



TIGHTBEAM #286

TIGHTBEAM is officially produced on a bi-monthly basis (but mostly comes out every month) by the **N3F –The National Fantasy Fan Federation**, a world-wide club for fans of science fiction/fantasy and related subjects. Copies are sent electronically direct to all current members, and copies are also posted, somewhat later, on the efanzines.com web site thru the generous courtesy of webmaster Bill Burns. ISSN: 2329-4809

This is issue #286, May 2018, and is edited by Bob Jennings. Letters of comment are solicited from everyone reading this; also, reviews of books read, movies seen, and convention experiences recently attended, and any other fannish material that would be of interest to our members is also requested. Please contact Bob Jennings at—

fabficbks@aol.com or

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

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

EDITORIAL RAMBLINGS

THE AMAZING STORIES MIRACLE

As related in previous issues of this fanzine, the effort to relaunch *Amazing Stories* as a print magazine again was

undertaken as a Kickstarter campaign that began back on March 20th.

Despite heavy promotion (hey, we did our part here in the pages of *Tightbeam*), the Kickstarter campaign got off to a slow start. There was a generous supply of premiums, limited edition books, signed books, special inducements of all kinds offered for various levels of donations. Each donation at or above the \$25.00 level would automatically receive a print subscription, plus the e-book version of the new magazine.

Many of the premiums were snapped up right away, but as the last week of the event loomed, it was clear that the donations were falling well behind projections, and certainly well behind the target goal of \$30,000, which was what it would take to bring the worlds first science fiction magazine back into existence as a print magazine again.

The final day of the campaign was April 8th, and the fund was ten thousand dollars short of making the goal. Things looked grim indeed. The *Amazing Stories* production team was sending out emails admitting that, short of some kind of miracle, the project was not going to make it. Kickstarter campaigns are all or nothing. Unless the full total amount (or more) is pledged, the campaign is declared a failure and none of the money pledged is actually accepted. 476 people had pledged about twenty thousand dollars, well short of the amount of money needed.

This was disappointing. *Amazing Stories* was the very first magazine completely devoted to the science fiction genre, and many people, me included, were confident that there were enuf interested fans out there to help bring the publication back again. But, apparently there weren't.

The magazine staff had already started sending out emails conceding defeat, when, with a mere twenty minutes left to go, an angel appeared out of nowhere who donated ten thousand dollars in one lump sum, enuf to push the grand total over the top. This generous donor has declined to be publically named, but needless to say the staff and editors of the mag were both stunned, and overwhelming in their gratitude.

When the dust settled, 478 backers had contributed \$30,074 to make the campaign successful. The world's very first magazine devoted entirely to science fiction is going to come back as a print magazine again in this new century. If you missed the Kickstarter campaign, you can still subscribe to the print version by going to the website at amazingstoriesmag.com. I'm looking forward to seeing the first issue of this new incarnation.



THE DEADLINE FOR OUR NEXT ISSUE
IS JUNE 20, 2018

Neffy Nominations

The list of Neffy nominations has been generated. **Please send letters of comment to Tightbeam FabFicBks@aol.com or here at TNFF phillies@4liberty.net, or join the APA at N'APA.** The ballot will appear in our issue after next.

For the 2017 National Fantasy Fan Federation Speculative Fiction Awards , the nominees are

Best novel

L.E. Modesitt—Assassin's Price
Chris Nuttall—The Zero Equation
Cedar Sanderson—Tanager's Fledglings
Ryk Spoor—Princess Holy Aura

Best shorter work

And Then There Were N-One--Sarah Pinsker
The Secret Life of Bots--Suzanne Palmer.
In the Shade of the Pixie Tree--Rodello Santos
Utopia LOL--Jamie Wahls

Best book editor

Toni Weiskopf—Baen
Sheila Gilbert—Daw

Best fanzine

Ionisphere
MT Void
Tightbeam

Best Blog

The Bar bar.baen.com
MadGeniusClub.com
The ChrisHanger chrishanger.wordpress.com

Films

Thor: Ragnarok
Guardians of the Galaxy 2

Best TV show

Legends of Tomorrow
Supergirl

Best anime

The Ancient Magus Bride
Devilman: Crybaby
The Eccentric Family
Kino's Journey

Best graphic art publication

Hawkeye
Jean Grey
Shade the Changing Girl

We Thank Greg Hullender and RocketStackRank for supplying short fiction links

<http://www.rocketstackrank.com/2017/03/And-Then-Were-N-One-Sarah-Pinsker.html>

<http://www.rocketstackrank.com/2017/09/The-Secret-Life-of-Bots-Suzanne-Palmer.html>

