

Tighbeam #284

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This is issue **#284** 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

EDITORIAL RAMBLINGS

by **Bob Jennings**



ODDITIES ON THE WEB

OK, that's pretty much an understatement. There are zillions of bizarre and unusual oddities on the world wide web these days, some of which may even be interesting, or even (gasp!) true.

I'm not referring to that stuff. The oddities I have been noticing over the past month or two has to do with the advertising that shows up along the borders and top/bottom of assorted web pages I look at. It is no secret that IPOs are now using targeting search advertising to link up with each individual user's personal interests. What this means is that if someone has recently been looking over web sites selling, say, snow blowers, that when he moves on to other web sites, including social media pages, that the IPO ad link will automatically begin showing up spot ads for snow blowers of different types and prices on the new web pages.

When user targeted advertising first showed up some years ago there was a great hue and cry about it. But now most people have gotten pretty much used to the whole gimmick. Like most people, I can ignore targeted ads with the best of them.

But lately something new has come along. I don't buy much off the internet these days and what I do tends to be books, video movies, comic strip reprint collections or the like. But for some reason the ad bars on sites I look at now have suddenly turned into ads for women's clothing! I'm not married, and I don't buy women's clothing for lady friends either. So why is this stuff suddenly showing up on my web browser pages?

One series of ads shows beautiful young damsels in fashionable dresses with hemlines that seem to be barely below the crotch area. In this mix are some backless playsuit type things made of gold or silver lamia cloth. I have no objection to looking at beautiful young women in sexy clothes, but I wonder how the marketing software decided I would ever be a customer for this kind of merchandise.

Then, as an added wrinkle, over the past couple of weeks I am also getting ads for women modeling more traditional style dresses with hemlines at or slightly above knee level. These are women who might

charitably be described as way more than pleasantly plump. Way, way more. A few of the ladies look like they could easily model for the “before” picture in those miracle weight loss ads that used to appear in the back pages of popular magazines.

Why would the ad goblins assume I would have any interest in this stuff? Could it be that gremlins have gotten into the ad software programs and are screwing things up? Has anybody else out there had any similar bizarre experiences with targeted internet advertising? Email me, I’d love to hear if anybody else has experienced this kind of weirdness.

THE COVER THIS ISSUE is yet another of those impressive posters for interplanetary travel designed in the retro art-deco style of the early 1930s by The Jet Propulsion Laboratory of the California Institute of Technology. They were developed as a promotional effort for their organization, which as they note, has always been concerned with turning positive technological developments into workable solutions for the future. Fourteen different future-style travel posters, collectively titled “Visions of the Future” were created by a team of nine different artists, designers, and illustrators, consulting with the laboratory’s science and tech experts. The whole series is well worth checking out, and, as noted on the website, any and all of those posters is free to download, print up, share with friends, or otherwise make positive use of. The website designation is--- <https://www.jpl.nasa.gov/visionsof-the-future/about.php>



STILL TIME TO VOTE IN THE FAAn AWARDS

As mentioned last issue, these awards are specifically linked to the people who produce fanzines for our hobby. This has nothing to do with professional publishers, movies, TV, media, or any of the other things one might normally associate with such industry-wide awards as the Hugos.

The FAAN awards are specifically and very narrowly devoted to fanzines and the people who write, draw, edit and publish fanzines. This year Nic Farey is in charge of distributing and handling the ballots, and he has done an excellent job of both explaining the awards, along with the separate categories, plus he has also assembled a pretty comprehensive ballot listing almost everything concerning fanzines that appeared in the past year of 2017. You can read the entire list (and I urge you to do so), by going to this web link--- <http://efanzines.com/TIR/Incomplete2017.pdf> The title of the info zine, if you forget, is *The Incomplete Register* 2017, and it is posted on the efanzines.com website. Please go there, look over the entire zine and the ballot in particular, and then vote. You can vote by email, or by printing out the sheets and sending them in via regular mail. The deadline for all voting is 15 March.

A BLATENT ATTEMPT TO SWAY SOME VOTES

Please go directly down to page 8 in this issue and read the article by Andy Hooper

discussing a newish book written by long time science fiction fan William Breiding. Please do this right now. I’ll wait here for you.

OK, good, you read the article. I want to echo Andy’s opinions 100%. If you have not yet read “Rose Motel”, please hunt down a copy and do so. It happens that copies of the book are on sale at many internet book selling sites, including Amazon.com for \$15.00. Or copies can be ordered direct from the author for \$15.00 post paid (and if you ask, Bill will even autograph the copy for you).

If your financial situation is so stressed that you cannot afford \$15 right now, then go to your local library and ask them to order a copy for you. Check with their inter-library loan. There are copies in some libraries already and you might be able to get a copy that way that you can read. But do this, and read the book.

Then after you have read the book, vote in the FAAn awards, and mark “Rose Motel” in the #1 slot in the Special Publications section. If you have already sent in your FAAn ballot, contact Nic Farey direct by email (at fareynic@gmail.com) and ask him to add or change your ballot to reflect your recent reading, and your new opinion of this book. If you have read the book there will be no argument about my suggestion. If you have not read the book, get a copy, read it, and then you’ll know why so many people, including Andy Hooper and myself, have been so impressed by this volume. Please, do this right away. You will not regret it.

AMONG THE MORE INTERESTING NEWS THIS MONTH

is the announcement that *Amazing Stories* is going to make another go of

it as a print magazine. *Amazing Stories* was the first magazine devoted entirely to science fiction stories. Thru its long and sometimes checkered history, *Amazing Stores* existed as a print publication for most of its existence. Then things changed. Ownership shifted a number of times, and in recent years the publication has been a web presence offering some fiction and a lot of articles. The current owners feel it is time to return to the traditional print format. Here is the full announcement of what they are planning---



AMAZING STORIES TO LAUNCH KICKSTARTER CAMPAIGN

Plans Quarterly Issues Beginning August 2018

The Experimenter Publishing Company is proud to announce that it will be reviving *Amazing Stories* as a professional science fiction print magazine. The first issue is planned for August, to be available at WorldCon in San Jose; several well-known writers have already committed to contributing to it. The magazine will be published on a quarterly basis after that.

Hugo Gernsback published the premier issue of *Amazing Stories* back in [April 1926](#). It was the world's first science fiction magazine and *Amazing* went on to publish works by writers now recognized as giants in the field, such as Jules Verne, H. G. Wells, E. E. "Doc" Smith, Robert A. Heinlein, Isaac Asimov and others. For the last five years, *Amazing* has been a social website that has published primarily non-fiction articles, although it has also produced three issues of fiction, as well as reprints of classic issues.

In order to make this dream a reality, we need your help. Starting [March 1](#), 2018, we will be running a Kickstarter campaign to raise seed funding for the magazine. Premiums will include: subscriptions, signed copies of books; editing of short stories; getting your image on the cover of the magazine; and much more.

Please contribute and help us let all fans know of our plans. With your support, we will be able to bring this iconic science fiction magazine back!

The Experimenter Publishing Company is an online and print publisher of science fiction, fantasy and horror.

###

In my opinion, this is definitely worth checking out.

LETTERS



Dave Haren;

I was glad to see Mary Alice featured. She always could crank out a good tale that kept you wondering what was going to happen next.

Cranky olde fan Art isn't exactly known for generating reams of print when a quick cut gets the job done.

The UFO realm has been the conflation of enormous numbers of things that don't mix well.

I knew the guy who located Area 51 for Kelly Johnson to relocate the Lockheed Skunk works to Nevada.

I've also seen UFO photos that were of the F117 before it was common knowledge. Anytime you fly experimental aircraft around and someone sees it, you get a UFO. Add to that that most people have zero ability to identify real aircraft and it doesn't take much to generate a skyful of oddities.

However there are things that occur that don't fit so neatly into the bland idea that we know everything. Once you get around the UFO crowd who are weirdly aberrant by any measure and realize that there's more than Horatio's philosophy covers.

How do you separate what happens in someone's head from something seen in passing in the sky? Since the mysterious interiors of the human skull are very hard to dig into at any depth we aren't going to get the definitive answers in the near future.

I could also say something about Spielberg and his wholesale theft of the SF materials around him but that is how creativity works. No one is so wonderfully self contained that they can generate material from nothing. Truly great people can mask the sources so well you have to dig deeply to see what they have done.

A useful news item or two for gamers and comics fans. Kill Six Billion Demons has a second physical book out and the RPG is now in print as well.

Steve Jackson games is readying Triplanetary for re-issue for those diehard fans of early SF gaming who missed out during the glory days of science fiction gaming.

####Thanks for your letter of comment on *Tightbeam* #283. Andre Norton has proven her ability to tell an interesting story by the number of times her books have been reprinted, and by how many decades her material has stayed in print. I always thot it was interesting that the material she originally focused on, historical adventure stories for pre and early teen-age boys, generally went out of print after one or two printings, but her science fiction/fantasy stories were universally popular with all ages. It's true that many of her earlier non-stf novels have come back into print lately, but this is entirely due to the popularity of her SF/fantasy works. People like her fantastic novels so much that they are willing to go look at her more mundane adventure stories as well, certainly the mark of a remarkably popular author.###



Nic Farey; fareynic@gmail.com

I very much appreciate your editorial section publicizing the FAAn awards (also, thanks for the 'boo!'), and indeed agree that an increase in ballot participation is a Ghood Thing.

Looking at your publishing schedule, this loc might appear about a week before the voting deadline of March 15 and thus serve as a final reminder of sorts.

I observe upfront in *The Incomplete Register* that my listings would inevitably be prone to errors and omissions, though hopefully not too many (a couple of corrections have already been mentioned, and this ought to make the 2018 version a little better for it). I note with interest your comment about a general omission of clubzines, so let me expand a little, there.

The FAAn Awards have never really had set-in-stone "rules", and the procedure has varied somewhat between different administrators. My only proscripton, as such, has been to return to the original intent of the awards in the sense of honoring work from the previous calendar year (which TIR attempts to summarize), but I do work from an underlying philosophy of what we're going to define as a "fanzine" for that purpose. One essential tenet, for me, is to define "fanzine-as-artifact": that might be simply described as a publication with a colophon (or an implied one), which once issued is fixed. Paper copies clearly meet this definition, as do pdfs. The other, perhaps more blurry pillar is that a zine (as defined "eligible" - a contentious term - for the awards) should be "generally/publicly available". Clubzines might not meet this criterion if their distribution is limited to members only. APAzines also generally don't unless, like Taral's *Rat Sass* for example, they are put into the general Faniverse on efanazines or some other unrestricted source. I should stress that this is a personal interpretation and not guided by ancient voices.

The individual categories have been altered and adjusted over the years. The original incarnation of the awards (1975-80) had six, the 1995 revival began with a simple three (Fanzine, Fanwriter, Fanartist). The underlying spirit of the awards has always been to spread the 'boo widely. It's nice to get the win, of course, but the feeling has always been that it's equally nice to get recognition for plowing the furrows at all, which is why, typically, a full summary of all votes gets issued.

The initial separation of the "Best Fanzine" category into Genzine, Perzine and "Special Publication" began in 2012 under the admirable tenure of Andy Hooper as administrator. Again here, in the spirit of 'boo, this was intended to show appreciation for the generally simpler "perzine" without such ishes having to compete against what Leigh Edmonds calls "BFFs" (Big Fat Fanzines, but hey, choose your own adjective), and also to recognize one-offs which might miss out in recognition when up against frequently published zines. Mark Plummer, by the way, has a very interesting take on a hypothetical fanzine matchup in a loc in BEAM 12. As always, there are notable exceptions. Mike Dobson's *Random Jottings*, a perzine, can hold its own for production values against any BFF out there. (In fact, by Leigh's definition, it is a BFF.)

Your clubzine comment, Bob, would seem to imply an argument for creating a "clubzine" category for the awards. That's an arguable proposition, which nevertheless goes against the grain of some groundswell for simplification rather than expansion of the award categories, although my own position on this would be to possibly eliminate the "website/online" category to focus on "fanzine-as-artifact" potential honorees and stick to my "publicly available" feeling.

Your opinion, and that of others is always welcomed by me. I'll add here that I will be continuing in the FAAn awards administrator job for the 2019 awards (for work published in 2018), and both private and public comment is invited.

###Thanks for your comments on *Tightbeam* #283 and your thots about the FAAn Awards. In general I agree with your comments regarding clubzines and apazines. The criteria of whether they should be seriously considered for the awards should be whether they are more generally circulated, or at least available to people who are not necessarily members of the particular club of apa.

In this area I think that the N3F zine *TNFF* easily qualifies. It is widely circulated outside the club membership and is also posted on Bill's efanazine.com website. I would also suggest that DASFax meets that same criteria because it is available to people who are not necessarily members of the Denver science fiction club. I am not so sure about other clubzines. I occasionally get copies from assorted clubs on a random basis, sometimes with a note asking that I review the current issue in the fanzine review column, but if there isn't some indication that the zine can be obtained/read by people beyond the club itself then I generally decline, and I think those clubzines do not meet the criteria.

By the same token I note that Bill Plott regularly posts his SFPazine *Sporadic* on the efanazines.com site. I also belong to SFPA, but I have never circulated my apazine, *The Typo King*, outside the SFPA membership and I never intend to do so. Bill's zine should qualify for the awards, *Typo King* should not.

I am not suggesting there should be a clubzine category. In my opinion that would be counter productive to the whole spirit of the FAAn awards, and if such a category ever was initiated I think it would generate precious few votes. But listing those clubzines that are offered to people who are not specifically club members on the ballot seems fair and reasonable.###



George Phillies; phillies@4liberty.net

I hope this finds you well. I much enjoyed the latest *Tightbeam*!

The account of “Earth vs Flying Saucers” and related films was very interesting. There are a few bits in the film that are also noteworthy. In particular, the film included a real computer doing computer-type things. The computer was the UCLA Differential Analyzer, which actually existed 60 years ago. This was one of its two film appearances, the other being in “When Worlds Collide”.

In “When Worlds Collide” it was shown doing something that it could actually do, namely calculating the future orbits of Bronson Alpha and Bronson Beta, the strange invaders from deep space that were going to destroy earth and provide humanity's salvation, at least for a few of us. In “Earth vs Flying Saucers” it was shown doing something totally impossible, at the time, namely computer machine translation of alien radio messages. We had actually captured an alien translation device, so we could do word by word translations; it translated texts. With modern computers, you could actually do this, but back then it was sci-fi at its finest.

The film also showed a piece of modern warfare, namely small drones that could enter buildings. In the film, there was a drone saucer that got into the secret underground lab. It was taken out before it could do something unfortunate. For all that we have had cruise missiles since World War One (these tend to be forgotten, even by comparison with the US J-1 Flying Bomb), drones so maneuverable were again SF.

Third, unlike many other films in period (“The Mysterians” was also virtuous in this respect), the saucers are beaten by international collaboration. The hero and friends are working on defense schemes, the schemes are not working, but they get a letter from a prominent physicist in India, suggesting the means that was actually used to shoot down the flying saucers. The Mysterians? Watch the segment where military officers from all around the world are arriving at the Japanese Earth Defense Headquarter. (Yes, I spelled that correctly.) There are Americans, and iirc Frenchmen, and if you watch carefully one of the cars unloading dignitaries has a Communist Chinese flag on it.

Naturally, your taste in fiction lastish cannot be improved upon. Note that heroine Marshall-Fitzryan is actually in her late 20s or early 30s, and is a very level-headed sort. I did not need her exact age so I did not populate it. Some readers would suggest that I went slightly overboard with the villains, but, then, they are supposed to be villainous.

###Your points about the film “Earth Vs. the Flying Saucers” are appreciated. Frankly, that has always been one of my favorite science fiction movies, and I felt that Sourdough Jackson unduly trashed it in his article.

Even tho Jackson didn't care for at all, it remains one of those films that remains near and dear to the hearts of most SF fans, including me. Yeah, there was some real crappy pseudo-science dropped in here and there; like describing the alien's armor as being made of “solidified electricity”, but at the same time the entire movie stuck to the core principles of good science fiction literature

Instead of opting to make the hero some hot-shot military jet pilot, or a tough two-fisted macho strong jawed type so beloved by so many Z-grade science fiction flicks, the protagonist here was a scientist, and a thinker. Yes, he had a beautiful and intelligent wife, but it was clear she was no eye candy dumb bunny, she appreciated the guy as a human being, and she contributed to the process of dealing with the menace. The hero used logic, science, and applied reasoning to figure out a bizarre, dangerous situation, and then he was able to come up with positive solutions to the flying saucer menace.

I also note that this did not all come forth all at once as some sort miraculous burst of divine insight (a situation very common in most high FX modern sci-fi movies), but was worked out over the entire course of the movie. The hero was portrayed as a realistic very human individual who used his knowledge to recognize and then figure a method of dealing with the problem.

So far as the special effects, the stop motion animation Harryhausen provided of the attacking flying saucers still strikes me as being much more effective than the explosions, blasting sound effects and scenes of vast destruction which have been the hallmark of most sci-fi cinema produced since at least thru the late 1990s. I'm sorry 'Jackson' did not care for this movie, but when I raised some of these points and asked if he had any second thots he declined to change his opinions.###

Rose Motel---More than just a memoir

by Andy Hooper

A few years ago, at the Corflu convention in Richmond, Virginia, something led me to comment that changes in publishing technology and the customs of fanzine fandom were making it less likely that anyone will collect or anthologize our work, unless we choose to do it for ourselves. Fandom doesn't think of being fanthologized as the honor it once did, partly because fanzine production no longer involves the cutting of stencils and the turning of cranks. But I also had in mind the typical fan-writer's very specific opinions about their work, and how and what they would like to be remembered by; and it is so much easier to control these elements if you do the work yourself. And, I noted, if you do feel like you want to collect someone's work to honor them while they are still alive to enjoy it, time is running out on us all.

