh and interesting. The first five issue series has been reprinted as a trade paperback selling for \$9.99, but available for less on most internet sites. Give it a read and you’ll be hooked and ready to

start Season Two, of which the first three issues have already appeared.



What else do we have in the box? Well, some new series just starting off. The brand new *Magnus Robot Fighter* is only a few issues along thus far, but it sure beats the last couple of incarnations of this title.

This time the entire premise is changed. Magnus is a woman and she is a sort of robot psychiatrist. Robots in this new series are more like cyborgs. They have their own society in an internet-style cloud, and they get free time in their own society based on how well they serve their human owners.

A murder has apparently been committed by a robot cyborg who has fled to the Cloud. Magnus gets the job of finding the alleged killer and unraveling the mystery. This is really good stuff, with good art as well. The strong science fiction themes will appeal even to those SF readers who are not big fans of comic books.

There is also the first issue of the new Turok series, which starts well. In this newest version Turok is a human in a world dominated by

intelligent reptilian beings who hold the humans, half breeds and the other races of this strange land in virtual slavery. Rebellion is harshly punished by the Varanid Empire.

A woman Turok wants is being held in the most notorious prison of the Empire. He needs to somehow get into that prison to find this woman who may have answers as to how the Varanid Empire came into being and how it might be derailed. Lots of action, with really good art.

Well, there's more stuff in the box, including several completed mini-series well worth mentioning, but this seems like a good place to end the review. If anybody is interested perhaps I'll pick up with the new box next issue.



cinema

The feature film of the evening was “The Deluge”, a pre-code RKO movie from 1933 loosely based on the popular novel of the same name written by S. Fowler Wright, with the setting changed from England to the United States.

This was a popular and influential science fiction thriller when it was originally released, but it became even more important in later years when the scenes of graphic destruction depicted in the first part of the movie were used extensively by Republic Studios as special effects. Republic used it several times, most notably in their 1949 serial “King of the Rocketmen”.

The picture opens with the world on the very brink of a massive disaster, as barometers fall dramatically clouds roil the sky, there is an unexplained eclipse of the sun, and then, torrential rains, with high winds and extensive rapid flooding begin. The flooding is also marked by massive earthquakes in the States and around the world. The earthquakes trigger enormous tsunamis, triple disasters that develop so fast that almost nobody is saved. Cities are inundated, skyscrapers crumble, mountains and cliffs wash way, ships are tossed around like flotsam and shattered to flinders as millions of people die while the flood waters rush onward. California washes into the ocean, the United States splits in half, flood waters rush up from the Gulf of Mexico, the great lakes spill over drowning the mid west as the rains continue to fall unabated.

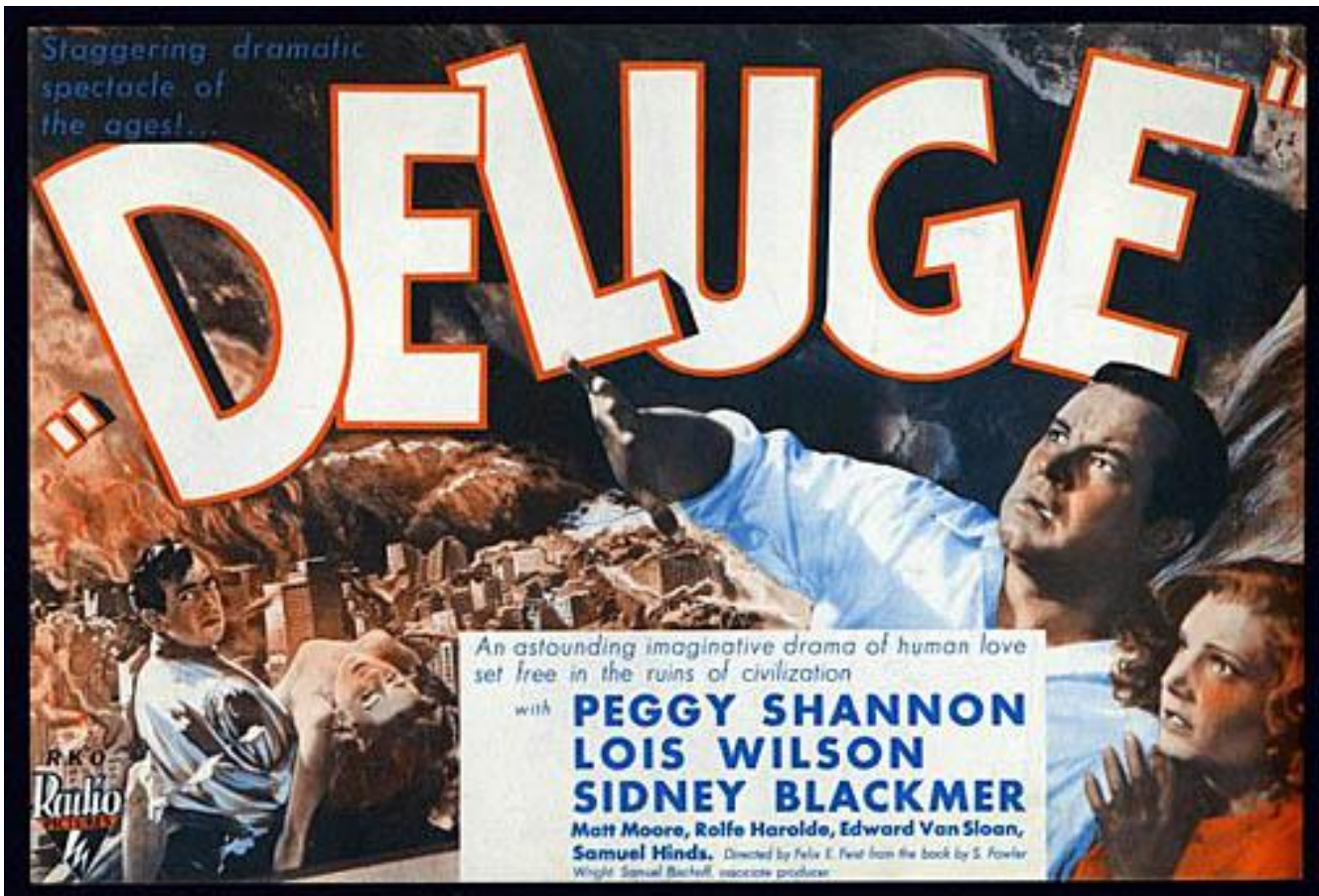
As the disaster unfolds we encounter the team of champion competition swimmer Clair Arlington who is forced to call off her long distance race due to the impending storm. The scene switches to the household of Martin Webster and his wife Helen outside New York City. As the storm becomes ferocious the house begins to give way. The pair hastily gather their two small children and head to the nearby rock quarry. Martin makes a quick return trip to the house for more provisions, but a falling beam knocks him unconscious. When he revives his wife and children are gone.