<http://www.rocketstackrank.com/2017/03/In-the-Shade-of-the-Pixie-Tree-Rodello-Santos.html>

<http://www.rocketstackrank.com/2017/06/Utopia-LOL-Jamie-Wahls.html>

For anime, Kevin Trainor and our new anime/comic bureau acknowledge Jessi Silver, who did the "Shiny New Anime" panel at Detour last weekend and who posts reviews on her website sle1.com

PLEASE NOTE---you must be a full member in the N3F to vote for the Neffy Awards. Please check the n3f.org web site to check out the various levels of membership in our club.

LETTERS



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

Thank you for Tightbeam 285, and my grand catch-up continues on. I will attempt another loc, and see if I have anything relevant to say. It's nearly spring, so it might just happen.

I like the idea of taking virtual tours through SFnal ships, but I figure that the creator's idea of What Things Should Be Like won't match up with most people, and some will actively disagree, as if that SFnal ship really exists. Some will take it as an exercise of imagination, and appreciate it as such.

Amazing Stories being revived sounds great, and if I had any spare cash, I would help out. The mystery shopper editorial job I had ended near the end of March (they ran out of work), and I have a short-term job with a health marketing company, but every cent has to be kept for the bills at this time. I will be kept apprised of what's happening...the managing editor of *Amazing* is Ira Nayman, resident of Toronto.

My loc...to go back to the previous paragraph, as I work and save whatever money I can get my hands on, Yvonne, still happily retired, has taken on a new short-term job to raise extra funds. We had a wonderful vacation in England in 2016, and we want to return in 2019, so Yvonne has been saving as much as she can, I put in what little I can, and any money she makes from this short-term job will go into the London fund. Getting to England is not cheap, and neither is living there.

Years ago, I read a book on the SF of Anthony Boucher, and I quite enjoyed it. I knew of all the connections between SF fandom and readers, and mystery fandom and readers. The annual Bouchercon was just in Toronto this past year. But now, a new challenge, to find a copy of the SF of Erle Stanley Gardner. I think I may like that. I did not know that Gardner himself chose Raymond Burr for the role of Mason in the TV show. Burr had made a fine career out of playing the heavy or villain, but with Gardner choosing him to play the good guy for a change, it redirected his career, and all roles after Mason were good guys. For me, Holmes was Jeremy Brett, Poirot was David Suchet, and Perry Mason was Raymond Burr. I admit I have seen none of the '30s Perry Mason movies.

As I said above, it is nearly spring, so with that comes the spring craft shows, and we are selling our wares at several of them, mostly surround Toronto, in an effort to find new markets. An old market also attracts us, and we have a table at the annual anime convention in town. It is usually our most lucrative market, it comes up the end of next month. Right after that event, Yvonne and I celebrate our 35th wedding anniversary.

Thank you for this issue, look forward to the next!

I agree with you that virtual tours of fictional space ships could be a chancy proposition, unless either the original writer went into great detail with his descriptions of the interior, or the tour was taken from visuals that had already been presented. That is pretty much the case with the virtual tours scifisteve54 is offering. Verne's description of the interior of the Nautilus was pretty extensive, and scifisteve54 seems to have taken every sentence to heart. The other ships that offer interior tours were taken from popular television shows or movies, where at least some partial visuals were offered over the course of the program's run or during the movie. Either way I think he has done a remarkable job of creating the animation and the entire tour sequences.

I too have a hard time picturing anybody else as Perry Mason except Raymond Burr, but Warren Williams did an excellent job in those 1930s movies. ###

mike weber; 655 Old Lakeview Rd.; Gainesville, GA 30501



Speaking of comics; DC has signed Frank Miller to a five-project contract and one of the first (after one featuring the female Robin from his first *Dark Knight* project) will be *Superman: Year One*.

Miller apparently hates or fears women. In *Daredevil* he made Matt Murdock's secretary/girlfriend a drug addict who disappeared, became a porn star and finally (I understand) died of AIDS.

In *Batman: Year One* he made Selina Kyle a professional dominatrix who lived with her under-age prostitute girlfriend and became Catwoman originally to deal with their abusive albino black pimp.

In *All-Star Batman and Robin* he often wrote dialog that was "blacked out", more than once insufficiently, leading DC to contact comics retailers and (without explanation) tell them not to put the issue that they were about to receive on sale and to destroy all copies.