Jump forward to the spring of 2017, and a thick envelope arrives in my mailbox from William Breiding in Tucson, Arizona. Inside is a copy of *Rose Motel*, a very handsome trade paperback collection of Bill's writing, available online through Amazon.com and other vendors (It doesn't have a publishing house, but it does have an ISBN: 1542902819). A yellow post-it note attached to the title page credited my remarks in Richmond with having helped move him to the completion of the project. Thus pre-inclined to look favorably on the book, I devoured every word inside.

The book is sub-titled "Fanzine Pieces 1980-2014," so there is certainly no attempt to conceal the amateur origins of the work. But I think almost anyone with any familiarity with fandom would note how different Breiding's writing is from the typical fanzine composition. Fans excel at writing thousands of words about things of the most trivial nature – club and convention politics, where the group went for lunch on Saturday, and who threatens to end fandom's way of life as we know it. They say things to one another with their mouths, and study the reactions on their sensitive fannish faces.

Bill Breiding doesn't do any of that. He writes about experiences, but they are always experiences that mean something significant to him, and they only occasionally have much of anything to do with science fiction or fandom. I'm sure I first encountered his work in the late Bill Bowers' fanzine *OUTWORLDS*, and Breiding dedicates *Rose Motel* to Bowers, in gratitude for that early encouragement. From those earliest appearances, he was without mercy for the reader; he plunged them directly into the turbulent narrative of a sometime violent, sometimes Bohemian childhood, a lifelong struggle for love and companionship extending to the places in which he has tried to live, and an enduring attraction to nature and the wilderness, which haunted and twined in his relationship with his dangerous father. His work can be plaintive without being whiny, and he can give a real voice to his sense of wonder without descending into treacle or madness, marking him as a true fannish asset in what are alternately wonder-challenged and wonder-saturated times.

His work has always had an arresting effect on me. Encountered in the pages of Gary Mattingly's underrated *SKUG* or Lichtman's gleaming *TRAP DOOR*, it always made me stop and go back over what I'd just read. Who is this guy? And why is he telling me about the fallout that the war between his mother and father precipitated into his life? And when it became clear that we had both spent some part of our childhood in the coal-mining college town of Morgantown, West Virginia, I began to feel a curious affinity with Bill, and watched carefully for his byline to appear in other places.

Submitted discreetly into fandom's conversation over a 34 year span, I'm not sure how many had noticed what a comprehensive and self-revelatory narrative Bill has shared with fandom. But when collected into a 210-page volume, the honesty of the work has little parallel in fandom. On the

other hand, Bill assures me that there are “two pieces of hokum” in the collection; I honestly forgot to look for them, and have no idea which pieces are actually fictional. If I had to guess, I’d say it was one of the pieces about his relationships with women, which seem terribly dramatic for all that they have been, in sum, less than satisfying. Breiding has a kind of chronic ennui that could easily descend into crabbiness, but which never does so. His depiction of his father, a misanthropic alcoholic who assaulted William’s mother, yet also helped preserve thousands of acres of West Virginia wilderness and pioneered the modern recreational extension programs of West Virginia University, is a masterwork. He writes with such fond understanding of his father’s love for nature that the reader quite forgets the fear and subversive resistance that his earlier behavior had inspired in his children.

This was so dire that William’s mother eventually gathered most of the children and defected to San Francisco. Then they returned temporarily to a farm in rural West Virginia, before escaping again to California, one or two at a time. The moves reminded me of the fits and starts by which Ray Bradbury’s family eventually relocated from Illinois to Los Angeles – they too had stops in Arizona, with relatives who lived in Tucson. Eventually, Bill decided that he would just as soon be neglected in San Francisco, and spent large chunks of the 1970s and 1980s there. I found the fact that two of William’s older brothers were his gateway into fandom one of the few elements of his story that I envied – even in the let-it-all-hang-out 1970s, my parents were largely convinced that fandom represented some kind of child labor scam.

There are topical pieces here too, appreciations of musicians like Dave Alvin and Ronnie Dawson, a playful reaction to Armistead Maupin’s *Tales of the City*, and the disillusioning experience of trying to re-read Tolkien after having his work read aloud as a child. His overall view is skeptical, possibly insurgent; fandom has been letting him down for over 40 years now, and shows no sign of reversing its pattern. But there is something hopeful or at least cheerfully resigned in his narrative voice. His mode is one of perpetual flirtation: with human intimacy, with aesthetic and artistic satisfaction, with the very idea of home, or permanent roots and their comforts. I found myself wondering how much Breiding knows about his father and mother’s ancestry; his ties to West Virginia are much deeper than mine, as I only lived there between the ages of 5 and 7. But even that exposure to its woodland slopes was enough to capture my imagination forever, and I still sometimes dream of hunting for yellow lady slippers in the abandoned seminary that lay farther up Tyrone Road from our home.



Breiding inspires that kind of reverie in me; he reminds me at times of Billy Wolfenbarger, alongside whom he has sometimes been published. Wolfenbarger also offers his personal experience without preamble or justification, and has also spent months of his life camping somewhere wild. Breiding wrote to me in the wake of the Richmond Conflu, expressing his disappointment that we had not had more opportunity to talk; I felt the same way, but also felt that a suburban hotel was a terrible place to get to know William 11 Breiding; by rights, we should take a long hike together, climbing to some scenic overlook, and letting silences settle between passages of conversation.

Rose Motel is an admirable substitute, however, an excellent map of Bill Breiding’s mind, and some elegant clues to his heart. After reading all 30 pieces in it, I’m convinced his work was perfectly suited for the fanzines and alternative papers where it was first published, and that it is writers like Bill that keep me fascinated by fanzines after all these years. The book’s satin-finished covers were designed by Pat Virzi; the handsome package has me daydreaming what a collection of my own work would be like, and if anyone would be willing to give Amazon \$15.00 for a copy. I’m not sure very much of my work would warrant that treatment, while Bill seems to have spent 34 years composing material worthy of this collection. It’s certainly my favorite “Special Publication” of the year.



BOOKS



The Great Martian War Counterattack; by Scott Washburn; Trade Paperback \$18.00; e-book \$9.99

We have here the third volume (trade paperback, 360 pages) of Scott Washburn's alternative history of the second Martian invasion of earth, in ca. 1910. Wells' Martians have learned from experience, and protect themselves from microorganisms. The first invasion was one Martian clan. The new invasion is supported by their entire planet and lands across all the earth. The Martians make a point of landing in places where they will not immediately be overcome by local armies. We follow their invasion of the United States under President Teddy Roosevelt.

The tale is told from a limited number of points of view, including Roosevelt and a few of his generals, cavalry commander Frank Dolfen, western cowgirl turned sniper Rebecca Harding (who was present at the first landing in the Western US), US Army officer Andrew Comstock, and Martian leader

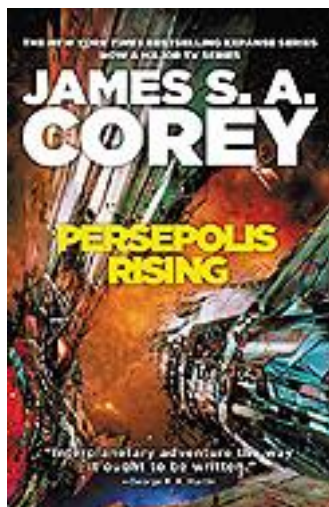
Qetjnegartis. We have enough characters that we see what is going on in different places, but not so many characters that there is no possibility of remembering all of them or what they are doing. Roosevelt must face politics and foreign countries. Martian politics are even worse.

The Martians have strengths but also limitations. Their heat ray melts through metal, but is not very effective against concrete. Their poison gas can be blocked by appropriate filters. The humans have artillery, and by this volume primitive aircraft, steam tanks, and land ironclads. Inventors Edison and Tesla, and various military personages, make cameo appearances.

At the start of this volume, the Martians have captured the United States from parts of the Rockies to the Mississippi, and launch their next attacks. American forces respond. Events in the rest of the world are referenced but not seen. Both sides show military creativity and surprise the other.

The writing is good, not at all wooden. The editing is first rate with spelling and grammar free of annoying errors.

---Review by George Phillies



Persepolis Rising by James E. Corey; hardback \$28.00, Trade Paperback \$11.99; NOTE: the e-book version at \$14.99 is more expensive

This is the seventh novel of 'The Expanse' series. Like "The Last Jedi" this book is another directional change for the series. I got hooked immediately on this hard science story set about 250 years in the future where humanity has spread into the whole Solar System, before a game-changing encounter with abandoned alien technology. One major theme of the series is the concept of the

Great Man in history. In 'The Expanse' series James Holden is the reluctant Great Man through personal charisma, unbending ethics, and a lot of just being there at the right time. The world of "Persepolis Rising" is a different place than where it all started in "The Expanse".

We've seen some other contenders for Great Man in this series as well. Chrisjen Avarsala leads from the shadows, but has a better grasp of the Big Picture than Holden will ever have. Carlos Inaros certainly had a big impact in volumes 5 and 6, and thought of himself as a Great Man, but ended up being a puppet. Now we are introduced to a character that may be an ever greater Great Man than Holden: Winston Duarte.

The Solar System has survived Marcos Inaros's Belter War, but only barely. Earth's bombardment has caused damage that may take generations to recover from. Mars is depressed and the terraforming project is going nowhere because the galactic gate has opened contact with thousands of other worlds more hospitable than Mars. The Belters are actually doing well after Holden's brilliant idea at the end of "Babylon's Ashes" to create a new niche for them: flying trade between Sol and the colony systems.

Everything more-or-less hums along for thirty years. Then "Grand Consul" Wilson Duarte sends an enormous warship through the gate from his exile world of Laconia. He's had all this time to study Protomolecule technology and now has tricks that laugh off any of Sol's military might. Duarte has volunteered to become humanity's Benevolent Dictator. When his character was first introduced in "Nemesis Games", Duarte was the one stealing Martian warships and secretly supporting Inaros, leading to the Belter War. We know he's not a good guy, but he's very smart, subtle, and capable of playing a long game. We also know he's playing with Protomolecule technology, and in "Cibolae Burn" we know that doing that risks waking things up that are very much best left sleeping.

Each volume of the series raises the stakes for the human race. This book is no different. The characters are all older and wiser, but the problems they face keep escalating by orders of magnitude. The seeming end-game will be an eventual confrontation with the beings who destroyed the Protomolecule Builders several billion years ago. Those creatures are still out there, and with Duarte poking sticks into the dark holes of Protomolecule Technology, it's only a matter of time before humanity will have to face the ultimate Big Bad.

This volume was another fine addition to the 'Expanse' series, well crafted and enjoyable to read.

---review by Gary Robe



Princess Holy Aura by Ryk Spoor; Trade Paperback \$15.00, e-book \$7.99

Ryk Spoor's *Princess Holy Aura* (Baen Books, trade paperback, 430 pages) is a wonderful merger of two literary traditions, the Lovecraftian horrors preparing to invade the world because soon the stars will be right, and the Japanese animation magical girl (mahou shoujo) tradition that many Americans will know through *Sailor Moon*.

Since ancient Lemuria, whenever the stars are wrong the one surviving Lemurian magician has incarnated five Apocalypse Maidens to stand against the eldritch horror of the nine-armed Azathoth and her minions. Silvertail (Trayne Owen) has now tired of inflicting Apocalypse Maiden status on teenage girls. He feels guilty about sending them possibly to their deaths. He instead chooses 30-odd-year old Stephen Russ, a man little successful at life other than as an RPG gamesmaster, to become the first Maiden. They must infiltrate the deepest concentration of angst, depression, frustration and agony known to man, this being a modern high school, which Russ manages by creating for Princess Holy Aura a new secret identity, with appropriate body, another teenage girl, Holly Owen. At first Russ considers it fortunate that if Cthulhoids are finally defeated, this segment of time will be rewritten with no Cthonic traces. All will be forgotten.

There are five Apocalypse Maidens. Silvertail chose the first; the spell chooses the rest in more conventional ways. Dealing with parental units -- ummh, sorry, but this uncontrollable spell has turned your daughter into a superhero -- provides various challenges. After a while, the five Maidens come to be friends, but realize that when things are all over they will never have met. The Cthulhoids appear, each more powerful than the last, until finally...but that would be telling. The government secret occult agency makes a few appearances. It tries to capture an Apocalypse Maiden and find the problem much more difficult than anticipated.

A four-page tribute to E.E. Smith's Children of the Lens was particularly well done. Readers not familiar with Smith, who was a founding member of the N3F, will think everything is well-written; readers familiar with Smith will recognize the references.

It's definitely worth a read.

---review by George Phillies

The Ruins of Gorlan (Ranger's Apprentice #1) by John Flanagan; Trade Paperback at 8.99, with audio and e-book versions available



First published in 2004, “The Ruins of Gorlan” is the first of twelve novels in the Ranger's Apprentice series by Australian author, John Flanagan. Originally written to encourage the author's twelve-year-old son to read, the books have since gained thousands of fans around the world.

The Ruins of Gorlan opens by introducing the reader to Morgarath, Lord of the Mountains of Rain and Night, a desolate region in the south-east of an island that is in some ways analogous to, and inspired by, seventh-century Britain (with a touch of J. R. R. Tolkien's Middle Earth). (A map of the island is provided early in the book.) Fifteen years previously, Morgarath – then lord of Gorlan – had attempted to overthrow the king of Araluen, a country that occupies most of the island. Defeated, he had been exiled to the Mountains of Rain and Night where he is now plotting again to take Araluen's throne.

The narrative then shifts its focus to Will, an orphan and a ward of Lord Arald. Having reached the age of fifteen, Will and his ‘wardmates’ – Alyss, George, Horace and Jenny – are selected by different Craftmasters to be their apprentices. Will is disappointed that he's not selected for Battleschool but is puzzled when a ranger named Halt picks him as his apprentice. Although the network of rangers across the country use their skills in espionage, tracking, concealment, and archery to provide the kingdom with a first line of defense against its would-be enemies, Will is fearful of them because of their mysterious and secretive ways and their supposed ability to wield magic. Halt's taciturn nature and the constant chores and exercises he gives Will do not make it easy for the boy to warm to him but, over a number of months, Will and Halt come to respect each other as the apprentice does his master's bidding and hones his skills as a budding ranger.

During the same period, Will's wardmates are also developing their respective skills in diplomacy, cooking, legal studies and, in the case of Horace, that of combat. Horace demonstrates to his superiors that he has natural martial abilities, but all the while he finds himself being bullied by a group of older boys at the school, and this comes to affect Horace's friendship with his wardmates.

Meanwhile, Morgarath's scheming becomes increasingly evident in Araluen. As a matter of urgency, while still only an apprentice with a few months' training, Will is forced to prove his mettle as a ranger when he accompanies Halt to confront the inhuman Kalkara, Morgarath's deadly assassins!

I liked Flanagan's play on names for this fantasy version of Britain and Europe (e.g. The Solitary Plain is substituted for Salisbury Plain and has its own Stonehenge-like monument, while the Vikings menacing the eastern coast are here rendered as the Skandians). It's a pity that though Flanagan has based his fantasy world on an alternate history of Europe, he has decided to stick to a more traditional gender division of labour among the new apprentices, with the boys being trained as a ranger, a soldier and a lawyer, and the girls being apprenticed as a diplomat and a cook. I'm also a bit sceptical that ‘Ranger horses could maintain a canter all day without tiring’ (p. 236) and it seems anachronistic to use centimeters as a unit of measure (p. 250). Sometimes, I feel the skills that Will develops seem to come too easily to him, making me wonder why he needs to practice them at all!

However, the book as a whole is a fun and easy read with plenty of action and humor. Although the protagonist and his wardmates are aged 15, the publishers market the book as being for ages 10+, and this is reflected, for the most part, in the writing. Nevertheless, older teenagers and young-at-heart adults will enjoy The Ruins of Gorlan.

---review by Greg Fewer



The Magicians by Lev Grossman; Hardback \$24.95, Trade Paperback \$17.00, e-book \$12.99

When you write a novel about young people who attend a school for magicians, you invite comparison with the Harry Potter books. In this book, the Harry Potter equivalent is Quentin Coldwater, although he is a high school senior applying to Princeton at the beginning of the book. This makes him considerably older than Harry who is actually a baby at the beginning of Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone. Nor is Quentin an orphan, as both his parents are alive, although Quentin does not really like them. There is no equivalent of Ron Weasley, but there is for Hermione in the character of Alice. Since they are older and have no Ron to complicate things, Quentin and Alice become lovers in the course of the story. Their friends Elliott, Josh, and Janet are more like Harry's other friends in Gryffindor rather than a best-friend-forever like Ron.