In the days that follow the waters cover almost everything. After the weather finally clears we learn that there are many islands along the east coast still above water. Some of them are very small, some are larger, but most are relatively close together. On one of those islands are two men, Jepson and Norwood. It is Jepson’s cabin, and his fishing boat. They find the body of Clair washed up on the beach and nurse her back to health. Almost immediately after she has recovered, both men decide they want her for themselves. A fight breaks out and Jepson kills Norwood. Clair has no interest in either of the men. In the aftermath she swims off toward another distant island.

Altho a champion swimmer, the long trek has exhausted her and she washes up on the larger island where she is discovered by Martin, who has build himself a refuge with a small cabin and salvaged supplies he keeps in an adjacent open ended tunnel. Martin is not the brute Jepson was. Clair and Martin become friends, then fall in love and declare themselves man and wife.

Meanwhile, a few miles distant other survivors have gathered in a small town with some buildings that are wrecked but usable, and are attempting to rebuild civilization. Among the survivors is Helen, Martin’s wife, along with the two children. Martin’s brother Tom is the nominal head of the group, and wishes to marry Helen, but Helen is convinced that Martin is somehow still alive. One of the rules of the new civilization is that single or widowed women must choose a husband within a few months of their arrival at the settlement. There are far fewer women than men present, and it turns out that not all the male survivors are interested in rebuilding civilization.

Outside the village there is a band of marauders who raid, kill, and steal, and one of the things they steal is any woman they can find, who they immediately gang rape and usually kill. The body of the daughter of one of the settlement’s families is discovered, the latest victim of the gang. Tom rouses the men in the town to take up a punitive expedition to locate the thugs and wipe them out.



Elsewhere, Jepson has not forgotten Clair. He sets out on his boat for the larger island intending to find and claim her. He encounters the gang of outlaws and rapidly succeeds in making himself their leader. The band heads for Martin's cabin and captures Clair. Jepson makes it plain that this woman is his and his alone. Martin manages to sneak into the camp and free Clair. In a fight with Jepson, Martin barely escapes alive. He and Clair head back to their cabin determined to resist as best they can with a captured rifle taken from one of the gang members.

Jepson and his well armed crew follow. Martin and Clair decide the old open ended mine tunnel with its cache of supplies is the best spot for defense. In the battle some of the attackers are killed, but the odds are against the pair, especially when Jepson posts guards on the rear of the tunnel and then decides to go in himself and kill Martin. The village men arrive and attack the raiders, routing them while Martin and Jepson are in a life or death struggle inside the tunnel. Martin is being choked to death when Clair picks up Jepson's fallen spiked club and kills him.