Why? The overprinting on the dialog was a less dense black than the text and you could read that Batgirl (teen-aged in continuity at that time) was saying things like: "Text every friend you've got shitheads—sell your poison somewhere else. This arcade belongs to the fucking Batgirl!"

His fanboy-favorite comic *Sin City* is gratuitously violent misogynistic trash—and there's an ugly, apparently very faithful movie version of it.

And then, speaking of movies, there's his "Spirit" movie—The Spirit; the character to whom Miller in at least some part owes his career, since his early *Daredevil* issues contained obvious quotes from and storytelling directly inspired by Will Eisner's work. Will Eisner, who, in Eisner's later years Miller claimed was his good friend.

Apparently; judging by Miller's "Spirit" movie, in Miller World, you wait till your best friend is dead and then piss on his grave.

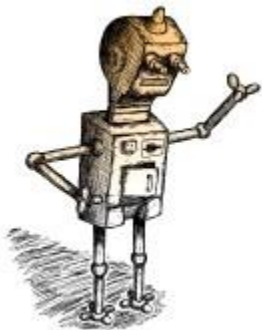
I shudder to think what he's gonna do with Superman's first year. Get ready for Lois Lane, junkie lesbian prostitute porn star and AIDS victim.

I've had some reservations about some of Miller's reformatting established commercial comic heroes. I was shocked at the treatment of Matt Murdock's girlfriend Karen Page in *Daredevil*, but otherwise I thot he did an excellent job revising a character that was headed for certain cancellation.

His other efforts seem to me to be designed to deliberately upset and aggravate long time readers. I almost always like his artwork, but his fascination with the grimeiest, most decadent side of life seems ill placed in a number of his stories.

I also have some reservations about his handling of Superman, but it appears that DC Comics is so desperate to snag new readers that they are willing to try any kind of new idea that comes along. They have just relaunched their entire stable of heroes and titles, starting everyone all over again with new number ones. You'd think they might have learned something after the, uh, shall we say, unique and unexpected reader reaction to their New 52 relaunch a few years back. I suppose time will tell.###

William Breiding; 3507 N. Santa Rita Ave -- #1; Tucson, AZ

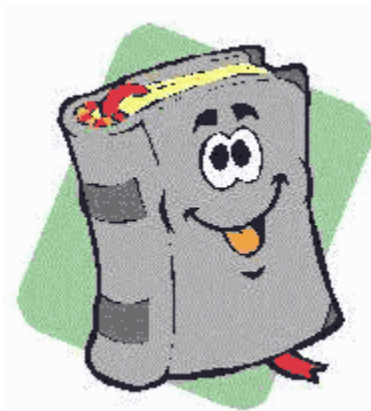


I was trolling efanazines.com the other day (something I do only once in awhile) and decided to see what you had been doing with *Tightbeam*. I happened to open #284 and see your paragraph on Rose Motel. Thank you so much! I doubt anyone will purchase an unknown quantity, via Amazon, but I appreciated knowing you got and liked Rose Motel. I do consider it a fanzine and have some copies to hand still which can be had for a request and a sticky three bucks to cover postage.

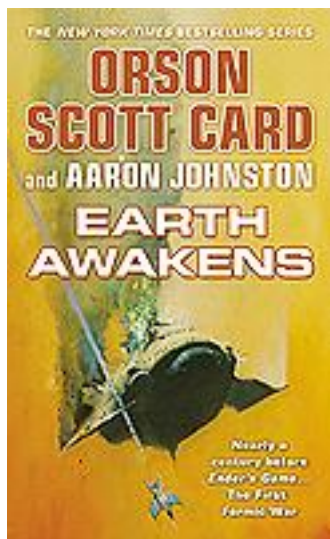
wmbreiding@gmail.com

Tightbeam is a good looking zine with interesting things going on.

Again, thanks for the egoboo!



BOOKS



Earth Awakens by Orson Scott Card and Aaron Johnston; available in hardback, paperback, and e-book versions

This is the third book in the prequel to Ender's Game, a series titled "The First Formic Wars". The first two books are Earth Unaware and Earth Afire. In the first volume, Earth colonies located far from Earth meet the Formics for the first time and, for the most part, are destroyed. There are enough survivors of Formic attacks that word eventually reaches Earth.

In the second volume, Earth itself is attacked by the Formics. There are attempts to fight back, but the situation looks hopeless until the very end of the book.