Brakebills, the school in this novel, is more like a college than Hogwarts, although Quentin, Alice, and their fellow students are required to wear uniforms. Another difference is that Harry was automatically accepted for Hogwarts because of his talent for magic, but Quentin had to take an entrance exam and was one of the only two people to be accepted that year. (The other student, a young man named Penny, is a major character, but he and Quentin never really become friends.) Furthermore, Brakebills does not have the nurturing environment that Hogwarts provided, but is more like a highly competitive pre-professional school from which only a few of the students will graduate.

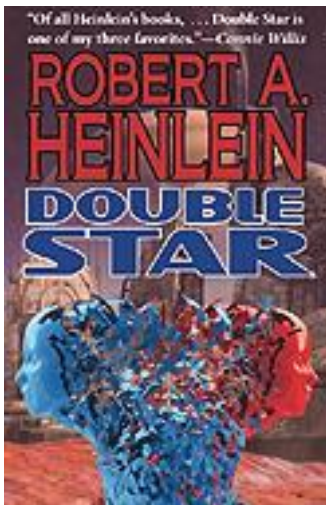
There is even a game called "welters", but few of the characters have the enthusiasm for it that the Hogwarts students have for quidditch. There is no equivalent of Voldemort in *The Magicians*, which is much more character driven than the Harry Potter books. This would not be a problem, except that Quentin and his self-centered acquaintances are a lot less likeable than Harry and his friends. They spend their leisure time getting drunk, having sex, and wondering about their futures. In other words, it is an attempt to place what the author considers to be more realistic characters in a fantasy setting.

The Magicians also reminded me at times of T.H. White's *The Sword in the Stone* and C.S. Lewis's *Narnia* books. At one point, Quentin and Alice are turned into geese and other animals as part of their education. There is also a "questing beast" such as the one that King Pellinore chases in White's classic. Quentin and Alice spend much of the second half of the book in a magical land called Fillory, much like Narnia but ruled by a ram named Ember rather than a lion named Aslan.

By the way, neither my wife nor I ever got into the Syfy television series based on the book and its sequels. It was not shown at a convenient time, and we had trouble getting it on the Comcast on-demand function. The books have received considerable critical acclaim, so I was curious enough to give one a try. Grossman is an excellent stylist, but his attempt to apply the standards of "literary" fiction to genre fiction fell short of my expectations.

---review by Tom Feller

Double Star by Robert Heinlein; Trade Paperback \$12.99, e-book \$6.99



When my science fiction book discussion group read Asimov's *The Caves of Steel* last year, it worked out so well that we decided to try a story by Heinlein as well. We chose *Double Star*, because it is short and tightly plotted (my edition is 128 pages), non-controversial, at least compared to *Starship Troopers*, *Glory Road*, *Stranger in a Strange Land*, or *Farnham's Freehold*, and it is not part of his *Future History*, so we did not have to worry about Lazarus Long showing up. (Some of our younger members would not have a clue as to who he is.)

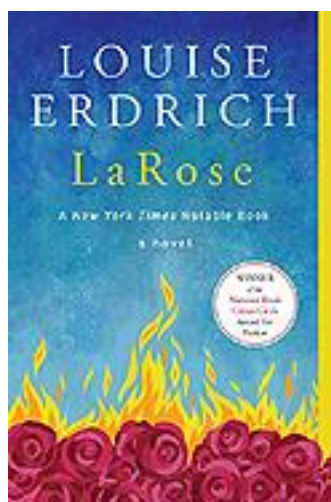
I believe I first read this novel when I was in college during the summer that I embarked on a project to read all the Hugo and Nebula Award-winning novels up to that time. (There were a lot fewer when I was in college, of course.) I still remembered most of the characters and the plot, which was

influenced by Anthony Hope's 1894 novel *The Prisoner of Zenda*. In Heinlein's version, an out-of-work actor impersonates an important politician.

The novel held up for me and for most of the others, although some of the references were meaningless to the younger readers, and some of the technologies, such as slide rules and microfilm, are obsolete. It is a good example of Heinlein's capacities when he was at the height of his creative abilities, and it is still fun to read. There is not one single wasted word, little exposition is needed to explain this future, and no long digressions in which the author gets up on a soap box and lectures us. Reportedly written in three weeks in 1955, the author could still get away with the assumption that Mars was inhabited by intelligent beings. These aliens, however, are imagined in the John Campbell ideal that they are clearly at least as intelligent as human beings, but in a different way.

It was originally published in *Astounding*, which Campbell edited by the way, and one of our older members actually brought those issues for show-and-tell. The book also felt timely when I read the passages that discuss giving the Martians the same rights as human beings, especially since the main character and narrator, Lawrence Smith aka Lorenzo Smythe aka "The Great Lorenzo", hates them, especially their scent, at the beginning of the story. On the other hand, the main female character is the stereotype, typical of the time, of a secretary suffering from unrequited love for her boss.

---review by Tom Feller



LaRose by Louise Erdrich; hardback & Trade Paperback & e-book versions at various assorted prices

The title character is a five year old boy in North Dakota in 1999 when his father, Landreaux Irons, accidentally shoots and kills LaRose's best friend Dusty Ravich while deer hunting. Not only were the two families next door neighbors, but the mothers, Nola and Emmaline, were half-sisters and the fathers best friends. Both families are of mostly Native American descent, specifically Ojibwe, and in an ancient means of atonement, Landreaux gives LaRose to the Ravich family. Over the years, LaRose becomes the link between the two families and the means of their reconciliation.

Father Travis from Erdrich's earlier novel *The Round House* is also a major character, and he falls in love with Emmaline. Another character from *The Roundhouse* is the villain in this novel and the best written character in the whole book. He is an Ojibwe man named Romeo Puyat who siphons gasoline from cars in parking lots and works at hospitals, assisted living facilities, and nursing homes in order to steal drugs from the residents. At one time he was Landreaux's best friend, but he feels that Landreaux betrayed him when they were boys plus he was another man in love with Emmaline. A further complication is that his son Hollis lives with Landreaux and Emmaline, and they consider him to be a member of their family. He tries to stir up trouble between Landreaux and Peter Ravich, Dusty's father, which drives much of the plot toward the end.

There is also a second story line beginning in 1839 with the original LaRose, who began a family in which there is always someone named after her, although not necessarily every generation. Her Ojibwe named directly translated as "Mirage", but "LaRose" was the name given her by Wolfred, her European-American husband. There is also a villain in this story line, a European-American trapper who rapes LaRose after buying her from Mink, her mother, for food.

There is very disturbing news for fans of *The Wizard of Oz*. L. Frank Baum is cited as an advocate of the genocide of Native Americans, and Erdrich quotes from an article he wrote in favour of this atrocious act. There are supernatural elements in this novel, but they are not really essential to the story. First, LaRose can see and converse with ghosts. For instance, he still plays with the ghost of Dusty and shares his toys. Second, Maggie Ravich, Dusty's older sister, can join with the spirit of animals. This novel is not unrelentingly grim, fortunately. I'm sure most of the readers of this fanzine can remember making preparations for Y2K in 1999, and Peter Ravich goes to an extreme, maxing out his credit cards to buy supplies. He erroneously concluded that the credit card companies would be out of business and unable to collect their money.

---review by Tom Feller

WHAT ABOUT AREA 51?

by

Jeffry Redmond

In June 1958, the U.S. Government established another top-secret military facility in the State of Nevada. It became known as Area 51, located in and around Groom Lake, about 90 miles north of Las Vegas. The number refers to a 6 mile by 10 mile section of land, at the center of which is a large air base the government will not acknowledge or even talk about.

The site was selected for testing of the U-2 spy plane because of its remoteness, proximity to existing military facilities, and presence of a dry lake bed for landings. Groom Lake is America's traditional testing ground for "black budget" (top secret) aircraft, before they are publicly acknowledged. The facility and surrounding areas are also associated with reports of UFO and space extraterrestrial sightings.

In 1989, a man named Bob Lazar claimed on a Las Vegas television station that he had worked with alien spacecraft at Papoose Lake, south of Area 51. Since then, "Area 51" has become a popular symbol for those concerned with continuing U.S. Government UFO stonewalling and cover-ups.



BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Groom Lake Base is a top-secret military base located in grid number 51 of the Nevada Test Site, and so it's called Area 51. The United States Air Force Flight Test Center controls the base. It's best known for testing exotic aircraft and weapons. The base was created in 1954 as a place to test the secret U-2 spy plane which was used to fly missions over the Soviet Union.

Soon after it started to house the SR-71, A-12 and D-21 drone. The F-117A was also tested there. In the 1980's the base increased in size, and the runway was increased to its present 6 mile length. Then, mysterious lights began to appear, and armed guards known as the "cammo dudes" started patrolling the border.

The government closed many viewpoints from which the Area 51 base could be seen. In 1989, the "physicist" named Bob Lazar claimed that he worked at a base south of Area 51 and also claimed that Area 51 was testing extremely advanced aircraft and UFO's the military got by trading with space aliens. Ever since then, Area 51 has been thought to be the test center of captured UFOs because of the lights in the night sky. Every weekday morning, at least 500 people arrive at the guarded terminal owned by EG&G on the northwest side of McCarran Airport in Las Vegas. Here they board one of a small fleet of unmarked Boeing 737-200s. Using three digit numbers prefixed by the word "Janet" as their call signs, the 737s fly off northward every half hour.

Their destination is the Groom Lake Area 51, and the entire installation remains so secret that its existence is denied by every government agency and contractor that has any connections there. By late 1955, the facility had been completed for flight testing of Lockheed's U-2 spy plane. Since that

time, Groom Lake has undergone vast expansion, catering to the needs of testing the most advanced aircraft projects in the world. Forty-four years after it was created, Groom Lake has hosted flight testing of the Lockheed U-2, the SR-71 Blackbird, the F-117 stealth fighter, Northrop's B-2 stealth bomber, the mysterious Aurora Project, and possibly even alien spacecraft.

Tony LeVier, Lockheed's test pilot assigned to test-fly the U-2 spy plane, claims the credit for recognizing Groom Dry Lake as a suitable test site. The CIA gave U-2 designer Kelly Johnson the task of choosing and building a secure test site. In March 1955, Johnson sent LeVier and Skunk Works foreman Dorsey Kammerer to visit potential test sites in the deserts of southern California, Nevada, and Arizona. After two weeks, LeVier presented Johnson with his impressions, and Johnson chose Groom Lake.

The Groom Lake facility has been known by many names since its construction. Kelly Johnson named the place "Paradise Ranch". When his flight test team arrived in July 1955, they simply called it "The Ranch". In fact, the secret base was formally named Watertown Strip, after the town in upstate New York where CIA director Allen Dulles was born. In June 1958, it was officially designated Area 51 by the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC). The adjacent AEC proving grounds became known as the Nevada Test Site and divided into numbered areas. The base is now known worldwide as "Area 51", though officially this designation was dropped in the 1970s.

By 1970, the USAF Systems Command took over the operation of Groom Lake. At this time, the U-2 and A-12/SR-71 spy planes had both been tested and were in service on reconnaissance missions. Unmanned high-speed drones were also being tested, including the Model 147 Lightning Bug, Model 154 Firefly, and D-21 Tagboard. In 1967, the United States acquired its first Soviet MiG-21, and US efforts to acquire Soviet weapons technology expanded.

In 1975, the Red Flag series of realistic air warfare exercises started at Nellis AFB, using large portions of the ranges surrounding Groom Lake. The box of airspace surrounding Groom Lake was strictly off-limits to Red Flag aircrews. It became known as "Red Square" at this time, but later acquired the semi-official title of "Dreamland" as a series of new exotic aerospace projects evolved in the late 1970s. These included the Have Blue and Tacit Blue stealth technology demonstrators. The testing of these aircraft caused the highest security measures to be maintained at Groom Lake.

The Groom Lake base was greatly upgraded and expanded in the 1980s. The main runway (14/32) was extended to the south. And then a huge northern extension was constructed out onto Groom Dry Lake, to a length of 27,000 feet. A smaller parallel runway was built in the early 1990s. Semi-recessed "scoot and hide" shelters were built on the main taxiway, so that secret aircraft could be more easily hidden from spying satellites overhead.

New radars, satellite telemetry and other communications facilities were installed, and extra warehouse and assembly areas were constructed. The base housing area was completely rebuilt to accommodate up to 2,000 people, and an extensive recreational facility provided. Today, Groom Lake seems to be administered by Detachment 3 of the Air Force Flight Test Center at Edwards AFB. Perimeter security was also greatly upgraded. Until 1984, it was easy to view the base from Bald Mountain and other hills in the Groom Range to the north of the lake bed. The USAF then extended the Nellis range military reservation to cut off this view. Two hillsides to the south of the Groom Range still offered a view of the base from 12 miles away, at least until these points, White Sides Peak and Freedom Ridge, were annexed by authorities in 1995.

The boundary of the secret base is clearly marked, but not actually fenced. It is patrolled by an anonymous security force equipped with high-tech surveillance gear. Remote electronic sensors detect movement along known dirt tracks and roads leading towards the installation. It has been thought for quite a while now that the surveillance equipment is so advanced that certain sensory

equipment has the ability to smell a person coming near the boundary, and even to distinguish him/her from other animals nearby. The ground patrols, often called "Cammo Dudes", are assisted by FLIR-equipped Sikorsky MH-60G Pave Hawk helicopters.

The Tacit Blue flights ended in 1985, and only two further "Code Black" secret projects are known to have been test-flown from the secret base. Or at least, only two have been officially acknowledged, and both were stealth air-launched missiles: the Lockheed Advanced Cruise Missile (ACM), cancelled in 1992, and the Northrop Tri-Service Stand-Off Attack Missile, cancelled in 1994.

In 1989, the man named Bob Lazar appeared on a Las Vegas television station and claimed that he had been employed at Area 51 for the purpose of "reverse engineering" alien flying saucers. He stated that nine of these disc-shaped craft were flown from a highly secure facility named "S-4" at Papoose Lake, 10 miles southwest of Groom Lake. Lazar's story has been widely criticized. A more credible link to disc-shaped objects is that they are testbeds for anti-gravity propulsion systems, being tested at Groom Lake. Such technology would represent a scientific advance requiring the most extreme secrecy. So would an operational hypersonic spy plane with another type of advanced propulsion system, such as Pulse Detonation Wave Engines or hydrogen-powered scramjets.

There is also much reported evidence to link Groom Lake with experimental high-Mach vehicles. It has even been claimed that a new mother/daughter combination like the A-12/D-21 has been flown, known as the Super Valkyrie. Evidence from base-watchers and elsewhere also suggests other top-secret, Special Access Programs that have been conducted at Groom Lake in recent years:

High Altitude Stealth Reconnaissance: Large subsonic long-endurance vehicle jointly developed by Lockheed and Boeing to replace the SR-71's ability to overfly denied territory at will. It was based on the Skunk Works failed bid for the Advanced Tactical Bomber (ATB), the B-2. It was cancelled in 1992 after at least \$300 million had been spent, and was replaced by the Tier 3 Minus UAV (Lockheed's Darkstar).

Covert Assault Transport: Probably a delta configuration with advanced V/STOL capabilities but with very low noise as well as radar signature. Probably cancelled in 1993 in favor of further Bell/Boeing V-22 Osprey development.

Stealth Helicopter: Different designs with emphasis on low blade and transmission noise, also exploring new technology to reduce blade and efflux signature. (Sikorsky's new attack helicopter, the successor to the Apache - the Comanche -- incorporates stealth technology, but this is being tested elsewhere.)

Cloaking Technology: Cloaking technology in the form of electrochromatic panels mounted to aircraft has been revealed as being tested at the Area 51 installation. More recently a new theory, which has a very factual basis, has risen giving an idea as to the glowing objects frequently seen above the Groom Lake installation. Researcher Tom Mahood has formalized his idea that the objects moving at incredible speeds, with sudden directional changes and emitting an unusual glow, are actually the results of experimental proton beam systems.

Regardless, "Area 51" remains a part of the off-limits military base. UFOers are sure it is used to hide aliens from us. The State of Nevada has recently designated a barren 98-mile stretch of Route 375, which runs near Area 51, as the Extraterrestrial Highway. Such a move is no doubt "proof" of a government attempt to throw us off the track, and to make us think there is not a cover-up when there is one. This is a cover-up of the cover-up? And typical of government agencies when dealing with sensitive information regarding UFOs and aliens?

Since anyone can be shot if you try to trespass onto the military base where Area 51 is located, UFO tourists must view the sacred ground from a distant vantage point. Many do this, hoping for a glimpse of a UFO landing. According to some speculative thinking, our government has a treaty with the aliens that allows them to fly into this area at will, as long as we can experiment on them and try to duplicate their aircraft. You don't really think that any human could have come up with the idea of the Stealth Bomber, do you?

Skeptics don't doubt that something secret is going on in area 51. And what is going on may be more sinister than building secret aircraft or developing new weapons. The Television new show "Sixty Minutes" did a segment where Leslie Stahl suggested that area 51 might be an illegal dumping ground for toxic substances. If so, Area 51 might turn out to be hazardous to your health in more ways than one.



Several former workers at Area 51 and widows of former workers have filed lawsuits against the government for injuries or death resulting from illegal hazardous waste practices. So far the government has been protected from such suits because of "national security." In fact, the government does not even acknowledge the existence of the base known as Area 51. Such denials, of course, do little more than provide further ammunition for those who claim that there is a government conspiracy to cover up just about anything it's ever been involved in.