Back at the village Helen and Martin meet. Martin immediately returns to his wife and children, but it is clear he still loves Clair as well. Martin proves himself a natural leader, establishing a credit system to handle salvaged supplies and is elected leader of the village with a mandate to get things organized and start rebuilding. Clair and Helen meet, both declaring that they love Martin, and both declaring they will never give him up. Martin meets with each and declares that he loves both of them.

In the end Clair walks out of town, throws herself into the water, and swims away to another island leaving Martin with Helen and the children. The End.

British born S. Fowler Wright was the author of the original novel. Like many an aspiring writer Wright originally yearned to be a published poet, except that poetry paid no money, and publishing fiction did. He was working as an accountant when he established the Empire Poetry League in 1917, and edited their journal, which he used to publish a few of his own poems, but mainly his translations of Dante's "Inferno" and "Purgatorio".

He wrote his first novel in 1924, a science fiction story where amphibian beings have succeeded the human race and taken over the planet. In 1928 "The Island of Doctor Sparrow" was published, followed almost immediately by "Deluge". "Deluge" gained a wide audience, and attracted the attention of reviewers because of its ending, which was not the ending used in the movie.

In the novel the two women in Martin Webster's life come to an understanding, and by the village's marriage rules, both women choose the same man, Martin, to be their husband. This ending did not sit well with a number of British literary critics, and those reviews sparked a wider interest in the novel which went into an expanded second printing almost immediately. It subsequently went thru several more printings in Britain alone, and was reprinted extensively in the US, Canada, and Europe.

Wright penned an answer to his critics in the preface to the second edition, but didn't say much more than had been stated in the original novel. He seemed puzzled that the critics had ignored his main focus, which was his critical evaluation of modern British society in the 1920s which he felt was crushing traditional family values, alienating individuals and destroying human initiative with an artificial class system. He felt a return to simpler times without the complexities and stress of twentieth century technology would restore the true values of the human race.

In some ways this attitude tends to echo the basic nativeism of Rousseau, but Wright was not the naïve innocent Rousseau and the other romantic primitivists were. He had a sharper view of human nature, and felt that true society, based on small villages, and traditional family values was necessary to tame the violent streaks of greed and cruelty that were the enduring marks of the human race. He was on record as being opposed to both automobiles and birth control, and felt that technology, including radio, was thwarting human civilization.

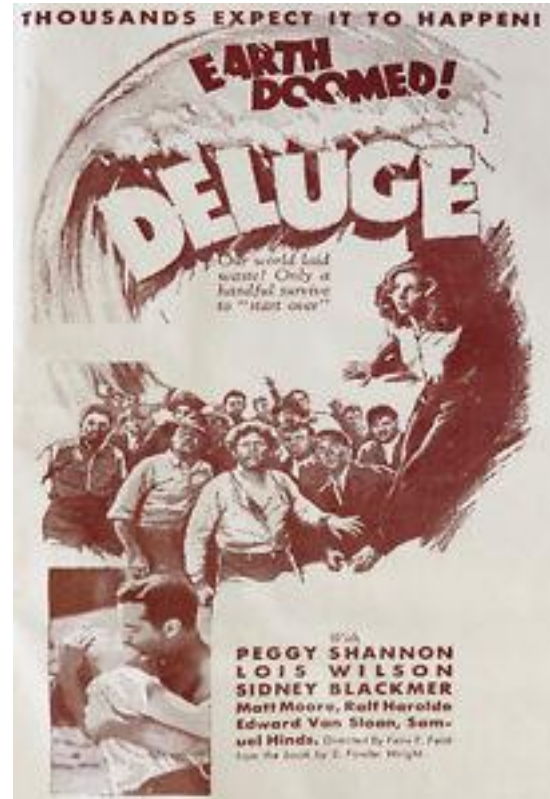
Instead of paying attention to his underlying philosophical themes or the adventure story plot, he felt that instead the critics were obsessed with the idea of one man who might be in love with two different women, and that both women might not really object to that situation. Altho he did not bring up the point specifically, he could have pointed to the many societies past and present that embraced polygamy, or to any number of situations in contemporary Britain where recognized leaders in the world of literature, business, and politics had made that situation perfectly workable.

The financial success of "Deluge" allowed Wright to quit his day job as an accountant and focus entirely on his writing. After the book went thru several editions he began efforts to interest film studios in the story. He sold the option to Worldwide Studios for \$5,000 (a tidy sum during the dark days of the Depression). Wright submitted a screen play, which was rejected outright. Admiral Productions did the actual filming in 1932, and had the whole picture in the can in record time with a total expense cost of \$171,000.

In addition to making changes in the story plot and location, the producers felt that adding a strong biblical-style opening narrative was necessary to forcibly let the viewers know that this movie was purely a work of fiction. This included a long quote from the book of Genesis, in which God had promised that human beings would not undergo another life destroying flood.