This current volume follows up on the actions in the second book. It nothing else the mission attempting to fight the Formics gathers lots of intel. There is also a group of soldiers that includes Mazer Rackham having some success against the Formics in China. This results in the beginning of cooperation between countries, which is essential in the upcoming fight against the Formics.

We follow the actions of that group of soldiers, a bright Chinese boy orphan, and one of the survivors of the initial Formic attacks. Circumstances bring the soldiers together with the survivor, and they succeed in capturing one of the large Formic ships. This leaves the way open for the events in Ender's Game.

Readers who enjoyed Ender's Game and its sequels will enjoy this series. It sheds light on how the situation in Ender's Game came to be.

---review by R.



In-Digest-ion...

My first rant has to do with the new series of Marvel Digests being published through a deal with Archie Comics. Don't get me wrong – I'm not objecting to either the concept or the execution. Archie has done very well with the digest format over the years, and there's no reason that Marvel shouldn't cash in on some of the action.

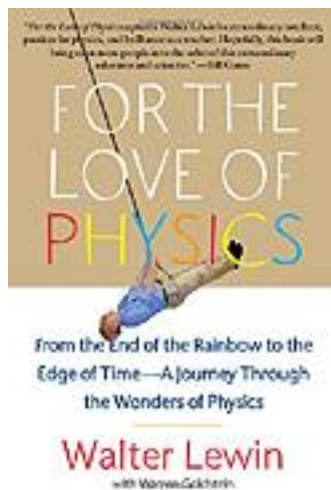
I also have some very fond memories about other digests: DC ran a series of them a few decades ago that reprinted a lot of their Silver Age stuff, and I collected them with great enthusiasm. And I searched a long time to accumulate the two issues of Archie Super-Hero Digests (that may not have been the actual title), containing adventures of great MLJ characters like the Black Hood, the Shield and the Fly (as opposed to those other Archie heroes, Pureheart the Powerful and his ilk). There was also a period there where the Classics Illustrated

stories were reprinted in a digest-like format, and those were very well done, too. As I recall, I picked up a ton of them at a discount store for a very low price.

Unfortunately, after reading the first few issues, I don't feel any such fondness toward the current Marvel Digests. They seem disjointed to me – these characters (Spider-Man, the Avengers, Thor and the X-Men, so far) now all have a 50+ year history, and that's a bit of the problem. The stories are plucked randomly from various eras of the characters and have no relationship to each other. Silver Age stories are followed up by stories from much later periods. They seem almost to be about different characters. I mean, there's nothing wrong with the stories, but reading each digest is a disjointed experience. As a comic reader who has primarily followed DC and watched Marvel from afar over the last few decades (with a few exceptions – the Silver Surfer series they've been doing in recent times is amazing!), I don't feel that I've gotten to know the newer versions of the characters any better. There's just a lot of action and little in the way of character exposure. Or maybe that's what Marvel is about these days, I'm not really sure.

After the fourth issue of these digests, I've removed them from my buying list. The clincher for my doing so wasn't Marvel's fault, though. Now that I'm an old guy, the durned things are just too small! The print seems microscopic to me, and eyestrain definitely detracts from my enjoyment of the books. Maybe if you're younger (or have better eyesight) than me, and have more of a bent toward the Marvel books, you'll enjoy them more than I do.

---review by Tom McGovern



Science for the Masses

It's been a long time since I read a book purely about science – decades, probably. Back in my younger days, Isaac Asimov used to write a monthly science column for Fantasy and Science Fiction magazine. I loved those columns. I'll confess that I didn't buy every issue of F&SF, and in the ones I did buy, the only thing that was certain to be read was Asimov's column. Eventually, the columns got collected into books, which I bought and voraciously read. Asimov had a way of explaining science – pretty much every branch of science – that both edified and fascinated without crawling into the technical weeds or getting lost in the math of it all.

Alas, the Good Doctor is no longer among us, and I have missed his clear and entertaining explanations. It was in memory of his work (and hoping, perhaps, to recapture it) that I added "For the Love of Physics" by Walter Lewin to my Amazon wish list. Pat's family has a Christmas gathering every year, and we have a Secret Santa arrangement. My Secret Santa was good enough to provide this book (among others) in my package.

Lewin was, for over 40 years, a professor of physics at MIT. It sounds from reading the book as if his classes were a hoot. He performed outrageous experiments in class – things like making himself the weight on a makeshift pendulum or hooking himself up to a Van de Graaff generator. This is teaching at its best; the memorable demonstrations he performed must have solidified his lessons forever in the minds of his students.