AREAS 19 and 20

There is another even more secretive Government base in Nevada. Some people think that it is just a piece of land owned by the Nevada Test Site (NTS), while some think that it is the "real" Area 51. These are just the two extremes; most people have their opinion somewhere between these two. The only thing that we know for a fact is that Area 19 is really just a piece of land in the middle of nowhere. What makes it noticeable is that there's a 34.5 kilovolt power line which just stops in the middle of nowhere. And this is, of course more than just a little bit unusual.

Area 19, along with Area 20 to its west, were added to the NTS because of the 1962 Test Ban Treaty, and its official ending of atmospheric testing. Yucca Flat is a little too close to Las Vegas with all of the shockwaves created by the nuclear bombs. The two other designated areas are far enough away to be ideal locations to do underground testing. However, according to NTS documents, there is nothing that is "supposed" to be there.

The location is farther away from any curious people than anyplace in the entire complex, even farther away than Area 51. However, there is an airspace so that planes can fly right over Area 19. And, even more suspiciously, Area 19 is officially for nuclear testing. However, there have actually been very few nuke blasts, but indeed quite an amount of drilling being done there. Most peculiar is the fact that the NTS never receives any information about the classified programs going on in their territory.

There is a story that has been told by a commercial pilot who flies in a Nevada airline. Some of his airline friends, who fly from Las Vegas to the Groom Lake and the Tonopah Test Range facilities, sometimes fly to Area 19. When the pilot prepares to land, first he has to always get clearance that there aren't any spy satellites over Area 19. Then the runway, which is always disguised to look just like the ground, is watered by sprinklers. This makes the runway stand out. The pilots always get off

and then have to immediately get back on. The complex that the pilots enter has been built to look just like a group of hills.

Enemy satellites can see in multiple wavelengths, and their sensor devices usually see through most types of camouflage. Perhaps the U.S. Government has some newer high-tech covering that can make any facility invisible to every type of wavelength. With the public airspace being right over it, the secret military facility would have to be noticed by others. But so far it never has.

Any member of the press who has ever requested a tour of Area 19, has been informed that they can visit anywhere in the entire complex. They can bring their cameras, and they can investigate anything they want to, just as long as they have an official guide with them. However, whenever the time comes for reporters to actually visit, they can never get to Area 19. The first time they are told that it is too far away, and the second time they are told that the roads aren't properly maintainedeven though one is nicely paved.

So, decide for yourselves. What is actually still going on at these top-secret governmental bases. Nuclear testing, highest tech spy aircraft, or perhaps even alien flying saucer research? Something is indeed going on out there in the State of Nevada. But just what, no one can or will ever quite say for sure. But if you're brave and determined enough, there's certainly plenty of something there to try to find out more about. The very best of luck in your continued search for what is really going on in these restricted and forbidden zones. Have fun and enjoy yourself. Investigate and learn as much as you can. Just don't get caught doing it.

An interesting website for more information about these and other such things is at:
www.area51zone.com



"I gave up on eBay dude! I tried to look up collectible zippo lighters, but all I got was 836 matches!"

The Toys of Fate

BY

TOD ROBBINS



THERE was a raucous screaming of brakes, and the train, which had been gliding along smoothly through the night, came to an abrupt, shivering halt. I was violently precipitated against the man who sat opposite me, and he was thrown to the floor.

"I beg your pardon," I said, as soon as I regained my breath and my equilibrium. "I hope you're not hurt."

He was a stout, middle-aged man in a light woolly overcoat. Lying on the floor of the smoking compartment, his large and melancholy brown eyes staring up at me from his unexpressive face, he closely resembled a sheep awaiting the attentions of the butcher. There was an irritating passivity about his inert figure which was galling in the extreme. My right toe tingled to stir him into a more upright and dignified position.

"I hope you're not hurt," I repeated, but this time there was no sympathy in my tone.

His hands fluttered uncertainly about his plump person.

"No, I'm not hurt," he said at last, rising slowly to his feet. "For a moment I thought that he'd finally taken me out of his pocket; but—"

He broke off and regarded me mournfully with his head on one side.

"I beg your pardon," said I, making no sense out of his words. "You were saying—"

But at this point I was interrupted by the conductor, who bustled in with an air of importance. The somber pride of the tragedian was mirrored on the official's face as he picked up a lantern and lighted it.

"What's the trouble?" I asked.

"A man's been run over," he answered tersely. "Got his foot caught in the switch, and couldn't get away in time."

"Poor devil! Is he dead?"

"I should say so! They tell me he's torn to rags. I'm going up there now. Want to go along?"

"No," I answered hastily. "That kind of thing makes me sick."

The conductor smiled rather contemptuously and strode out into the passageway. A moment later I could see his lantern, one among a dozen or more, gliding past the window like a large, luminous bubble. We had come to a standstill in a deserted tract of swamp-land. The black, brooding night seemed to hang heavily over the earth, like a threatening hand. Not a light glimmered anywhere, except those gay bobbing lanterns which flowed on merrily to the feet of tragedy; not a sound broke the silence, except the far-away murmur of voices and the dismal croaking of frogs.

"He would have chosen such a night!"

I started involuntarily. For the moment I had forgotten the existence of the man in the woolly overcoat. He now sat facing me in his old seat near the window, looking particularly docile, stupid, and altogether aggravating.

"I'm sure I haven't the slightest idea what you're talking about," I said rather irritably. "Will you kindly explain?"

"Naturally you wouldn't," he murmured sadly. "And you won't believe me if I tell you the story. You'll think me mad."

"Oh, no, I won't," I hastened to assure him.

I had realized at the first glance that this fellow with the muddy brown eyes was too stupid to be threatened with insanity. Madness, after all, is a mental fungus dependent on rich soil for its growth—the disease of a vivid imagination. Looking at my traveling companion with the trained eyes of a physiognomist, I said with conviction:

"I would never consider you insane!"

At this he brightened visibly, as if I had paid him a compliment. "So I was, sir," said he, with a mournful shake of the head. "That's a satisfaction," said he, crossing his plump legs. "It all happened a long time ago, when I was living in Prestonville. To be quite candid with you, Mr..."

"Burton's my name," said I.

"To be quite candid, Mr. Burton," he continued, "I've been called mad more times than once. And when I haven't been called mad, I've been called a good liar, which is just as insulting."

"Neither is insulting," I replied; "but let that pass. You were about to tell me your story."

"So I was, sir," said he with a mournful shake of his head. "Perhaps you've heard of Prestonville, Mr. Burton?"

"Prestonville?" I murmured. "Prestonville?" And then memory flashed up in me. "Why, that's the town that was destroyed by an earthquake!" I cried, in the tone of a man making a happy discovery. "There was great loss of life, wasn't there?"

"A frightful loss of life, Mr. Burton! It came after midnight, when people were in their beds, and the houses were bowled over as if they were made of cardboard. There was no warning. All at once the earth began to shake, and then—"

He made a sweeping gesture with his hand.

"It was a thriving town, I understand?"

"Yes, indeed, sir—a progressive town. By this time it would have been a large city. There were enterprising business men who had made their homes there—clean-living, ambitious men, who would have been the pride of the country if they had survived; but most of them were buried under their own roofs. They died with the town." He broke off and rubbed the bald spot just above his right temple, which was

glistening with perspiration. "And there was no reason for it all!" he finished, almost fiercely. "If it had been a vicious growth, like some towns in this State, one could call it a visitation of Providence, and explain it that way."

"Can one ever satisfactorily explain what happens?" I broke in. "Fate is a blindfolded baby attempting to play chess for the first time."

"No, he isn't!" the man in the woolly overcoat cried excitedly. "I'll tell you what he is. He's an old fellow—a little mad, you understand, but not so mad as not to be vicious."

"You seem positive that you're right," I said with a smile. "Why?"

Before he answered, he drew out a cigar and lighted it with a hand that shook oddly.

"I'll tell you why," he answered very calmly between puffs. "I have met Fate."

"You have met fate?" I said slowly, trying to figure out his meaning.

"Exactly," he replied with a half-hearted chuckle. "He's a dirty old man with a face white and wrinkled as a paper bag—an untidy old man who drops crumbs in his beard and soup on his vest—an old man who neighs when he laughs, like a frightened horse."

"In spite of his stupid look this man is quite mad," was my thought. But aloud I said: "How did you know that the old fellow was Fate? Tell me about it."

"Willingly," said he. "It unburdens my mind to tell what I know, even though people think me mad. Living and remaining silent is unendurable. I feel that I am hidden away from the world in some black recess—a recess from which I cannot escape, and in which I must wait patiently. Some day his hand will grope about in that recess, touch me, and then—" He broke off and passed his handkerchief across his perspiring forehead. "And when I am finally plucked out into the light of day, what will happen to me? I do not know, nor can I guess. Perhaps he has forgotten me; perhaps I may be overlooked for years. He has so many playthings, that mad old man!"

"You were about to tell me your story," I ventured.

"To be sure," the man said in a somewhat calmer tone. "It all happened ten years ago in Prestonville. I was in the toy business then, and had a large shop on Main Street. My show-windows were the delight of every child in town. They would stop on their way to school and stare in, with their noses pressed tight against the glass. And often grown people would stop. You see I had an artistic temperament, and it found expression in my show-windows."

"How?" I asked.

"Well, I arranged scenes like a stage director. For instance, there was my tobogganing scene. Through the show-window one caught a glimpse of a hill covered with snow and children sliding down it on gaily painted sleds. And then there was my hunting scene in the forest. One saw a miniature bear at bay, surrounded by miniature sportsmen with leveled rifles. The bear growled, opened its cavernous mouth, and struck at the hunters with its heavy forepaws. It was all quite realistic, I assure you."

"No wonder your windows drew a crowd!"

"Yes, one can perform miracles with mechanical toys," he said. "But perhaps my greatest success was my replica in miniature of Prestonville itself. That, indeed, was a work of art. Every street, every house, every tree, was an exact counterpart of one in the town. When I finally put it on exhibition, it interested not only the children but the grown people as well. It was a drawing card which helped my business and quite eclipsed the efforts of my rival across the street."

"Every day hundreds of people would stop to see what was happening in this tiny town of Prestonville; for with great skill I arranged scenes for them—scenes which parodied the happenings of yesterday. It was a clever joke on the town—a harmless joke at which all could laugh, and at which none could take offense. And I was extremely happy in my ability to amuse, when one dark, rainy evening in October he came and peered solemnly through my show-window."

"He?" I asked.

"Yes, that untidy old man I told you of—the old man who dropped crumbs in his beard and soup on his vest—the mad old man whom later I grew to fear worse than death."

"On account of the weather the streets were deserted; and, as there seemed to be little or no prospect of business on such an evening. I had allowed my two assistants to leave before their usual time. I was standing by the counter, staring absently at the rain-splashed windows, when I suddenly saw a dingy coat-sleeve rubbing

against the plate glass. A moment later a white, wrinkled face appeared through the space which had been wiped dry, and a pair of small gray eyes stared solemnly down on my miniature of Prestonville.

"On first seeing it thus, Mr. Burton, I experienced an involuntary tremor of fear. I had an odd fancy that there was a face out there in the night and nothing more—a face drifting about quite independent of a body—a thin mask with a tangle of wild, disreputable beard hanging from it, and shark's eyes staring coldly through the slits above the cheek-bones. But it wasn't what this face held that troubled me, Mr. Burton. No, it was what it lacked—the thinness of it—the feeling that behind its flat, wrinkled surface there was nothing but vacancy. A thin mask of flesh, it had blown off its owner's real face and come floating to my window—or, at least, such was my vague, disquieting thought of it.

"For some time I stared stupidly at the face; and it, in turn, stared down on the toy town. From where I stood the scene suggested a picture. The town no longer seemed a group of miniature houses at my elbow, but the real Prestonville at a great distance; and the face, surrounded as it was by the gray mist which had formed on the window-pane, resembled the face of a cruel divinity looking down from the clouds on what it might presently destroy. It suggested one of those religious pictures of old times when man believed God to be capable of an implacable hatred and desire for vengeance. As I stood there, motionless and staring, I actually trembled for my toy town, which by some mysterious flight of the imagination had also become Prestonville."

The shopkeeper paused and blew a ring of smoke thoughtfully ceilingward. "All this must sound absurd to you," he resumed after a moment. "In fact, on looking back on it later that night, it seemed absurd to me that an old man's face should have filled me with such wild notions. You see, Mr. Burton, I'm not ordinarily an imaginative man. I've always prided myself on my practicality."

"How long did he stare through the window?" I asked with growing interest.

"I don't know exactly. It might have been only a minute, but it seemed an age. I remember that my eyes, which have always been weak, winked shut for an instant. When I opened them again, the face had gone. I might have thought I had dreamed the whole thing if it hadn't been for the clean patch on the window-pane."

"Did you see the face again?"

"Yes, many times; but always when I was alone in the store, or at night. Sometimes I saw it surrounded by other faces, but it was usually by itself. It seemed to pick stormy nights to stare in at the toy town."

"Were you always affected in the same way?" I asked.

"Yes, always. I could not rid myself of the unhealthy feeling that this face was only a mask, like those I sold to children on Hallowe'en. If it had mirrored any human emotion or thought, it would not have affected me so. There was a sickening thinness about it, if you can understand me. It hung over my toy town like an evil moon. Soon I began to dream about it. It was a great relief when the old man finally came into my shop."

"So he came in!" I cried. "That's rather unusual, isn't it? Faces such as you describe seldom trust themselves under the glare of electric lights."

"I knew you wouldn't believe me," the shopkeeper said wistfully. "Nobody does."

"So far I believe you," I answered truthfully enough. "Go ahead."

"Well, as I was saying, he finally came in. It was a great relief to see that the face had a body to it; but what a body it was! Here were old bones, Mr. Burton—the oldest bones I've ever seen outside a graveyard. I give you my word, the man was a walking mummy. I felt the great age of those bones as they moved slowly beneath the parchment-like skin, and the sight filled me with a kind of awe; but there was nothing to command respect in his shuffling gait, or in his tangle of beard, where bread crumbs were sticking like currants in a bush, or in his clothes, which were dingy beyond belief, or in his silly senile smile, which set the twinkles on his face all aquiver, like ripples on a bowl of milk when you stir it with a spoon. All in all, he was as disreputable looking an old man as the town could boast of—and half-witted as well, if his wagging lower lip did not belie him. But, as I was saying, there was something awe-inspiring in his slow-moving bones—something which filled me with an unaccountable reverence.

"Well, he shuffled up to the counter and leaned on it for a space, mumbling to himself, like a man rehearsing a speech. His, pale gray eyes were fixed on me, but they didn't seem to see me. He ran his fingers through his beard in a nervous fashion, so that several stray crumbs rolled down his soup-stained vest and fell on the floor.

"'Well, sir,' I finally said, speaking pleasantly and even respectfully, for I couldn't forget the age of his bones, 'what can I do for you?'"

"At that he winked one eye at me and snickered. It wasn't a laugh at all, rightly speaking, but more like the neigh' of a frightened horse.

"Tut, tut!' says he with a reproving roll of his head. 'Don't ask silly questions, young man. You know what I want. Why, I've come for your town!'

"My town?' I cried in astonishment. 'You mean you want to buy it?'

"Isn't it for sale?' he asked, cocking his beard at me. 'I'll tell you what it is, sir. I've found everything for sale in this world but myself—myself!' He smirked and bowed like a dancing-master in his dotage. 'The prices that have been offered me just for a nod or a smile! Ha, they would turn your head, young man! You'd sell your soul for a hundredth part of them; but I? Ah, no! I may not be intelligent, but I'm essentially honest—yes, essentially honest. What do you want for your town?'

"I hadn't intended to sell it,' I replied rather weakly, for his torrent of wild words had played havoc with my wits. 'You see it's a good advertisement for the shop.'

"Come, come, young man!' says he, tapping his nose slyly with a shriveled forefinger. 'None of your tradesman's tricks with me! Everything has a price, you know. Out with it!'

"At that, Mr. Burton, I took a careful survey of this old man from top to toe, from the dingy felt hat set awry on his head to his mud-splashed boots rich with the red clay of the countryside. I had no intention of selling my toy town, and I meant to ask a price far beyond his ability to pay.

"Well, young man?' he cried impatiently. 'Well?'

"Five thousand dollars is the price of that town,' I answered, thinking that now I would be rid of him. 'You may well imagine my surprise, Mr. Burton, when he pulled out an old leather wallet fairly bursting with bills, and counted five thousand-dollar notes into my palm. One would as soon expect to find a scarecrow stuffed with bank-notes. Here he was, a very beggar of a man in appearance, with a purse whose contents would have done credit to any millionaire! It made my head swim.

"There you have it,' said he with one of his snickers. 'A very moderate price, I'd say, for such a thriving town. I'm afraid you've cheated yourself, young man.' He turned his back on me and stepped over to the show-window. 'You shouldn't have kept it so long!' he cried sharply. 'You're hopelessly old-fashioned!'

"Old-fashioned?' I muttered.

"Yes, old-fashioned,' he said sourly. 'You show nothing here except what happened yesterday. What sort of business is that? Now I'm abreast of the times, and sometimes a step or so in advance of them. I may look antiquated, but I'm not. See here!'

"As quick as thought, Mr. Burton, this strange old man put his hand in his pocket and drew out a match. Striking it on the heel of his boot, he bent forward and applied the flame carefully to one of the tiny cardboard houses in the town. "Look out!' I cried. 'You'll set it on fire! It's only made of paper!'