The graphic scenes of destruction were fleshed out to fill the first section of the movie when the studio discovered that the action parts of the book would probably not run long enuf for a feature length production. All the filming of buildings and landscapes used in the destruction sequences were actually shot in San Francisco. The impressive special effects were handled by the team of Ned Mann, Russell E. Lawson, and Billy Williams. Ned Mann went on to handle the special effects on H.G. Wells' movie "Things To Come" in 1936.

Wright was not happy with the finished product, and advised his children to not bother seeing the movie. His sequel novel "Dawn" sold well, but was peachier than "Deluge" had been. He went on to write more science fiction, but in the 1930s he primarily turned out fast action detective novels, many with fantastic



premises that were explained away as the stories finished up. In between he visited Nazi Germany and devoted a lot of his time to writing newspaper articles warming about the Nazi regime, including turning out three day-after-tomorrow novels in which Hitler started a war and rapidly conquered all of Europe including the UK.

After WWII he wrote more SF novels, but many of them were not submitted for publication, and most of the manuscripts disappeared after his death in 1965 at age 91. Wright had ten children, but apparently the family was not greatly interested in his literary status and many of his stories have fallen out of copyright since his death.

Released as an RKO film, "The Deluge" immediately became a cult classic for science fiction fans, and turned a fair, but hardly impressive profit for RKO. The studio apparently felt it was a dated niche film with no future potential when they sold the rights and the master prints to Republic around 1940. Republic bought the picture specifically so they could reuse the destruction special effects footage.

For decades "The Deluge" was considered to be a lost film. Then, in 1981, long time SF fan Forrest J. Ackerman, was alerted by his friend and fellow film enthusiast Wade Williams while they were attending a science fiction film festival in Rome, that an Italian language copy of the film was in the collection of Italian movie producer Luigi Cozzi (also known as Lewis Coates). Ackerman confirmed that it was a copy of the lost film. Williams bought the access rights and had new copies struck in 35mm where it was released with English subtitles to art houses, museums, SF conventions, and eventually on VHS tape. (By the way, this is Wade Williams the long time film collector and sometimes film producer, not the movie actor of the same name).

In 2016 a nitrate dupe negative in the original English with full musical soundtrack was discovered. Lobster Films digitally restored the film, and has made it available on DVD thru Kino/Lobster, which was the copy we saw.

The movie itself is interesting. The impressive scenes of destruction are so powerful that they almost overwhelm the rest of the picture. The story of the survivors trying to establish themselves, and the primitive passions that the disappearance of the restraints civilization unleashes are well handled. All the scenery, all the acting, all the dialog is excellent. The images of survivors trying to rebuild society in its nescient stages while faced with malicious brutal men who rely only on force are dynamic.

The picture slows down considerably when it reaches the end and the characters are faced with the dilemma of Martin having to deal with two women he clearly loves and who also clearly love him. Neither one of the women is prepared to surrender possession of Martin, and Martin either cannot or will not make a choice on his own. In the original novel it was shown that both of these women were intelligent, resourceful, and fully able to take care of themselves, while Martin is more of a dynamic leader than a survivor. In the novel, reaching the conclusion that they will share Martin was a natural outcome of the story developments and the forceful characterizations of the two women. In the movie Martin is depicted as both strong and determined so having him essentially defer his decision making to circumstance is difficult for viewers to accept. The movie ending, where Clair gives up and swims away, may have been the proper "moral" choice for most of the audience in 1933, but it made for an abrupt and unsatisfactory ending to the movie. This sudden ending disrupts and largely eclipses the positive impressions that audiences have formed about the strong story plot in the rest of the production.

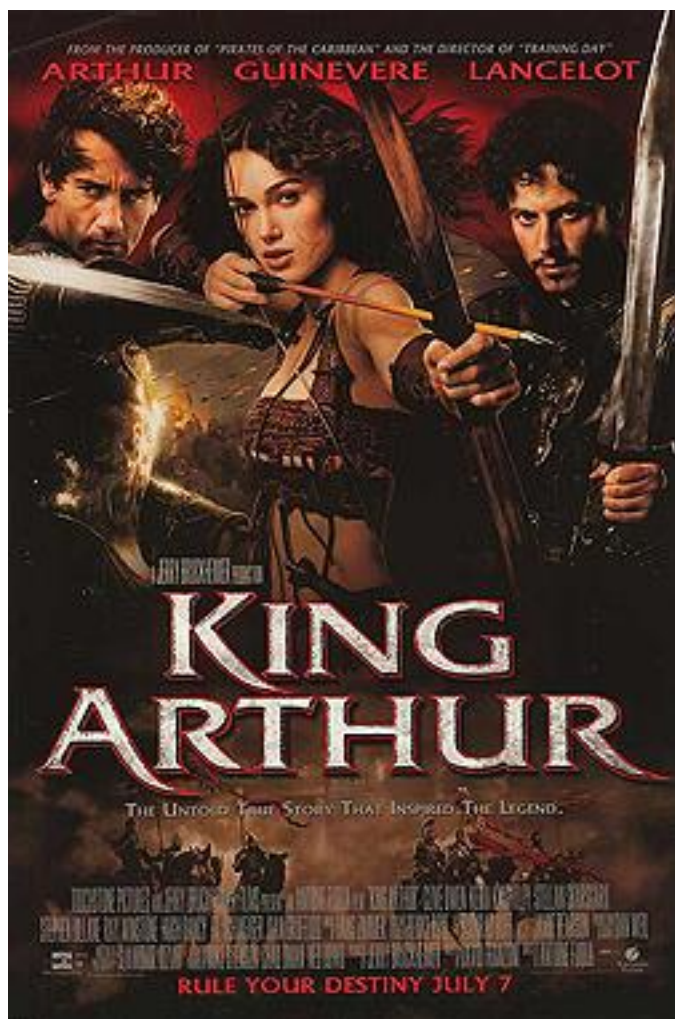
With it's theme of gang rape and sexual predators as the villains, this movie could not have been made a year later after the Motion Picture Production Code censorship office came into being in mid-1934. This may have been a