Lewin tells interesting stories about his life in teaching and research as he covers most of the major fields in the world of physics – of particular interest was the chapter about his experiences during the early days of X-Ray ballooning. Individual chapters focus on electricity, magnetism, light, gravity, motion, sound and go all the way to neutron stars and black holes, giving overviews of relativity, quantum theory and string theory along the way. This is a book for laymen (like me), not for scientists. It's just an overview of the major topics, not a technical explanation. To Lewin's credit, he does manage to explain these topics without getting too heavily into the math, though there were a few places where I got a bit lost when he did bring the math into the picture.

Generally speaking, this is a good book and an interesting read. On the negative side, it's not as readable, in my opinion at least, as the Asimov books I wrote about earlier. As good as the book is, Lewin doesn't quite capture the Good Doctor's magic. The biggest drawback of the book, though, is that Lewin provides many, many links to lectures and videos on the Internet, but since this is a book, not an e-document, the reader is forced to type in long URLs manually in order to see the content. To make matters worse, probably 50% of the links are to Lewin's own lectures at MIT, and all of these links are broken. Apparently there was a

question raised a few years ago (after the book was in print) about Lewin's sexually harassing a woman over the Internet, and MIT took the accusation seriously enough to remove all of his lecture material from their site.

So it's not perfect. But if you are like me and just enjoy an occasional well-described tour to the edge of the universe, "For the Love of Physics" is definitely worth a read.

---review by Tom McGovern



Mighty Crusaders through History

One of the Christmas gifts I received from whoever my Secret Santa was in Pat's family was a book called The MLJ Companion. It's a very thorough history of the superhero line originally published by MLJ Comics, which was later named after its red-headed teen-aged superstar and became much better known as Archie Comics. In addition to the adventures of the Riverdale gang, however, Archie Comics has tried again and again over the years to jump into the superhero business with such iconic characters as the Shield, the Fly (aka Fly-Man), the Comet, the Black Hood, the Hangman, the Jaguar, etc.

My first experience with the MLJ characters was when, at 7 years old, I picked up the first issues of the Simon and Kirby classics, The Fly and The Double Life of Private Strong (aka, the Shield). I fell in love with the characters immediately and eagerly sought out subsequent issues. The Fly was a new character, of course, and I had no idea at the time that there had been any earlier incarnation of the Shield. Unfortunately, there were only two issues of Private Strong and Simon and Kirby only held on for four issues of The Fly. Subsequent writers turned The Fly into a pretty hokey comic and the other titles that came out during the Silver Age were pretty campy as well.

The MLJ Companion is a fascinating read; after reprinting several complete Golden Age stories featuring the original MLJ characters, it follows the history of these characters in detail, exploring the writing and artwork down through the years, as well as the business machinations and corporate politics that led to the characters' many revivals and abandonments. There is an abundance of sample artwork, cover reproductions and other graphic material, in full color throughout the book. Historical articles and interviews with creators offer a great deal of detail as to the history of the MLJ heroes.

What struck me as I read the book was how strong these characters are but, sadly, how much unrealized potential they have. Archie Comics has tried again and again to bring them back to compete with Marvel and DC, but they have always failed for various reasons. The characters have also been leased to DC a couple of times, and even these revivals haven't ultimately been successful. And I think that part of the problem is similar to what I discussed in the above rant: every time they have brought back the characters, they have made them very different. There's no continuity between the various reboots. Fond as I am of Simon and Kirby's The Fly, none of the various attempts at reviving the character have been even vaguely similar to the original. The same can be said of each of the various reboots: the character's name might be the same, but the character is completely new. Not that there's anything wrong with creating a new character, but if that's what you're doing, just go the whole nine yards – give the character a new name and backstory as well. Don't claim that you're bringing back The Fly if all you're doing is offering a character with a few superficial similarities and the same name, but nothing of the content of the prior series.

The latest incarnation of the MLJ crew, of course, is in Archie's Dark Circle imprint. Again, we pretty much see new characters with old names, and a level of "grim and gritty" rarely seen in comics until now. But the stuff I've seen from Dark Circle has been really excellent; well written and well-drawn. The problem with Dark Circle is that it publishes so inconsistently. Many months go by between issues and series seem to pop up sporadically. I suspect they are having financial problems and are picking and choosing which books they bring to print. There's no presence in the market, because it's an issue here and a miniseries there, as Archie Comics once again pours its main resources into its red-headed wonder boy.