"It is on fire,' he answered with evident satisfaction, slowly straightening his aged back. 'It gives quite a blaze for such a small house.' He broke off and regarded me with a strange look of childish innocence on his wrinkled old face. 'I love fires!' said he. 'Don't you?'

"I made him no answer. My eyes were on the toy town and on the tiny cardboard house which was going up in flames and smoke. Instantly I knew which one this mad old man had picked out to destroy—it was the miniature of my own house on Sanford Avenue. There it blazed merrily; and I was moved by the sight of it. Hot anger surged through me against this old fool at my elbow — an anger which was tinged with fear. I felt regret, too, that I had sold my toy town to this destroyer of miniature homes.

"At last the toy house crumbled into red-hot ashes, Mr. Burton; and the old man, who all this time had been stretching his hands over the blaze, once more turned to me with an air of triumph.

"You see I'm not old-fashioned!' he cried with a high, neighing laugh. 'No—I keep abreast of the times, although I'm so dingy. Who cares about yesterday's doings? We want a peep into the minute ahead, not the minute behind. Do the little figures of wood go with the town?'

"Yes,' I answered sourly. 'As perhaps you know, each is supposed to represent some one in Prestonville.'

"And are you included?' he asked, half closing his dull, fishy eyes. 'Did you sell yourself as well as the others?'

"I suppose you'll find the wooden manikin of me in the collection,' I muttered, 'unless it was burned up in that little house.'

"How could that happen?" he said pleasantly. "You've been in this shop all the time. No, not a soul was burned but your mother-in-law." He leaned forward and prodded in the little heap of ashes with his finger. "Here she is, sir," he continued with a grin, holding up for my inspection a tiny charred figure of wood. "Burned to a cinder, you see! Well, you won't miss her much."

"And then I smiled weakly, Mr. Burton. I was very much attached to Sally's mother, but I smiled, as almost any man smiles when his mother-in-law's name is coupled with tragedy."

"Of course, I won't miss her much," I answered, with quite the conventional air of gay unconcern.

"Well, that's lucky," he went on, stroking some more crumbs out of his beard; "for, as you can see for yourself, she's well toasted. Not that it makes one iota of difference to me whether you miss her or not," he added fiercely. "To be quite candid, young man, I'm neither very intelligent nor very kind-hearted, and I don't pretend to be, although there are optimistic fools in this world who call me both."

"Indeed?" I said politely.

"Yes," he continued, "they think I sit up at night trying to better the human race—I, who have so many amusing things to do. There are people who imagine I'm a cousin of Santa Claus."

"Once removed or far removed?" said I.

"At that he began to snicker, Mr. Burton, in a most unpleasant way."

"I wish I could think up bright things like that," he said after a time. "Far removed, I'd call it. But seriously, young man, I often kick those fools in the face just to see what they'll do; and, bless me, if they don't come crawling back on all fours to lick my boots!"

"You're a stranger to me," I broke in. "I thought I knew by sight every soul in town. Where are you staying?"

"For answer he bent over the toy town and touched with his finger a house which stood a little apart from the others."

"Preston Mansion!" I cried in surprise. "Why, that hasn't been lived in for twenty years—not since old Colonel Preston cut his throat."

"I live in it," he said simply.

"But it's in a deplorable state of disrepair," I ventured.

"So am I," he rejoined. "We're good company for each other."

"But the roof's never been shingled since it got hit by lightning two summers back. It can't keep out the rain."

"I'm living under that roof, not you!" he replied sharply. "It suits me."

"I'm sure I didn't mean any offense," I said. "Shall I have the toy town sent there to-morrow morning?"

"No, no!" he cried irritably. "I'll call for it when I want it. None of your impudence, young man!"

"And at that he shuffled out of my shop, Mr. Burton, without so much as a good night, leaving me fairly dumfounded. Nothing that I had said could possibly have given offense to the most sensitive person; yet he had left me in high dudgeon. Later I came to learn that he was always like that toward the end of our talks. It wasn't anything that had passed between us, but just a natural weariness of my society—the same irritability that a child shows when he is forced to stay indoors with his nurse. Indeed, that terrible old man was very much like a spoiled child in a great many ways—his love of excitement; his pure joy in destroying objects of value; his fickleness; and, lastly, his downright fury if he was opposed in anything."

"Possibly," I assented. "But why do you call such a harmless old lunatic terrible?"

"I'm coming to that, Mr. Burton," the shopkeeper replied, with a calm which I could see was forced for my benefit. "Let me get on in my own way, and then you can judge for yourself. As I have said, he left me with my wits all astray, gaping behind the counter; and it was there that one of the neighbors found me a few minutes later."

"Come, come!" he cried, shaking me by the arm. "There's been a fire up at your place. Your wife wants you."

"A fire!" I cried, coming to myself with a start. "My house?"

"Burned to the ground," he answered shortly. "But that isn't the worst of it. Your wife's all broken up, and you must go to her at once. She needs you."

"And Sally's mother?" I cried weakly. "She's safe?"

"The man shook his head sadly."

"'Lost, I'm afraid,' he murmured. 'She was the only one in the house when it caught fire, and they think the smoke must have suffocated her, for she hasn't been seen since. Your place was insured, I hope?'"

"I made him no answer. Stepping to the show-window, I bent down and looked long and curiously at the ashes where once had stood my miniature house.

"'It all happened here,' I muttered dully. 'It happened here before my eyes!'"

"'Come, come!' my neighbor said brusquely. 'Don't break down. Play the manly part. Your wife's the real sufferer, you know. After all, a mother-in-law is only a mother-in-law.'"

"'It all happened here,' I repeated stupidly, pointing down at the toy town. 'Everything!'"

"'But he did not even so much as glance at the show-window. His eyes were on my right hand, which still grasped what the old man had given me.

"'You're drunk!' he cried after a moment. 'Perhaps you'd better not go back to your wife in this condition.'"

"All that I had gone through that evening, added to this final affront, made me see red.

"'Drunk!' I cried, stepping forward. 'Why, you fool, I—'"

"Unconsciously my right hand opened. From it dropped—not crisp thousand-dollar bills, but half a dozen chocolate creams wrapped up in a piece of tissue paper. The money that the old man gave me had all disappeared!"

The shopkeeper regarded me wistfully. Evidently he still hoped that I might believe his improbable story. The train was once more slipping through the night, only now at a faster pace, to make up for the enforced delay. I could see nothing through the window but a curtain of moving blackness, could hear nothing but the monotonous lullaby of the revolving wheels; but I was vaguely conscious of the sky which overhung us, somber and threatening, like an immense, hovering hand.

"Well, what do you think?" he said at last, a trifle timidly.

"I think that you were badly frightened by a coincidence," I answered. "Of course, it was strange that the old man should have burned your house in miniature; but those things happen. I remember once—"

"But how about my mother-in-law?" he broke in.

"Another strange coincidence—startling enough, I grant you."

"But can you explain how the money turned to chocolate creams?" he demanded.

"Well, as for that," I answered, "probably it was a sleight-of-hand trick. No doubt your mad old man was a practical joker with some knowledge of parlor legerdemain. Those fellows can fool even the brightest eyes, and you acknowledge that yours are weak."

"You have common sense," he said bitterly, "and all that I told you is an affront to it. You argue very much as I used to argue before I met that terrible old man for the second time and learned the truth."

"He came into your shop again?"

"Yes, a week after my mother-in-law's funeral. He came in just as my nephew went out. They must have met each other at the door. I can still remember the old man's first words as he hobbled up to the counter.

"'I don't like that boy,' he said peevishly, his cold gray eyes fixed on my face. 'He aggravates me.'"

"'That's a pity,' I answered ironically.

"You must know that I was very fond of my sister's son, Mr. Burton. There wasn't a cheerier, better-natured boy in Prestonville than Charlie, though I say it myself. He was a bit mischievous, perhaps, but there was no malice in it. He was a real boy who showed that he was glad to be alive.

"'No, I don't like him,' the old man continued, plucking irritably at his tangled beard. 'He's happy—entirely too happy. Why, the little fool goes hopping about this town like a canary! When he isn't whistling, he's grinning like an idiot. The way he acts, you wouldn't think that I existed. He ignores me, and that's the truth of the matter—me, whom nobody should ignore.' He paused and twitched a gray hair savagely out of his beard. 'Besides,' he finished, 'I can't abide round-eyed, apple-cheeked boys! Can you?'"

"'I'm very fond of Charlie,' I answered warmly. 'Of course, he's happy. Why shouldn't he be? He's strong and healthy.'"

"'Strong and healthy, eh?' the old man cried, with one of his unpleasant snickers. 'Well, that can be mended. Have you any toy trolley-cars in your shop—the kind that you wind up and run?'"

"'Yes, I have several,' I answered; 'but what do you want with one?'"

"'Never you mind,' he said with a sly wink. 'Never you mind, sir. Perhaps I'm buying it for Charlie. When I don't like children, I buy them toys—not at all like Santa Claus, you see!'"

"Now, Mr. Burton, he was grinning at me so slyly, with his beard ruffled out like the tail of a turkey-cock, and his eyes shifting from side to side, that, in spite of the strange fear I had of him, it was all I could do to keep from bursting out into a laugh. Here was this mummy of a man puttering about my shop like a child of ten. A toy trolley-car, indeed!

"And yet there was a childish sincerity about him, an eager curiosity to see the stock of toys, which stroked my business pride the right way. There he stood as I brought out my supply of cars, bending forward in wonder, and actually sucking his thumb.

" 'Here they are,' said I from between twitching lips.

" 'A nice assortment,' he said gravely; 'a very pretty lot of trolley-cars. Now I wonder which would be best suited for Charlie. Let's see!' He bent lower still, so that his gray beard brushed the counter. 'I rather fancy this one without a fender,' he muttered. 'It looks more businesslike than the others. Do you wind it up with a key?'

" 'Yes, here's the key,' I answered, holding it out to him. 'And there's where it winds up, right behind the rear seat. Do you want to see it run?'

" 'Indeed I do,' he said eagerly. As he spoke, he picked up the toy and began to wind it. His beard twitched with excitement, and he hopped about as nimbly as a goat. 'This is what I call fun!' he cried.

" 'Put it on the counter,' I suggested. 'It'll run along there all right.'

"He shook his head.

" 'No, no,' said he. 'That's silly. Who ever heard of a trolley-car running on a counter? There's just one place for it. Look here!'

"And as quick as thought, Mr. Burton, he skipped over to the window and placed the trolley-car on one of the streets of my toy town.

" 'Here's the place for it—right on Main Street!' he cried joyously. 'Now I'll let her go. Ding dong! All aboard!'

" 'It will do damage there,' I told him, stepping forward. 'There are people on that street. It will break all my manikins. Stop it!'

" 'But I was too late. Before I reached the window, the toy trolley-car had bowled over one of the little wooden figures and had smashed both its tiny legs.

" 'Now see what you've done!' I cried angrily, as the old man picked up the manikin in the palm of his hand. 'I must ask you to leave my show-window alone in the future. That's no way to treat toys!'

" 'They're mine, aren't they?' he demanded innocently. 'Didn't I buy your town, with everything in it?'

" 'No, you didn't,' I retorted. 'If you think a handful of chocolate creams paid for this artistic miniature of Prestonville, you've got another guess coming.'

" 'Chocolate creams?' said he, with a puckered brow. 'Chocolate creams? Did I pay you with chocolate creams?'

" 'You did!' I answered hotly. 'What good are they?'

" 'Why, chocolate creams are good to eat,' he answered solemnly, staring at me like an owl. 'You should consider yourself lucky, young man. There are people who would pay more than five thousand dollars for a handful of chocolate creams.'

" 'Nonsense!' I cried, quite out of temper. 'If you think—'

"But he cut me short with a wave of his hand.

" 'Now you speak about it,' he said blandly, 'I do remember about the chocolate creams. You must know that it was one of my little jokes. I'm not very intelligent, but I've a keen sense of humor. It happened that there was a young man who got lost in the Maine woods last week. He had five thousand dollars and six chocolate creams in his pocket. For days he wandered about in a circle, till his provisions were all gone. He grew very hungry. The five thousand dollars were no good to him; but the chocolate creams!' The old man broke off to snicker, while his cold, shifty eyes wandered here, there, and everywhere. 'Those chocolate creams would have kept life in his bones till his friends found him,' he finished with a grin.

" 'Well?' I demanded.

" 'Well, sir,' he replied, 'I took those chocolate creams out of his pocket while he slept, and gave them to you in place of the five thousand dollars. You see, they were very precious chocolate creams—to him. That poor young man died of starvation four days ago. Now doesn't that prove that I have a keen sense of humor, sir?'

"It was an extremely warm day; and yet, in spite of the heat, I felt cold. For the first time, Mr. Burton, a real tangible terror of that old man took possession of me. As I have told you, he was not so mad as not to be vicious; and now his white, wrinkled face was convulsed with a malicious merriment. Once more, in my imagination, it had become the mask of flesh which had stared through my show-window—that thin mask without human substance behind it, which might be worn in turn by all evil emotions.

"If you really did such a thing,' I said at last, 'it shows a strange kind of humor!'

"Strange it may be,' he answered sourly, 'but it's mine.' He drew out his bulging wallet and put five thousand dollars on the counter. 'It seems that you were not satisfied with chocolate creams,' he added. 'Well, there's no suiting everybody. Here's the money. You'd better count it carefully this time, for I've come to carry the toy town away with me.'

"It is needless to tell you, Mr. Burton, that I acted on his suggestion. I counted the bills three times, and then locked them in my safe. Next, at his bidding, I packed up the toy town in a large leather case and helped him carry it to the door; but here I paused.

"How about the trolley-car?' I asked. 'Don't you want that, too?'

"No, young man,' he answered, with a solemn shake of his head. 'I have no further use for trolley-cars at present. Perhaps some other day. We'll see, we'll see. Meanwhile you can give this one to Charlie, with my compliments. It will make him remember me in the future. A souvenir of our meeting in your shop, eh? Good evening, sir.'

"Frail as he looked, he picked up the leather case as easily as if it were filled with feathers. Indeed, he was surprisingly strong for a man of his age.

"I find you rather amusing company, young man,' were his final words to me. 'Drop in some evening at Preston Mansion. You'll always find me at home.'

"Whom shall I ask for?' I inquired.

"Mr. Fate,' said he, grinning up at me from beneath his ragged hat-brim. 'Mr. L. P. D. Fate, at your service.'

"For some time after he had left me I stood on the door-sill, following his bent, crooked figure with my eyes. Finally it vanished in a crowd that had gathered on the corner of Main Street and Sanford Avenue. Then I heard the clatter of horses' feet and the brazen clanging of a bell. A moment later the Prestonville ambulance swept past my shop, the horses' shoes striking sparks on the pavement.

"An accident,' I thought, not without a sensation of personal fear.

"Snatching my hat from the rack, I hurried up the street and was soon in the midst of a horrified group. Not a dozen yards farther on a trolley-car had been deserted by both motorman and conductor, and stood motionless on the tracks. Contrary to the law, the car had no fender.

"Who's been hurt?' I asked an acquaintance who stood on the outskirts of the crowd.

"For a moment, Mr. Burton, this man didn't recognize me. When he did, his face took on a frightened look.

"Push your way through, Jim,' he told me. 'You've got a right to see. It's your nephew, Charlie Carey. He was hit by that trolley. The poor kid! Both his legs are smashed to a pulp.'

"I waited to hear no more. Pushing my way through the crowd, quite overmastered by horror and grief, I would have been by Charlie's side in another moment, had not a long, thin hand reached out and plucked me by the sleeve.

"It's Mr. Fate,' a low, insinuating voice whispered in my ear. 'Mr. L. P. D. Fate, at your service. Don't you forget him, young man. It doesn't pay to forget Mr. Fate!'

"And then I saw that terrible old man at my elbow. There he stood, grinning up at me, his cold gray eyes fixed on my face, his left hand outstretched and holding in its palm a little broken figure of wood.

"Suddenly he pocketed his toy and turned away.

"Don't you forget Mr. Fate, young man,' he called back over his shoulder. 'Home every evening—Preston Mansion---Mr. L. P. D. Fate!'

"His voice died away; he was gone. And I? Why, a new horror had overmastered me—a horror of the old man's tangled beard; a horror of his cold, fishy eyes; and, worst of all, a horror of his shriveled, claw-like hands. Yes, I feared his hands the most. What were they not capable of, those hands? Guided by a brain—a little mad, you understand, but not so mad as not to be vicious—surely they gripped the world and spun it at their

pleasure. This old man's talons held the throat of strangling humanity in their grasp. Only twice had I seen them at their work, but I wanted no more proof. I was convinced of their power, Mr. Burton!"

The shopkeeper paused to light his cigar, which had gone out. Once again I noticed the uncertainty of his every movement. I had seen drunken men, or men heavy with sleep, fumble with a match before striking it in just such a fashion.

Indeed, there was something of the somnambulist about my traveling companion. His acts did not seem to spring from the promptings of his own brain; it was as if he obeyed another's orders. He reminded me forcibly of a famous murderer whom I had interviewed a month before for my paper. Yes, that condemned poisoner had had exactly the same manner—the irresolute gestures, the trick of yawning unexpectedly, the terror and weariness of the eyes.