contributing factor to RKO's decision to essentially sell the movie for scrap to Republic. Things have changed in this new century, and audiences today can enjoy this fully restored movie. Everyone present enjoyed the film, but I don't think anybody cared for the sudden snap ending.

For those interested, the novel is still in print as a trade paperback, or it can be read/downloaded for free off the internet at this URL: <http://www.sfw.org.uk/deluge.shtml>

---review by Bob Jennings



King Arthur

In recent years, British director-producer Guy Ritchie made two Sherlock Holmes movies which have been rather controversial in Holmes fandom. (One of the members of our local club still refuses to see them.) Jude Law portrayed Doctor Watson in both films, and he now appears in this new one as Vortigern, the principal villain. In this version of Arthur, Vortigern is the younger brother of King Uther (Eric Bana), whom Vortigern murders. However, before he dies, Uther is able to put young Arthur into a small boat and send him downstream from Camelot to Londinium (the Roman name for the site of present-day London). In a twist on the Moses story, Arthur is found and adopted by a prostitute and raised in a brothel, where he grows up to become the leader of a street gang. Twenty years after becoming king, Vortigern orders that all young men be rounded up and transported to Camelot, where they are ordered to attempt to draw Excalibur from the stone. Arthur (Charlie Hunnam) succeeds, of course, so he is arrested and sentenced to be executed. Fortunately for Arthur, the resistance led by Bedivere (Djimon Hounsou) rescues him. Special effects are excellent, especially the giant elephants in the prologue and the giant snake at the climax, and the fight scenes are well choreographed.

Merlin (Kemil Lemieszewski) is mostly absent, except for a few references and a brief

appearance in a flashback. Mordred (Rob Knighton) is not related to Arthur at all, appears to be part of Uther and Vortigern's generation, and is an evil mage. There is also a follower of Arthur named Percival (Craig McGinlay), although there is no mention of the Holy Grail. This was projected to be the first of six films, but it has been a flop at the box office so it is unlikely that Ritchie will make any more.

---review by Tom Feller

Spiderman: Homecoming

Nineteen year old Tom Holland made his debut as the title character in last year's Avengers movie and while I liked the actor, I did not like the way the filmmakers used him as a kind of junior member of the superpower team. Robert Downey Jr. returns as Iron Man/Tony Stark and mentors young Peter Parker, 15 years old and a high school student in this version of the character, with the assistance of Jon Favreau as Happy Hogan. Stark Industries even provides him with a high tech Spiderman costume completed with a computer voiced by Jennifer Connelly. However, Peter is not recruited to become a full-fledged Avenger but is instead



exiled to Hollywood's favorite hell, high school. The high school scenes were influenced by the films of John Hughes, and the principal is played by Kenneth Choi, who appeared in the first Captain American movie as Howling Commando Jim Morita. Pictures in his office hint that the principal is related to the character. Tony Revolori plays Flash Thompson, and in this version, he is a bully who picks on Peter. Other students at Peter's high school are Betty Brant (Anjourie Rice) and Ned Leeds (Jacob Batalon). One of the key plot points is that Peter has a date (Laura Harrier) to the homecoming dance.

Marisa Tomei also returns as a middle-aged, rather than elderly, Aunt May, but Uncle Ben is not even mentioned. Chris Evans has a couple cameos as Captain America in amusing motivational videos for high school students. Michael Keaton as the Vulture makes for an excellent villain. (It was only three years ago that he was nominated for an Oscar for playing an actor who had become famous for playing a character called the Birdman.) He is ably assisted by Bokeem Woodbine as the Shocker and Michael Chernus as the Tinkerer.

Holland reminded me much more of the early Stan Lee/Steve Ditko Spiderman than either Tobey Maguire or Allen Garfield. It probably helps that he is younger than either of the other two when they played the character. He actually appears to have fun being Spiderman, but Peter Parker's personal life is just as complicated in this movie as those early comic books.