"I suppose you think me mad?" he said at last.

"Not yet," I answered. "Of course, what you've told me seems unbelievable; but there may be some simple solution to the affair which we've both overlooked."

"No, no!" he cried impatiently. "There isn't any solution. Hear me out, and you'll see that for yourself."

"I'm all attention," I assured him.

"You can well imagine," he resumed, "that this second tragedy, coming hard on the heels of the first, shattered my peace of mind. From that time on I lived in constant fear of the old man; and yet, much as I feared him, much as I dreaded to see his face or hear his name, he exerted a peculiar fascination over me. Like many another fool, I longed to look into the eyes of the future. Preston Mansion beckoned my imagination.

"At first downright fear held this unhealthy curiosity in check; but gradually, as the days went by, the first horror of what I had seen wore off slightly, giving place to a burning desire to probe the mystery. Soon I began to haunt the streets at night."

"You visited Preston Mansion?" I broke in.

"Yes, frequently. I couldn't stay away, Mr. Burton. Night after night I stole out to the outskirts of town, where that old brick building stood somber and solitary. At first it would seem dark and deserted as I took my stand in the garden among the nodding weeds; but always, after I had been there a short time, one of the windows on the topmost floor would light up on a sudden, and a thin black shadow would pass back and forth across its glowing surface. Often this shadow would pause for an instant and bend down eagerly; and then I knew that something of moment was about to happen in Prestonville. It was terrible to stand there, Mr. Burton, and not know for certain what was happening behind that fire-flecked pane of glass."

"Didn't you ever go inside the house?" I inquired.

"Not until the old man called me. You see, I was afraid; but one night, as I stood in the garden, the front door swung open on its rusty hinges, and I saw him waiting for me in the hall. He held an old-fashioned taper above his head. Its light showed me that he wore a yellow nightcap and a disreputable velvet robe with rents in it.

"Don't be afraid, young man," he called softly. "Come in!"

"I'm not afraid," I replied, stepping forward bravely, although my knees were fairly knocking together from fright. "I'm cold from standing so long in your garden."

"You've been patient, young man," said he. "There's no gainsaying that; but one has to be patient with L. P. D. Fate."

"By this time, Mr. Burton, I was standing beside him in the hallway. The mansion was in a pitiable state of neglect. Cobwebs hung in long festoons from the rafters overhead; dust covered the floors and powdered the broad, winding staircase, lying nearly an inch deep on the carved mahogany balustrades; and behind the walls an army of rats scampered back and forth. A dismal odor of damp and decay filled my nostrils.

"The house seems a little old-fashioned, like me," the old man said, giving me a suspicious, sidelong look; "but we're not old-fashioned—neither of us. Ah, no—we keep abreast of the times! Come up to my room, young man."

"He led the way up the staircase, while I followed close at his heels. Up and up we went, three flights or more, till we came to the attic. Here he ushered me into a large, bare room, lit dimly by two wax tapers and by the rays of the moon, which peeped in timidly through a hole in the roof; but I had eyes for nothing but the toy town.

"There it stood, Mr. Burton, on a large straw mat in the center of the room. Many changes had taken place since I had seen it last—changes, of course, which corresponded with the actual changes in Prestonville.

For instance, there was the foundation of my new house standing where there had been but a heap of ashes. Then there was the new public library, which had been built in record time; and, lastly, standing outside my sister's home, was the miniature of the wheel-chair in which poor Charlie managed to get about after his legs had been amputated. These were the details that caught my immediate attention.

"I haven't played very much with this town," the old man said, sitting down on the dusty floor. "Other matters have taken up nearly all my time. There was a steamer to be sunk in the Baltic Sea, an uprising to be arranged in China, some emperor to be assassinated—I can't think of his name now—and a thousand other amusing things to do. They kept me hopping about, I can tell you! But I mustn't grow lazy. I must amuse you."

"Don't bother about me," I said quickly. "I don't need to be amused."

"You are my guest," he said rather sternly, "and I always try to amuse my guests. Now how would a flood suit you, young man? The river seemed very high to-night. Floods are rather commonplace, of course; but still—he rose and picked up a glass of water which stood on a table within arm's reach—"they're amusing. Don't you think so?" he finished, seating himself in front of the toy town and regarding me with childish solemnity.

"Don't!" I cried in horror, stretching out a detaining hand. "Don't!" And then, seeing that he was tipping the glass in spite of my protests, I shouted: "Floods are old fashioned! Why, they date back to Noah's ark! Surely you wouldn't be as old-fashioned as that?"

"One grows tired of the new things," he replied, with a sad shake of the head. "I've had enough of trolley-cars and trains and steamers. Come, a flood isn't so bad, young man!"

"And then, without another word to say on the matter, he tipped the tumbler more and more till the water spilled out of it in a thin stream and flowed straight toward the miniature town of Prestonville. In a moment more it was dashing down Main Street, sweeping one or two of the cardboard stores with it, and threatening all. Fortunately the glass was only half-full, otherwise the inhabitants might very well have been drowned in their beds.

"Not enough water!" the old man cried peevishly. "Well, that's a disappointment! Better luck next time. I'd go down and fill this tumbler at the pump, if the steps weren't so confoundedly steep. I'm not so spry as I was, young man."

"I'm afraid I've got to be going," I said, glancing up at the moon, which had grown gray and ghostly. "It's morning."

"So it is!" he cried angrily, as if I had insulted him. "It's time you went home. Some guests fairly have to be turned out of doors! Get along now, you humbug, or I'll set my dogs on you!"

"You have dogs?" I cried in surprise, snatching up my hat.

"Hell-hounds," he told me, "that eat sulfur. Get along with you! Come later next time, and don't stay so early. I can't abide guests who think me old-fashioned!"

"Well, I hurried out of that house as fast as I could, keeping a wary lookout for any such beasts as he described; but I didn't see any. After a time I came to Main Street, which was a good two feet under water. Here it was that I found Charlie's wheel-chair floating peacefully along on its back; so I pushed it home ahead of me, to show my wife that I hadn't wasted the whole night. For the rest of that week, we citizens of Prestonville wore rubber boots."

The shopkeeper broke off and yawned prodigiously. I could see that he would be fast asleep in another moment if I didn't prod him out of it. As you may well guess, I was anxious to hear the rest of his strange story, and I lost no time in keeping him at it.

"Did you go back to Preston Mansion again?" I asked.

"What's that?" said he, coming out of his doze with a start. "I was almost asleep, sir. I've been like that lately. I simply can't keep awake. What were you saying, sir? Oh, yes, I visited Preston Mansion many times. Indeed, I couldn't seem to keep away from it. That large room on the top floor—that bare, dusty room where the moon peeped in through a hole in the roof—drew me as a magnet draws steel. Night after night I sat on the floor beside the mad old man, and, sitting thus, watched him play with his toys.

"It was here that I saw the murder of Molly Adams in miniature—a crime which horrified the entire State. It was in this room that I witnessed the robbing of the Prestonville Bank, when one of the clerks was killed, the burning of the schoolhouse, the explosion at the gas-works, and several other ghastly puppet-shows which froze me with horror. But what could I do, Mr. Burton? I was powerless to turn him from his grim jests. Any word from me only drove him to a more brutal mishandling of his toys.

"And yet, in spite of Fate's cruelty, in spite of his wanton destruction of people and objects I held dear, there were times when I pitied him. Boredom sat heavy on his shoulders. You see, Mr. Burton, there was no game under the sun which he hadn't played a million times before. For centuries, no doubt, he had been playing the same savage tricks on his toys. To them, his vagaries were always new; but to him, they were as old as the stars. I knew that he felt the age and mustiness of all he did, and that it filled him with a kind of blind fury against the world. The savor of his brutal jests was gone; nothing remained but the dregs of laughter, which are even more bitter than the dregs of tears. And it was because he knew himself to be a decrepit, toothless tiger, unable to masticate with enjoyment the stale titbits beneath his claws, that he rent so cruelly whatever crossed his path.

"I am not old-fashioned!" he was wont to say over and over again, as if to convince himself rather than me.

"Yes, relentless as he was, I often pitied Fate."

"But did he pity you?" I asked.

"No, pity was denied him. He lacked the imagination from which pity springs. I remember that last terrible night we spent together—that night when I knelt on the floor with tears gushing from my eyes.

"Pretty, pretty!" he gurgled like a baby, touching my cheek with an inquiring forefinger. 'Pretty—like diamonds!'

"You see, he simply didn't know the meaning of tears."

"Tell me about that last night," I said eagerly.

"Well, sir, it was a beautiful summer evening when I reached Preston Mansion. A full moon rode the heavens, casting its pale, silvery light on the dilapidated old house and the weed-choked garden. Not a breath of wind stirred the languid leaves of the maples. From the broad veranda I could see the roofs of Prestonville, faintly luminous in the distance. Never did the earth feel firmer underfoot; never did the well-being of the town seem so assured.

"On this last night, Mr. Burton, I hadn't long to wait. Hardly had I rapped gently on the door before it swung open and my host confronted me.

"At the first glance I saw that trouble was brewing. For days he had been sulky and out of sorts, taking no interest in his toys, and sitting silently in a dark corner; but now this sullen brooding had given place to a forced gaiety, which was a sure sign of coming danger. Evidently he was contemplating some new atrocity.

"Come in, young man!" he cried, capering about in his ragged velvet robe like some kind of mad marionette. 'I've got a surprise for you. Come in!'

"What is it?" I asked, with the gloomiest apprehensions.

"But he gave me no answer — just skipped nimbly up the winding stairway, waving the taper gaily above his head. Soon he had ushered me into that bare attic room where, as I have told you, he kept the toy town spread out in perfect order on a straw mat. The moonlight streamed down upon it through the broken roof.

"I am tired of all these playthings," the old man cried, pointing at the miniature of Prestonville with a wrathful forefinger. 'For days they have bored me to distraction. Never have I been so bored since I looked down on Pompeii. Those old Italians! Ah, I served them out for tiring me with their stupid arts and pompous pageantry! It seems only yesterday that I destroyed them and their city, yet it was many centuries ago.'

"What are you going to do to Prestonville?" I cried; and all the blood seemed to flow away from my heart, leaving it cold and dead.

"For answer he stooped painfully, so that his crooked back curved like a bent bow and his long, tangled beard brushed the floor. Following his every movement with dread and horror. I saw him pick up the corner of the straw mat between finger and thumb.

"What are you going to do to Prestonville?" I repeated dully.

"This, young man," he murmured, shaking the mat very gently. 'This!'

"You can imagine what happened then, Mr. Burton. No sooner had he taken the corner of that mat between his fingers than I felt the solid floor shake beneath my feet. The whole room swayed dizzily from side to side, and the moon swung back and forth across the opening in the roof like the pendulum of a clock.

"Don't!" I cried, sinking on the floor and covering my eyes. 'Don't!'

"When I looked again, Mr. Burton, the room was once more stationary; but the toy town of Prestonville? Ah, that had changed in those few brief moments beyond belief! Half the tiny houses were

in ruins, and the rest were tottering on their foundations. My new home was still standing, but it was heavily listed to one side.

"Don't!" I cried, holding my clasped hands toward him in entreaty. 'Everything that I love is in that town!'

"An earthquake is both unusual and amusing,' he murmured, still holding one corner of the mat between finger and thumb. 'Don't be selfish, young man. I simply must be amused!'

"I pray you be merciful, Fate!" I cried in a breaking voice.

"Ah, yes!" he broke in hurriedly. 'Pray to me! I love to have people pray to me. Some of them have done it so well—Mark Antony, for instance. Let me hear you pray to Mr. Fate, young man!'

"And then a strange eloquence was vouchsafed me, Mr. Burton. Words, melodious and rich with feeling, flowed from my lips. It was as if the floodgates of restraint that bottle up a man's emotional outbursts had suddenly opened in my breast. To this day, I don't know what I said, or with what fine poetic imagery I clothed it all; but I do know that it pleased that terrible old man and made him wag his beard at me and smile.

"Very well put!" he cried when I had done. 'Mark Antony himself could hardly have improved upon it. You have gifts, young man!'

"I pray you be merciful, Fate!" I repeated.

"Merciful?" he cried irritably, with a sudden change of mood. 'Tut, tut, young man! How should I know what mercy is? No one has ever shown me any. Certainly my playthings haven't had mercy on me. No, they have bored me to distraction by their sameness. I can't die, remember, and I've got to live on endlessly in an immense shop through which millions of toys pass daily. Do you wonder that I destroy them when I find time? Mercy? Tut, young man!'

"And then, Mr. Burton, he gave the mat such a savage shake that the walls seemed to change places with one another and the moon spun round and round like a top. When the room finally righted itself again, I saw that my worst fears had been realized. The miniature of Prestonville had been destroyed. Not a house was left standing, with the single exception of Preston Mansion, which was lurching drunkenly to one side. It was as I looked at this desolate waste of ruin which so shortly before had been a thriving town, at my own home toppled over on the sidewalk, that tears rose up into my eyes and fairly blinded me—weak, womanly tears at my own impotency.

"Pretty, pretty!" muttered Fate, touching my wet cheeks with his callous forefinger. 'Pretty—like diamonds!'

"It was not until many days later that I came to realize that this terrible old man did not know the meaning of tears; that he took delight in them, like a baby, because they were bright and shining. At the time I thought he was mocking me, and I cursed him from my heart. I cursed him, Mr. Burton, as I don't believe any other man has ever cursed Fate. My tongue fairly flamed with invectives. I cursed his cold, fishy eyes, his beard all gritty with bread-crumbs, his vibrating, claw-like hands. I cursed his youth in the days when the world was young, and his old age when the world would be dying. I cursed him by all his names together—Luck, Providence, Destiny, Fate—and by each one singly. And when I had done, Mr. Burton, when my throat had gone dry of words, I found him grinning.

"Well done, young man!" he said, with his head on one side. 'You curse even better than you pray. I can't think of anybody who has so spoken up to me since Judas Iscariot on the day when he hanged himself. He had a scorpion for a tongue, did Judas! You did very creditably, young man. You actually succeeded in amusing me. I feel that I should reward you. What would you have of me, young man?'

"Nothing!" I cried, half out of my mind from grief. 'Treat me as you do the rest of mankind—carry me around in your pocket.'

"Not a bad idea!" said he, once more bending his crooked back over the ruins of the town. 'So that's what you want, is it?'

"I want nothing from you," I told him coldly.

"He paid me no heed—just began to grope about with his long, thin fingers in the only toy house that still was standing. At last, with a shrill, neighing laugh, he pulled through one of the open windows a tiny wooden figure and held it toward me in the palm of his hand.

"Here you are!" said he. 'You came out of this business without a scratch. So you want to into old Fate's pocket, do you? Well, I must warn you that it's dark in there. Your ambition may fall asleep.'

"Ambition?" I cried in despair. "My ambition is buried under this town!"

"Very well," said he, cocking his beard at me whimsically. "You're safe in my pocket—at least, for a time." He paused and regarded me steadily with his cold gray eyes. "I'm essentially honest," he continued, "and so I'm going to warn you again. What goes into my pocket must sooner or later come out. Good-by until then, young man!"

The shopkeeper again yawned, and his chin sank down on his breast. Evidently he was on the very brink of sleep; but I had no intention of letting him doze off until he had told me the rest of his story. I bent forward and touched him on the arm.

"And then what happened?" I asked.

"Why, then he slipped the little wooden figure into his pocket and went out through the open door. I've never seen him again since that night, Mr. Burton."

"But what did you do?"

"I knelt on the dusty floor of that attic for a long, long time, quite alone with the ruins of my toy town. Nothing seemed to matter very much any more, Mr. Burton. It was as if I had been suddenly plucked out of life, as if its happiness and suffering were as remote as the stars. Later, even the real town of Prestonville failed to move me—that tragic heap of shattered masonry beneath the paling moon. Everything had died in my breast but fear—fear of the mental darkness which now enshrouded me, fear of that terrible old man whom I could no

longer see, fear of that future time when Fate would drag me put of his pocket into the light of a relentless day. And so I have lived ever since—without love or ambition or hope. Only fear has remained, Mr. Burton!"

Once more the shopkeeper's chin sank on his breast and his brown eyes closed.

"I'm so tired!" I heard him mutter fretfully.

A moment later he was fast asleep; and this time I did not disturb him. Instead, I stared through the window at the level swamp-land through which the train was speeding to make up for lost time.

"A strange story to come from even a madman!" I told myself. Far ahead, around a distant bend, I saw a glow in the murky sky which informed me that I should soon reach my destination. A few minutes more and the train would pull into Fairview. The light came from a factory on the brow of the hill above the town.

Turning from the window, I started picking up my belongings. Suddenly I saw something which caused a cold thrill to run up my spine. While I had been staring out at the landscape, an old man had noiselessly entered the smoking-compartment. He now sat beside the sleeping shopkeeper, peering into a large cardboard box that rested on his bony knees. I noticed, with an involuntary shudder, that this old man's long, tangled beard was sprinkled with bread-crumbs, which

dangled from it like berries in a bush.

"What have you got there?" I asked, for I felt the need of speech.

"Toys," he said with a snicker. "Do you want to see them?"

Not waiting for my response, he put his hand into the box and pulled out a toy train. Next he drew forth a coil of tin tracks, and placed them on the floor.

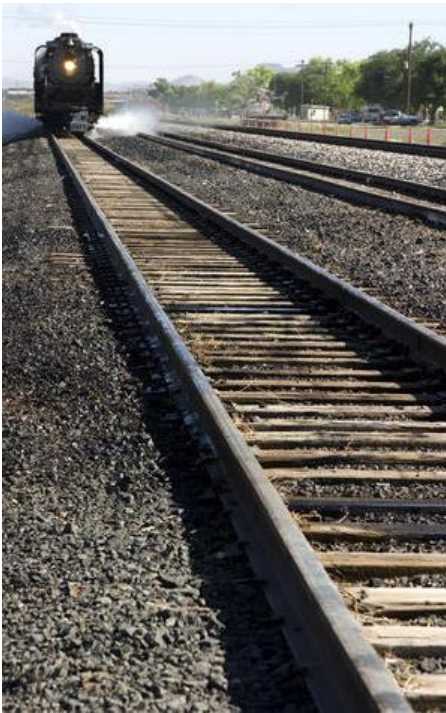
"Do you want to see it work?" he asked, winding the engine as he spoke. "I love toy trains! Don't you?"

"Yes, of course," I answered, glancing hastily at the shopkeeper, who was still sleeping peacefully; "but I'm leaving at the next station, and I'm afraid I won't have time to see it work."

"Yes, you will, young man!" he cried excitedly. "Oh, yes, you will! I'm going to start it now!"

In spite of my common sense, I felt a sudden flicker of fear as he got painfully down on his hands and knees and placed the toy train on the tracks. A moment later it started off. Faster and faster it went, while the old man's tangled beard waved joyously above it.

"It's going to smash!" I heard him mutter in a strange, singsong voice. "It's going to smash!"



But it didn't—not that time, at least. Slowing down at the last vicious curve, even as the train which carried us was doing now, it came to a shivering halt. Before it had fairly stopped, the old man seized the engine and began winding it savagely. Then, glancing slyly at the sleeping shopkeeper, he felt in his pocket and pulled out a little wooden figure. This he carefully inserted through a window of the first toy car, and replaced the engine on the tracks. By now we had reached Fairview. Pushing past the old man, I was hurrying out of the smoking-compartment, when something prompted me to glance back over my shoulder.

There the shopkeeper sat, sleeping sonorously, and quite unaware of the old man who crouched beside him on the floor—that mad old man who, even as I watched, took a match out of his pocket and laid it carefully across the toy tracks.

"It's going to smash!" I heard him mutter gleefully through his beard. "It's going to smash!"

I have little more, to add. All of you, no doubt, still remember the glaring headlines in the morning papers, telling of the most disastrous railroad wreck that this country had ever known — how that ill fated train, while making up time between Fairview and Forest Point, was derailed by a tree-trunk which had fallen across the tracks, and pitched over a hundred-foot embankment; and how every man, woman, and child aboard met an almost instantaneous death. All that is ancient history now.

But the mad old man—what of him? He was not among the charred bodies taken from the burning train; nor was he among the few men who leaped for their lives and perished on the cruel rocks that lined the gully. No, he and his toys had vanished together.

Of late I have been thinking that perhaps that unfortunate shopkeeper was not so mad; that Fate may indeed wear a human guise while he stalks among us. If this is so, surely it was he whom I met that night as the train drew into Fairview! Fate, an old man playing with toys like a child of ten—a mad old man who is not so mad as not to be vicious! Truly a terrible thought!

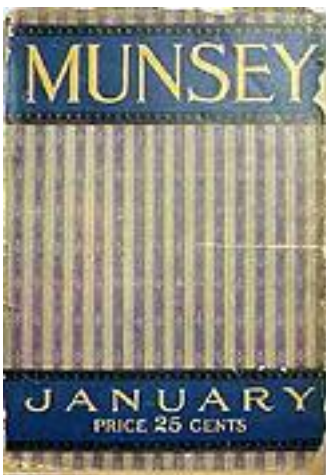
But there is another thought, more terrible still, which of late has plagued me sorely. How was it that I came to escape that night? Yet did I actually escape? Perhaps, after all, I have not slipped through those eager, groping fingers—perhaps that merciless old man has merely dropped me into a ragged pocket, to play with me at his leisure. Yes, I feel that he can still hold me at will in the hollow of his hand.

Long ago, like the shopkeeper, I lost love and hope and ambition. Now, of all human emotions, only fear remains — the fear of a rat in a trap when it hears its jailer's footsteps approaching—the fear of a fly in the threatening shadow of a descending hand.

And yet, as I draw back with a shudder, as I look about hopelessly for some means of escape, a merciful drowsiness descends upon me, calming the wild, tumultuous beating of my heart. Yes, all my senses are engulfed in a sea of tranquil dreams.

Yawning, I stretch my arms above my head and yawn again. Surely this must mean the beginning of the end. I, too, am in Fate's pocket!

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cinema

The feature movie of the evening was “Carnival of Souls”, a 1962 black and white horror film, independently produced and directed by Heck Harvey, a guy who had previously made many industrial and educational films. He held a Master’s degree in arts & drama and had previously been both an actor and a teacher of drama at various schools. He gained cinema experience working for the Centron Corporation which specialized in promotional and educational material, a company that also made a good number of films for the US government. Harvey quickly became one of their top producers and directors, able to turn in quality material on time and under budget. During this time he also developed some innovative special effects, which were written up in an article for *American Cinematographer Magazine* in 1956.

In 1962 he put out his one and only feature film: “Carnival of Souls”. Developed specifically to appeal to the then current interest in horror movies, particularly with teen age audiences who comprised a significant

segment of the theater going public during that era, he built his entire movie around one dramatic scene he had envisioned, a dance with ghoulish dead couples who seek to lure the living into their merriment of death.

This idea was coupled with his interest in the abandoned Saltair Pavilion in Salt Lake City, Utah that he encountered when driving back from making a Centron movie in California. He asked Centron associate John Clifford to write a script, hired unknown New York actress Candace Hilligoss as the star, and decided to make the film with a bare bones budget of about \$17,000. Expenses rapidly exceeded the budget, eventually running the total costs up to about \$33,000. The extra money was raised from friends he and his wife knew in their hometown of Lawrence, Kansas, where most of the movie was going to be shot.

Ms Hilligoss was paid \$2,000 for her role, and the entire movie was shot in three weeks’ time, with everybody working constantly seven days a week. Local people and local locations were enlisted to appear in the film for free. In a lucky break, Harvey was able to rent the old Saltair Pavilion for a flat fee of \$50. Harvey himself appeared in the movie as the ghoulish man whose random appearances terrorize the heroine, a figure that only she can see.

The organ score that was used as



a theme and background for the entire movie was composed by Gene Moore. The music adds considerably to

the feeling of taut suspense and other-worldly detachment as the events involving the characters unfold. The heroine is a musician, a church organist, who becomes fascinated with this odd and disturbing piece of music.

The completed movie was released in 1962 by an independent distributor, where it played as the B part of a double feature release. "The Devil's Messenger" was on the top of the bill. Response to the film was lukewarm, at best. The distributor went out of business almost immediately, and the movie would have sunk like a rock, a minor foot-note in the history of motion pictures, except for the fact that Harvey had secured international copyrights, but for some reason, had neglected to copyright the movie in the United States.

This meant that the picture could be shown royalty free by anybody who could get a print of the film. It is unclear whether Howard or Walter Manley, who handled the international rights, began producing 16mm prints of the movie, but they were soon being offered to TV stations and film rental libraries, where they were then shown at science fiction conventions, low budget art houses, and film festivals. WOR-TV in New York City used to regularly play the picture as part of their annual Halloween spooky movie offering from the late 1960s thru most of the 70s and early 80s. This helped considerably to bring the film to the attention of people who might otherwise never have even heard of it.

Meanwhile, some people who had actually seen the movie during its original release regarded it as a flawed but highly interesting experiment in picture making. In particular people who later become involved in the psychotronic film movement took a deep interest in "Carnival of Souls" and its composition.

By the time the 1980s rolled around the movie had achieved minor cult status. Viewing the movie now it is possible to understand the continuing fascination for this picture, without understanding exactly why so many people think it is hot stuff.

The problem with "Carnival of Souls" is that it is a movie without a plot. A drag race between a car of young men and a car with three young women leads to the vehicle with the three girls being forced off an old wooden bridge, where it hits the river below and sinks immediately. Everybody is presumed dead, and the local authorities are trying in vain to locate the car, which may have been swept down the river. Then, to the amazement of everyone, young Mary Henry rises out of the water, and walks across a mud flat, a miraculous survivor of the accident.

Right away the audience knows something is very wrong. Nobody could survive many hours underwater, so Mary must be some sort of ghost, or some other kind of undead creature returned to temporary life for some specific reason. Except she doesn't know any of this. Almost immediately she leaves the area to take the job as a church organist in Utah.

She is plagued by the random appearances of a ghoul-like figure that unnerves her, a figure nobody else can see. She refuses to get involved with other people when she arrives for her new job. She is fascinated by an abandoned amusement park on the edge of the town; then incidents begin to occur in where she seems to be invisible to everyone, unable to hear them or make them see, feel or hear her. She is badly shaken by these recurring events, but is more frightened by the phantom ghoul figure that keeps showing up.

A local doctor tries to help her when she freaks out after seeing the ghoul on a public street. The boorish lout at her new rooming house who has the hots for her complicates matters, and her fascination with the closed abandoned amusement park leads her to visit the place several times, eventually exploring the insides alone, where she sees a party of dead ghoul-ghosts dancing in a large ballroom to the same organ music that has haunted her the entire time.

The ghouls pursue her thru the structure, then outside where they finally catch up with her. Flash immediately to the river side, where the authorities have located the wrecked car, and are dragging it out. As the vehicle appears, we see three dead women in the front seat. Flash immediately back to the Utah amusement park, where the local police and some of the people Mary had met in town have found her footprints running out onto a patch of open sand, where they stop. The footprints are there, but there is no body. The End.

As I said, there is no real plot to this movie. Mary's fascination with the abandoned amusement park is never explained, the ghoulish phantom is never explained; her return from the dead is never explained. What was the purpose of her return from beyond the grave? No reason is even hinted at. The times where she became non-corporal and non-existent to the people around her are never explained. In fact, nothing is explained, at all.

There is simply no plot. Where did the story go? It was never there in the first place. Most people who see this movie immediately feel a huge letdown when the film stops.

At the same time the film creates an enduring sense of eerie foreboding, a strange other-worldly experience broken by moments of absolute ordinary realism, as when Mary fends off the creep at the boarding

house who brings her a fresh brewed coffee one morning, and wants to spike the cup with some hard liquor, or the scenes where the doctor tries to rationalize and explain her strange pre-occupation with a phantom figure nobody but Mary can see. These scenes are interspaced with all the unearthly events that Mary realizes are totally unnatural, frightening, unexplainable, and yet she can't do anything to make the situation better.

It is a film that focuses on the potential for menace rather than any actual physical threat until the very last scenes when the party of dancing ghouls turns on her. Of course, this is never explained either, or even rationalized. Why should these dancers out of time even notice her, let alone try to attack her?

None of these questions are answered. Had Harvey insisted on a more coherent screen play, with story elements that eventually linked together so the audience could experience something that comprised an actual plot, something that unified all these random occurrences, then the film would have certainly have been far stronger, and certainly more memorable. But, they weren't, they didn't, and the film as it stands seems like an interesting but incomplete experiment.

Indeed, a number of film critics and people who have made the study of motion pictures their life's work have suggested that "Carnival of Souls" is not a horror movie at all, instead it is an American version of German Expressionism; a study in emotion with characters reacting to events they neither understand nor control. I can accept that far easier than I can that this is some kind of horror masterpiece.

But, this is an opinion that many other people do not hold. The Rotten Tomatoes web-site, for example, gives this movie an 85% approval rating. To my amazement, books written about horror films consistently cite this as a superior example of low budget horror and have generally good things to say about it.

Heck Harvey never made another feature film. He tried to produce a comedy and also a science fiction adventure written by science fiction author James Gunn (a professor at Kansas University at the time), but neither effort really developed. He continued to make industrial and education films for Centron until he retired in 1985. He passed away in 1996.

The movie's star Candace Hilligoss only appeared in three other movies and a couple of TV shows. She married movie actor Nicholas Coster, but the marriage ended in divorce in 1981. Her book about the marriage and her adventures in movie making came out last year.

So far as "Carnival of Souls", I thought it was an interesting but seriously flawed movie with no plot. I was disappointed in the picture, but I suggest that anyone who has never seen the film view the long version which is now out on DVD, and judge for themselves.

---review by Bob Jennings



The Babysitter

Last night (writing this on October 31) I watched a Netflix original movie called The Babysitter. This was not a film that I should have liked. I'm not big on the "splatter" genre with lots of gruesome deaths and blood everywhere; in fact, I tend to avoid even the blockbusters in that category. This was, however, an hour and a half of more or less mindless fun. The premise is that a nerdy, bullied 12-year-old boy named Cole gets left home a lot in the company of his baby sitter, a smoking hot girl in her later teens called Bee. The two become the best of friends, and, of course, the kid develops a massive crush on her.

The problem is that Bee isn't what she seems to be. The real reason she babysits Cole is that she needs his "innocent blood" so that her group of devil worshipers can offer demonic sacrifices in order to get "everything she wants" (which is never specified). Cole witnesses the group playing Truth or Dare and thinks that he is going to get a sexy show as the game progresses, until Bee drives two knives into the skull of one of the players, collects his blood and tells the group to prepare for the ritual. Cole panics, especially after he hears Bee tell the others that it's time to "go upstairs and get some of that innocent blood." Cole retreats to his room and tries to form an

escape plan, calls 911 to report the murder, but is trapped in his room and has to get into bed and fake being asleep. While he is doing that, Bee and the other cultists extract the innocent blood they need – a syringe full. Turns out they don't need to kill Cole, they just need a little of his blood. As soon as the cult leaves, Cole jumps out of bed and starts tying sheets together, planning to climb down from his bedroom window, but Bee has hidden behind the door and captures him.

Cole, tied to a chair, tries to play dumb, but the police show up and the violence begins. A cultist named Max, played ably by Robbie Amell, (shirtlessly channeling Tom Cruise from *Risky Business*) kills the cops. The cops shoot one of the girls. From this point, the movie becomes a mixture of [choose your favorite splatter film] and *Home Alone*, with Cole foiling the cultists at nearly every turn. In the process, he pretty much destroys his house, solidifies his relationship with the girls next door and convinces his parents that he no longer needs a baby sitter. It's a fun ride and a very funny movie, and it never slows down for a minute. If the mark of a good movie is that you're disappointed that it's over, this one qualifies, even though the ending was perfect. There is an inter-credits scene where they set up for a potential sequel, though, so it could be there's more to come. This isn't Fellini, but it's definitely fun.

---review by Tom McGovern



The Good Place On Heaven and Hell (Sort Of)

NBC's half-hour sitcom, *The Good Place*, finally made its way to Netflix recently, and I've enjoyed Kristen Bell as an actress ever since *Veronica Mars*, so I decided to give it a try during the few weeks I had before the much-awaited (by me) season 3 of *Gotham* hit the streaming service.

There's nothing profound about this show. It's not television for the ages. But it's cute and funny, and the final episode of the season did pack a twist ending that caught me by surprise (I'll avoid spoiling it for you in this review). Kristen Bell plays Eleanor Shellstrop, a recently deceased soul who, as the show commences is being welcomed into *The Good Place* by its Architect, Michael, played admirably by Ted Danson. Traditional concepts of the afterlife don't apply here. There are *The Good Place* and *The Bad Place*, and only the crème de la crème of humanity get into the former. For everyone else, there's eternal torment. Well, with one exception, a coke-addicted attorney, but you'll have to watch the show to see how that plays out.

Upon being inducted into *The Good Place*, Eleanor is ushered to her ideal house (which she hates,

as it was designed for the person who should have arrived in *The Good Place* rather than for her) and meets her supposed universe-chosen soulmate, Chidi. Chidi was an Ethics professor in life; Eleanor was, well, somewhat less than ethical. Eleanor is also introduced to her new neighbors, Tahani Al-Jamil and Jianyu Li (aka Jason Mendoza). Tahani and Jianyu are also supposed to be soulmates; Jianyu is allegedly a Tibetan monk who has taken a vow of silence and never speaks.

Here's the problem: As I mentioned, Eleanor wasn't such a good person while she was alive, and she knows from the start that she doesn't belong in *The Good Place*. She doesn't want to go to *The Bad Place*, however, so she determines to try to find a way to stay. She enlists Chidi to teach her Ethics on the theory that this will make her a better person. Unfortunately, the universe rebels at Eleanor's presence; *The Good Place* is plagued with problems ranging from flying giant shrimp to garbage storms to a huge sinkhole that threatens to devour the whole shebang. Michael realizes that something is wrong, but doesn't know what, and enlists the aid of Janet (think Siri in human-appearing form) to find out what is going on.

Eleanor, of course, doesn't want to be found out, so she tries to hide her secret from Tahani and Jianyu, only to find out that Jianyu is also a phony. He's not a Tibetan monk at all but rather, in his words, a "pre-successful" DJ from Florida named Jason Mendoza. He's been capitalizing on the "vow of silence" in order to prevent anyone from finding out that he, too, doesn't belong in The Good Place. Now Eleanor must hide not only her own secret, but Jason's as well.