This is definitely a strong addition to the "Marvel Cinematic Universe".

---review by Tom Feller



War for the Planet of the Apes

We have seen all eight of the previous *Planet of the Apes* movies, so we were pleasantly surprised to see the makers of the latest version actually finding a new take on the premise. Caesar (Andy Serkis) is pitted in a personal conflict with an unnamed colonel (Woody Harrelson) with the future of both the apes and humans at stake. The colonel's troops have recruited apes to function as servants and call them "donkeys", a reference to the video game "Donkey Kong". The apes still do not wear clothing, except for a character named Bad Ape (Steve Zahn), who provides much of the film's comic relief.

There are numerous references to earlier *Planet of the Apes* films. The colonel's command calls itself the Alpha and Omega, a clear reference to the bomb in *Beneath the Planet of the Apes*, and their logo is an exact copy of the one in the earlier film. The orangutan Maurice (Karin Konoval) is a reference to Maurice Evans, the actor who played Dr. Zaius, also an orangutan, in the first two films, and a mute little girl named Nova refers to the character played by Linda Harrison in those films. One of Caesar's sons is named Cornelius (Devyn Dalton), which is also the name of the ape played by

Roddy McDowall in the first three films. In the fourth and fifth films, McDowall's character is named Caesar, and he is Cornelius's son.

Serkis is being mentioned for the Best Actor Oscar, despite the use of motion capture technology for his character. He has been doing excellent work in that format for years, including Gollum in the *Lord of the Rings/Hobbit* films and *King Kong* in the 2005 incarnation.



Wonder Woman

Gal Gadot, a former Miss Israel, model, and combat instructor for the Israeli army, made her debut as Wonder Woman/Diana Prince in last year's *Superman/Batman* movie and earned very positive reviews. Now she is back in the first theatrical film devoted to the character. It keeps the basic origin story of Steve Trevor (Chris Pine) landing on Themyscira. (Paradise Island, the island of the Amazons, was renamed by George Perez in the 1987 comic book version.) However, it moves the year from the original 1941 to 1918. When he tells her about World War I, she leaves the island to end the war, which she believes is caused solely by the ancient god Ares. Another change to the original is that it follows the DC's 2011 "New 52" origin of the character in making Diana the daughter of Zeus and therefore a demi-goddess. In a throwback to the original, Lucy Davis plays Etta Candy, who was Diana's best friend in the 1940s comic book. The plot involves a plot by General Ludendorff (Danny Huston), an actual historical character, to use a new and improved poison gas on the western front. The special effects are excellent and the fight scenes are well choreographed, making this one of the better comic book movies in recent years.

It begins and ends with a framing story to tie it in with the *DC Extended Universe* series, as it is called, and it is the fourth movie in the series. Patty Jenkins, the director, cites the Christopher Reeve *Superman* films as one of her inspirations. Jenkins, by the way, had a Wonder Woman notebook as a child.

---review by Tom Feller



It Comes at Night

This movie is set during a global pandemic that is spread by an airborne pathogen and with about a one day incubation period. The main characters are a small family (Joel Edgerton, Carmen Ejogo, Kelvin Harrison Jr.) who have taken refuge in a big, boarded-up house in the woods. They take in another small family (Christopher Abbott, Riley Keough, Griffin Robert Faulkner), but the stress of their situation leads to disastrous consequences. The acting is excellent, and the director/writer Trey Edward Schults cites the original *Night of the Living Dead* as one of his influences. It is a very intense, very effective low-budget thriller.

---review by Tom Feller



FANZINE REVIEWS

A regular feature of ***TIGHTBEAM***

by

Bob Jennings

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.



THE INSIDER #318 **8-1/2x11"; 52 pages; mostly bi-monthly;**
Richard & Michelle Zellich; 1728 San Martin Dr.; Fenton, MO 63026-2304

This is the clubzine for the St. Louis Science Fiction Association, and altho there are some club notes present, most of each issue is devoted to other things. The regular features include fanzine reviews, a varied letter column, notes on upcoming conventions and fan doings around the area and the nation, and an obituary section that covers the deaths of people involved with science fiction/fantasy in the areas of literature, movies, and fan activity. The obituary section provides plenty of background info that I have not seen presented in other zine venues.

There are other regular features, including a long and usually detailed calendar of upcoming events covering about six months of science fiction/fantasy/fandom related events.

But the bulk of each issue is devoted to science news. Now, you would think, what could be duller than that? Well, you've never seen a science section like this before. There are some weighty articles about new discoveries in the fields of astronomy and space travel, but there are also off-trails reports of bizarre and unusual science events, things in the experimental stage, information on research underway on unusual explorations that seem like the wildest science fiction somehow about to be brought to life. These articles are often illustrated with full color photos, artists renditions and sometimes even diagrams or charts. It's an odd mix that is usually interested and decidedly unlike what you would expect from more traditional (stodgy) science reports.

It always a strange mixture of the new, cutting edge, fannish, and odd; all stirred together with full color reprints from a wide variety of comic strips and cartoons old and new. Nothing else like it anywhere else, and definitely worth your attention.



NICE DISTINCTIONS #31

8-1/2x11"; 6 pages; Arthur D. Hiavaty; 206 Valentine St.; Yonkers, NY 10704-1814; twice yearly; \$1 for a sample issue, after that The Usual; one free copy by email to anyone who specifically asks for the e-version.

When he sets his mind to it, Arthur Hiavaty is one of the finest writers and thinkers in fandom. He consistently produces some of the most quotable writing in the hobby, but these twice-yearly issues of his perzine are increasingly devoted to obituary notices, sometimes taking up half the issue. Luckily this time the obituary section is down to a page and a half.

This issue he natters about attending conventions, one that had a "My Little Pony" back theme, which he enjoyed, to his surprise, and another convention that he has attended for thirty-five years, which he enjoyed even tho his hearing aid was malfunctioning, and the airlines decided to send his luggage to some far

distant place instead of where the convention, and he, happened to be located. Bummer indeed.

There are also comments about the death penalty, particularly Arkansas's despicable decision not to allow DNA testing on two of their death row inmates that might prove they are innocent, and his decision to get a new cell phone, but not a smart phone, because he doesn't want or need most of the features the so-called smart phone offers. I totally agree with that. In ye ancient days phones were made to allow, you know, voice communication between people. Now phones are apparently there to remind you to empty the cat littler and to watch previews of the latest block-buster summer disaster movie on a three inch wide screen. Plus telling you the time. Instead of a watch, people now whip out their "smart phone" to decide if the sun is sufficiently overhead so they can go to lunch. As Arthur notes, this isn't the way science fiction envisioned it back when SF stories included gadgets and inventions that would somehow make life better. Is carpal tunnel syndrome or fused vertebrae and inflamed neck muscles caused by peering down at a tiny phone screen really making life better? I don't think so.

There's more here, including his thots on the tribe of fandom (friends everywhere, vs limited friendships from people who stay rooted to their places of birth), the folly of judging people by race, his inability to dislike something just because everybody else says you should hate it (in this case, pineapple pizza), and lots of addition commentary delivered with disarming openness, and criticism delivered with razor edged wit.

I'll say it again; Arthur Hiavaty is one of the best writers in fandom. All of his comments are sharp, precise, and well worth reading, whether you happen to agree with his viewpoint or not. I only wish he would write more, as in longer essays, or full fledged articles even, and that he would turn out more material than these twice-a-year *Nice Distinctions* issues.



OPUNTIA 389

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 back issues also on display at the efanzines.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.

Increasingly Dale is including long photo shoot commentaries as an integral part of his fanzine. This time the photo opportunities were limited due to a massive forest fire the next province over, which caused lots and lots of smoke to drift over the Calgary region, ruining the scenery, often almost blotting out the sun, and drastically affecting his choice of photographic subjects. He settled for a trip along a little-used trail near Lake Louise (which he notes, is properly a pond, not a lake, since it is fed by ground seepage and rainwater; no streams feed Lake Louise at all). He makes up for the lack of good scenery with close-up shots of some of the local wild flowers in full bloom.

The main feature is his examination of a series of sci-fi films that purport to deal with the sun going nova, or some other sun nearby going nova that somehow affects planet earth. Since it is impossible for our own sun to go nova, even if somebody were to lob a few H-bombs into its core, these films might best be described as disaster hyped fantasies. Many of them also include such preposterous events as meteor strikes, tsunamis, and earthquakes, all absolutely unrelated to what would really happen if the sun were to magically go nova. Add in bad acting, stupid story plots, and often inferior FX, and you have a series of films that would be

an embarrassment to the drive-in movie trade, if drive-in movies were still around. Instead, they get shown on late nite TV. Dale has a lot of fun deconstructing these turkeys and some of his comments are pretty funny.

There is a section where Dale discusses the use of the telephone in OTRadio murder mysteries and short science fiction stories pointing out their flaws or strengths as related to current communications technology. The comments are interesting if you happen to be familiar with the programs or the story set-ups, otherwise a lot of this will probably go right by you.

A lot of what followed went right by me, as Dale discussed some of the technical science books he had read. I enjoyed his narratives on some of the speculative archeology volumes he read, but he also reports on a bunch of hard science books he read. Hard science and math are not my strong suits. I do take note of his comment that wide climate changes thru the centuries has been a constant on this planet, and that the human race has always managed to adapt. I don't doubt that the human race can adapt to the current warming climate change too, but our technology and living patterns have changed over the past thousand years, so I am also sure that rising sea levels that inundate lots of coastal plains and cities, as well as changing weather patterns that will dramatically affect farm lands and what kinds of foods can be grown in the future will certainly plan hob with our current level of civilization, unless we began to make some preparations for those changes right now.