How all of this plays out is the essence of the season, and ends with a twist in the final episode that I didn't see coming. But the show is well written, well-acted and very entertaining. Kristen Bell balances serious dialogue with humor effortlessly (as I so much enjoyed seeing her do in *Veronica Mars*), and Ted Danson presents just the right blend of flightiness and gravity in Michael. The other characters are equally well developed and portrayed. As I said, it's not profound, but it's fun, and, in a series of this sort, that's what really counts, isn't it?

---review by Tom McGovern



When the Bad Guys Win (MORE SPOILERS)

Pat recently discovered that she had purchased, apparently by accident, a year's worth of membership in Amazon Prime. I, not being one to waste such an opportunity, took advantage of the situation to start watching the Amazon exclusive, *The Man in the High Castle*, based, of course, on the classic novel by Philip K. Dick. I'll confess right up front that I haven't read the

novel (though I may want to after watching the series), so I can't comment on issues of how well the storyline of the TV series follows that of the novel.

That having been said, this show is excellent. The acting and writing are both superb. It's the story of America in the early 1960s, set in an alternate universe where the Axis powers won World War II and have occupied parts of the United States. The Nazis are in charge of the entire eastern half of the country and a big chunk of the Midwest, while the Japanese occupy the Pacific states. Between the two occupied territories lies a neutral zone, sort of a Wild West area where various forces are at play politically and anything can happen. A powerful Resistance movement is operating throughout the country, fighting the occupation covertly in hopes of regaining America's freedom. Characters' lives intermingle with the intrigue generated among the various political forces at play.

And the characters are interesting. Juliana Crain, a white woman (as the Japanese overlords refer to Caucasians) living in San Francisco with her part-Jewish boyfriend Frank Frink, gets involved with the Resistance after seeing her sister gunned down by the Japanese Kempeitai (essentially the equivalent of the Nazi SS corps). Trudy, Juliana's sister, was attempting to smuggle a mysterious film out of San Francisco, presumably to get it to the elusive Man in the High Castle, whose headquarters are somewhere in the neutral zone. Trudy hands off the package containing the film to Juliana just before she is confronted and killed.

Juliana bails out on Frank without notice and boards a bus for Canon City, Colorado, somewhere in the neutral zone. There, she runs into Joe Blake, a Nazi agent who is infiltrating the Resistance. Thinking that Joe is actually with the Resistance, she begins to work with him, the two of them saving each other's lives at different times. Joe really wants the film, as does pretty much everyone else in the series. Actually, it is the aging Adolph Hitler - nearing a death that is certain to set off a significant power struggle in the Reich and that is likely to lead

to war between the Nazis and Japan - who wants the film and others like it, since he believes that their existence threatens the Reich.

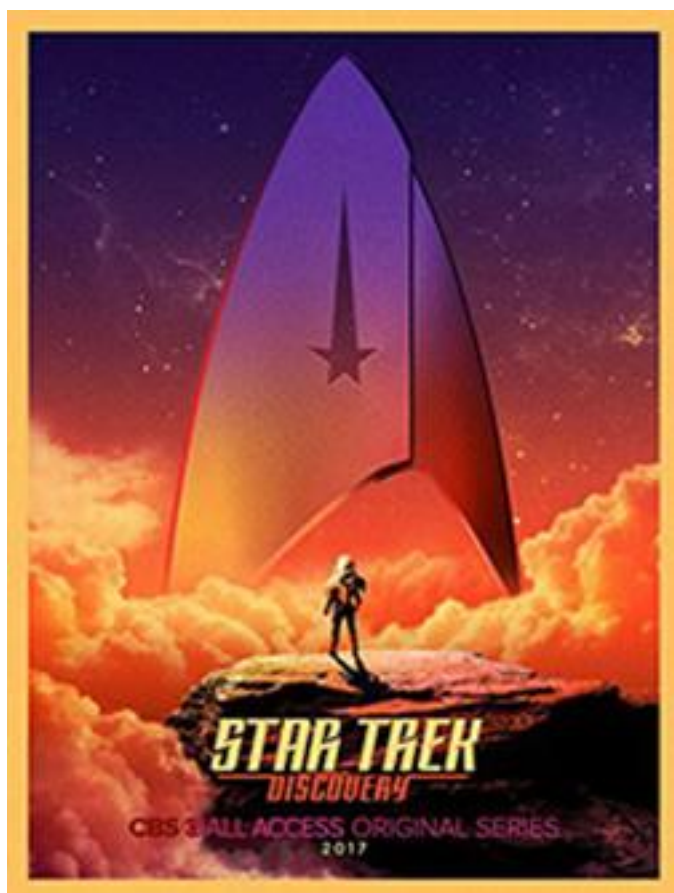
Blake works for Obergruppenfuhrer John Smith, an American who has achieved high ranking in the Nazi party. You know, as an aside, I'd never want to be a Nazi, but how cool of a job title would Obergruppenfuhrer be? Smith works hard at pleasing his Nazi masters in hopes of preserving the comfortable, upper middle class life that his position affords him. He, too, encounters moral problems with the existing regime's principles, especially in the second season when his own son is found to have an incurable and debilitating illness, which, in the eyes of the Nazis, renders him unfit to live.

Other interesting characters are Trade Minister Nobosuke Tagomi, a Japanese official trying to prevent war between the Japanese and the Nazis, Chief Inspector Kedo of the Kempeitai, seemingly an intrepid enforcer of the occupation laws, and Ed McCarthy, Frink's co-worker at the metal fabricating factory, who is determined to keep Frank from getting himself into potentially life-threatening trouble.

These aren't all of them - every character in this series is well-rounded and interesting. And the story itself is very engaging. Oh, and those films that everyone is so interested in? Ah, well, that's the science fictional element in the story. The films appear to depict other realities - alternate universes, if you will - in some of which the world seems a much nicer place, absent the domination of the Axis powers.

If you have access to Amazon Prime, this series is definitely worth your time - I recommend it highly.

---review by Tom McGovern



Star Trek: Discovery

I was excited when I read that CBS was launching a new Star Trek series based in the time period about ten years before Kirk and Spock came aboard the Enterprise. I was less happy when I found out that besides the first episode, the series would only be available by subscribing to the CBS streaming service. I was even more hacked off to find that CBS offers two tiers of service: \$5 a month with commercials, and \$10 a month without.

The first episode did a nice job of setting up that situation with interesting characters and an existential threat coming from a rising Klingon Empire. The first episode, of course, ends in a cliffhanger and there's no more without subscribing.

I was sufficiently impressed that I'll wait until the first season is complete and then spring for a trial subscription to see if the series is worth paying for. I heard that subscriptions to CBS All Access more than doubled with the addition of Star Trek Discovery. I also hear from others who have ponied up that they are happy with the series.

I suppose this is the face of the future of television, and I'll have to manage a dozen subscriptions to various services, possibly doing away with cable TV entirely. I'm not completely

comfortable with the idea yet, especially since BBC America has no streaming capability yet.

---review by Gary Robe



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.



OPUNTIA 405 20 pages, 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 FAPAazine, *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.

Frankly, I don't know how he does it. Every two weeks, and sometimes even more often than that, Dale

turns out an 18 to 20 page issue of this fanzine complete with photos, commentary, reviews, and opinions. Most faneds have a hard time keeping up a quarterly schedule, with maybe the occasional outside article and a few LOCs to other fanzines. Dale is a human fanzine production factory, and incredibly, almost everything he writes about in these issues of *Opuntia* is interesting and informative.

Increasingly Dale is including long photo shoot commentaries as an integral part of his fanzine. This time the photo shoot deals with Chinese New Year in Calgary. As he notes, Calgary has a large and very active Chinese-Canadian community. Keeping the old-country traditions alive has become a major tourist attraction during those cold winter months when opportunities for outside festive encounters are limited. There are some nice color shots and some brief but insightful comments added to the photo shot.

This time round Dale continues his examination of a series of very early science fiction novels relating to space stations and other world colonization. Most of this material dates badly, and not just because the science is impossibly or completely wrong. Even accomplished story tellers sometimes struggled with brand new concepts, trying to make a reasonable plot out of wildly improbably speculations. Some of these stories continue to be read because they were first. Being first in SF literature is important. Dale devotes several pages to discussing Edward Everett Hale's "The Brick Moon," an important novel that is filled with many improbable conjectures, including the idea of shooting a fully constructed brick building into the stratosphere. A look at a novel written in 1894 by John Jacob Astor IV (of the ultra-wealthy Astor family) focuses on not just its improbable science, but also its racism, jingoism, and neo-fascist political leanings. This is a novel that nobody remembers fondly.

He also includes several pages of recent updates concerning the FANAC Fan History Project. I am mildly impressed by all the genuine effort and enthusiasm these folks are generating scanning old fanzines, fan correspondence, convention bulletins, oral fan history reports, and more. I remain skeptical that this project is going to be successful overall, due to the simple fact that the history of science fiction fandom is enormously diverse and scattered, with many, many isolated pockets of local activity that had some, or sometimes very little, interaction with the so-called hard core of fandom. Still, it's a wonderful effort, and I wish the people working on the project all the best.

Dale discusses the "Fibber McGee & Molly" radio program, and notes the ease with which lots of OTRadio shows can now be downloaded from the internet, for free in most cases. He blithely asserts that the expense and storage problems needed to accumulate OTRadio shows on reel-to-reel tape or cassettes "kept the hobby down until the advent of MP3". Uh, no, it didn't. Collecting and storing old radio shows on tape is no more difficult than collecting and storing science fiction/fantasy literature in book or magazine form. There were plenty of collectors of OTRadio during the tape era (including me), and without our work, seeking out old programs and preserving them, the so-called MP3 era would never have come into existence at all.

A lot of what followed went right by me, as Dale discussed some of the technical science books he has been reading. Many of these tomes deal with the effects of pollution, particularly pollution on fresh water supplies and the ocean ecosystem. All important stuff, I'm sure, but Dale does not explain most of this in terms that the average layman (me, for example) could grasp easily. Altho I got a pretty clear impression that we are polluting everything pretty thoroughly and it is messing Mother Nature up pretty badly. Solutions? None are specifically mentioned, but I venture to suggest that until a much larger portion of the general population becomes involved, that nothing major will happen to deal the problem.

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.



LOFGEORNOST #130

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 Fred's trip to WorldCon, held this year in Helsinki, Finland. For anybody who doubts that WorldCons have become gigantic, Fred notes that the attendance was 7,000 people, and the program book was 120 pages long. He mentions encountering a number of non-US SF authors who gave readings from their works, which inspired him to search out some of their novels, the ones that had been translated into English anyway.

Fred's second article in this issue us a report of an opera he attended. It was a modern opera, "The Exterminating Angel!", based on a bizarre and pretentious artsy Spanish film of the same name. Fred did not like the music or the story. (I'm surprised there was any kind of plot to the opera at all, having tried

unsuccessfully myself to watch the original movie). He also notes that the audience was composed almost entirely of oldsters, as in, a very white haired audience. To quote him: "at seventy-one, I was not accustomed to being one of the youngest persons in the room". It seems unlikely that opera as a viable entertainment form will last much longer unless some way can be found to interest younger people in the form, but, as he notes, you need good music and intelligible stories to do that, and in his opinion, "The Exterminating Angle" did not offer either.

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, the early life of Sherlock Holmes, the fracturing of television, 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.



TETRAGRAMMATON FRAGMENTS #248

5-1/2x8-1/2" fold over saddle stitched, 30 pages, published bi-monthly (mostly) by Rob Imes; 13510 Cambridge #307; Southgate, MI 48195; \$2.50 for sample issue, after that The Usual

This is the official 0-0 for the UFO fanzine cooperative. What is that, you might ask? Essentially fans who produce their own fanzines agree to cross promote each other's efforts thru the pages of their own zines and also thru the pages of *Tet Frags*. It is not an apa; there is no central mailing officer, and there is no set schedule the members must produce their zines on, altho *Tet Frags* itself generally comes out bi-monthly.

The UFO was developed in the 1970s to help producers of comic fanzines find a way to successfully cross promote their efforts. Back in those days there were literally thousands of different fanzines devoted to comics. The hobby produced amateur comics, histories of comics, offshoots, comic perzines, reprint projects, and a lot more. There have been a lot of ups and downs with the UFO over the years, but it is on a firm footing now, and *Tet Frags* is available to anybody who shows an interest in the publication or the UFO. Members are

encouraged to write reviews, and editorials, commentaries, overviews about their involvement with the world of amateur publishing and their own products as well as those of their fellow members. This issue carries a lot of reviews, and a lot of commentary about the changing face of fandom, and how the Internet is directly affecting the world of amateur creation.

The focus right now seems to be primarily on artists and those who are creating their own amateur comic book characters, but the range is varied and there is room for everyone. There are usually some interesting illos thruout. Unfortunately there is no letter column in this particular number. Issues generally run about thirty pages each.

This issue features articles from members discussing a wide variety of subjects, from reviewing and commenting on other members' recent publications, to dealing with creative block, to discussions of commercial art projects, and how to get more people interested in amateur comic book characters.

One of the more interesting articles comes from Gavin Galligan, who relates his opinions and ideas of both the current and amateur comic scene as well as the changing political scene of the United States thru his detailed discussions and critiques of comics books. Gavin is very conservative politically, and his observations about the casual hypocrisy and ultra-liberal smugness in certain professional comic books is interesting to follow.

In fact this entire issue has fascinating, insightful articles by the UFO members talking about themselves, their involvement with art and writing, and how they are deal with the creative process. A free sample is available to anyone who wants to check it out, and it is well worth checking out.

ASKEW #23

John Purcell; 3744 Marielene Circle; College Station, TX 77845-77845; 8 pages, irregular; available for The Usual

John's highly personal zine appears in print format only, and is generally devoted to light personal musings, a few reviews, and a letter column. The letter column is usually the heart of these issues, but his recent TAFF trip, plus his duties as the new administrator of the TAFF fund have pushed a lot of things to the sideline.



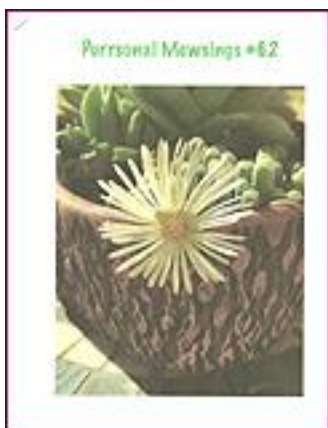
As a result most of this issue discusses his post-TAFF comments, as well as discussions of his new duties as the fund's administrator. A complete ballot for this year's TAFF fund is enclosed as a rider to the zine. Also as a result, the letter column is anemic this issue; a mere two letters, short ones at that, which does not provide many opportunities for discussions or commentary.

John does add a review of one of Ursula K. LeGuin's Earthside books, and a couple of mini-fanzine reviews (informational postings, really).

The other pages of the issue are filled with a long political rant about the current President of the United States and his recent actions. People who are pro-Trump will dismiss this as mindless whining, while the article will be more preaching to the choir for the anti-Trump readers. Unfortunately that is the ongoing problem these days with trying to insert political commentary into a fanzine. The national political sides are so polarized that intelligent discussion or even an exchange of ideas rarely happens anymore. I find this to be a pretty depressing state of affairs, but I have no suggestions on how to make the situation

better.

This seems like a lightweight issue to me, more like a filler before *Askew* gets back into gear again. I'm sure next issue will feature a return of the usual free wheeling letter column and more relevant natterings from editor Purcell himself.



Purrrsonal Mewsings #62

R-Laurraine Tutihasi; 2081 W. Overlook St.; PO Box 5323; Oracle, AZ 85623-5323; 8-1/2x11", 18 pages; six-weekly; available for The Usual

This is editor R-Laurraine's perzine, which also doubles as the editor's apazine for Stipple-APA. Each issue features some abbreviated apa (amateur press alliance) mailing comments that readers will find difficult to get involved with. The mailing comments consist of brief remarks related to the past mailing of Stipple-Apa, and are pretty much incomprehensible if you are not a member of that particular group.

In the past editor Tutihasi has devoted a lot of her recent issues to trip reports that often read like an expense diary, with notations of places stopped for gas, foods eaten, when she turned in for the night, when she woke up, even what she had for breakfast. I find that kind of stuff gets old pretty fast.

Lucky there is none of that this issue. Instead editor Tutihasi has offered some generous reviews of new books, movies, and plays she has experienced. Most of these are brief but interesting and cut to the heart of the matter. There is also a nice humorous short story by Ray Nelson, about the wise Siamese Philosopher Cat and his adventures and warnings about a computer using info-rat. Nicely done. I wish Ray would write more articles and short stories for fanzines.

The letter column is longer and a lot healthier this time than it has been in past numbers of this zine. Much of it concerns Laurraine's recent articles about the solar eclipse and her adventures in astronomy (both she and her husband are ardent amateur astronomers). There are also some comments about cats (hey, it's the theme of the fanzine, remember).

Each issue always features a generous assortment of color illos from a wide variety of sources, but mostly photos she or her hubby took around their house, which is located in semi-desert terrain. This issue features only a few cat pictures (despite the fanzine title), but does offer many photos of local plants. The format here is clean and open, with wide margins and distinct type font. This is another relaxed, fun issue, well worth checking out.

THE DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE IS April 20, 2018