Opuntia usually offers a lot of variety and a uniquely different focus. 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 efanazines.com website.



THE KEN CHRONICLES #44

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 his decision to actually buy a condo in Florida, since he spends so much time down there anyway. Of course, the sale came with problems, some of them more complicated than expected, but Ken happens to be very good when it comes to home repairs, and the legal problems turned out to be manageable. He is leaning towards selling off his house in New York, but the jungle-like temps and humidity of Florida in the summer months will likely prevent that. Not to mention the state's delightful location which makes it a prime target for most Caribbean hurricanes and tropical storms during the late summer and fall months. Readers can stay tuned for future developments, but Ken and his better half are pretty darn sick of the New York winter ice and snow, and the cold, wet, late spring seasons too.

This issue's discussions about places that aren't there any more covers the coffin factory that was an integral part of his old neighborhood for years and years, until suddenly it wasn't. The building is still there, but now it has changed into a storage warehouse for the Goodrich tire company. The other article under this heading deals with a pond in a neighborhood park that the city decided was too dangerous, so they filled it in and tried to turn it into a ball field. Mother Nature, as is often the case, did not appreciate that meddling, and regularly flooded that field with water levels and muck that often lasted for long periods of time. Finally the city decided that what the park really needed in that location was a nice quiet pond, or maybe a small lake. And with some extra municipal spending, that is what is there now, abet somewhat different from the pond from Ken's childhood days.

He discusses books read, movies seen, music recently purchased (or given to him), with a long section on fanzines he has recently received. I note that all of these are perzines, more specifically, biography zines, and that none of the titles he discusses have the least connection with science fiction/fantasy/comics/games or media entertainment.

There is a whole subdivision of print perzines from people discussing their lives and reaching out to touch other people who also want to present their life experiences in print. This is different from on-line blogs. Most on-line blogs tend to be stream-of-consciousness mutterings about daily life, a sort of web-based diary that lets anybody with a computer read pages that in past days would have been kept in a closed and locked journal. A print perzine forces the writer to organize thots and subjects and make a presentation that will attract the

person reading it, and also induce that person to keep reading. That's not to say there aren't fanzines that are totally insane/random mish-mashes that pander to the most self-indulgent narcissistic impulses, but a majority of print perzines do not do that. They feature writing and the kinds of articles that used to show up in the little literary magazines, (back when little literary magazines were an actual literary genre). Ken's reviews and comments about the current batch of perzines he has received make interesting reading.

There are plenty of photographs thruout, plus nattering about car rental rates, restaurant foods encountered and people encountered at his vacation condo. There are also some letters. This was another relaxed, fun read all the way thru. Give this mag a try, you'll enjoy it.



LOFGEORNOST #128

8-1/2x11"; 8 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 the recent CBC TV adaptation of the first Anne of Green Gables novel. This series of girl's books, eleven volumes long, was a perennial part of many girls' childhood reading for generations. The books are still in print in paperback form, and thru the years there have been many efforts to turn the series, particularly the first book of the series, into movies and television specials.

Unfortunately this latest effort was not one of the best. Fred notes that in an effort to somehow modernize the original story the producer and writer decided to add a "documentary level of realism", which turned out to mean they crafted a deliberately darker, more edgy story which includes some scenes of potential sexual menace and sexual experimentation. Fred does not approve, and points out some of the problems with this treatment, and concludes it is probably not suitable for the age group the original stories were aimed at. I might also ask why would anyone want to modernize this charming period piece in the first place? Clearly the producers of this program were trying to capitalize on the fame and familiarity of the Anne of Green Gables title in order to lure those people who remembered the books, and their children, into watching this series. Most of those people, including their children, were probably as outraged by what they saw as Fred was. The people who run television networks get paid serious money to turn out TV shows that will generate positive reactions from their audience, not outrage and complaints. I have to wonder how far out of touch with their viewing audience the TV executive who approved this project must have been.

Fred also has some comments on viewing a "Doggy Hamlet", a play featuring canines in costume, shown in a drizzling rain, which only served to make the production worse. He also discusses his reading of several books examining India. its history and geography during the time period in which Kipling's novel "Kim" takes place.

The heart of most *Lofgeornost* issues is the long, meaty letter column, and this issue does not disappoint. There are freewheeling discussions about the comparisons between the current US president's reliance on wide-sweeping proclamations, and the rule of law, as well as the legal opposition to those neocon concepts, plus of course, commentary on science fiction and fantasy in print form and the visual media.

This fanzine only comes out four times a year, but it is always worth the wait, and these issues are always enjoyable.

DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE OF TIGHTBEAM IS NOVEMBER 20, 2017