But, again, this volume is incredibly good and held my interest throughout. I still love the characters it features, though I dearly wish that someone would do them well and consistently. They surely have the potential to be winners.

---review by Tm McGovern

The Brotherhood of the Seven Kings; by L.T. Meade & Robert Eustace; originally published in 1899; but posted on the Gutenberg Australia web-site

THAT a secret society, based upon the lines of similar institutions so notorious on the Continent during the last century, could ever have existed in the London of our day may seem impossible. Such a society, however, not only did exist, but through the instrumentality of a woman of unparalleled capacity and genius, obtained a firm footing. A century ago the Brotherhood of the Seven Kings was a name hardly whispered without horror and fear in Italy, and now, by the fascinations and influence of one woman, it began to accomplish fresh deeds of unparalleled daring and subtlety in London. By the wide extent of its scientific resources, and the impregnable secrecy of its organizations, it threatened to become, a formidable menace to society, as well as a source of serious anxiety to the authorities of the law. It is to the courtesy of Mr. Norman Head that we are indebted for the subject-matter of the following hitherto unpublished revelations.

This is a book that has been on my to-read list for a long time. I think I was originally intrigued because L. T. Meade (Elizabeth Thomasina Meade Smith [1844-1914]) was a prolific writer of girl's books, many of which formed into series books even if that was not her original intention (the Scamp stories, for example, written from 1872 to 1907 and not written in any kind of publishing order). She was an extremely prolific author, turning out well over three hundred different novels and plenty of short stories during her successful career.

She also wrote detective novels and thrillers, more of interest to me, and in this novel she was the creator of a female criminal master mind, a femme fatale of crime. In fact, she created two of them, both in collaboration with Robert Eustace, (Eustace Robert Barton [1854-1943]) a doctor who wrote crime and detective stories that stressed scientific invention and modern techniques. He collaborated with many other writers over his long career. With Ms. Meade he wrote eleven novels. His most famous collaborator was Dorothy L. Sayers. He provided the plot and solution to the 1930 mystery titled "The Documents in the Case".

Female masterminds of crime are of continuous interest to male readers, but not so much for women. Generally speaking most women consider the whole idea of a female mastermind heading a criminal empire to be ridiculous. The police in real life pretty much scoff at the idea as well, and in real life long lasting or fanatically cohesive criminal organizations involving more than a relatively small group or related family members are not common. This particular novel features Madame Koluchy, leader of a dark brotherhood of Italian origin, who enlists the skills of criminals from every walk of life to help run her operation.

The novel is essentially a collection of interconnected short stories, or adventures, where the British protagonist, independently wealthy Norman Head battles Madam Koluchy and her minions, trying to turn up enough evidence to jail her and break up her criminal organization. The story is set in London in the late 1890s.

It is revealed that Head had been a member of the Brotherhood and a lover of Madam Koluchy in Italy during his younger days, but broke away from her and the gang when he determined that they really were ruthless criminals who routinely used murder to achieve their ends.

Returning to London, he thought he was free from the Brotherhood and their evil influence, but then more than ten years later he discovers that the new toast of elite society is Madam Koluchy, a beautiful dark haired beauty who has a miraculous ability with herbs and psychic cures that helps any number of ailing upper class people that the medical profession cannot aid. She is also miraculous with her social skills. She is witty, sophisticated, sings very well, and is so well read that she holds her own in conversations ranging from the political to the scientifically obscure. She is the toast of the hour, and to his horror Head recognizes her as none other than his old companion from the Society of the Seven Kings.

He soon recognizes that she has not forsaken her old ways, and that her intrusion into the social whirl of London has sinister implications. A series of extraordinary and seemingly impossible crimes involving vast amounts of money or dangerous international secrets all seem to involve people who have a connection with Madam Koluchy. Most of these people are devoted to the Madam, regarding themselves as her personal friend, and often making full use of her remarkable scientific medical and psychic soothing skills to treat ills either nervous or real.

To quote one of Head's friends, a prominent woman who has fallen under her sway---"There is no quackery about her, Norman. I believe her to be the cleverest woman in England. There are authentic accounts of her wonderful cures which cannot be contradicted. There are even rumors that she is able to restore youth and beauty by her arts. The whole of society is at her feet, and it is whispered that even Royalty are among her patients. Of course, her fees are enormous, but look at the results! Have you ever met her?"

Indeed, he has, in the past. The connections make it obvious to Head that Madam and her gang are behind these crimes, and are planning another monstrous crime against the sickly young son of his friend.

He attempts to battle the group on his own, but soon enlists the help of an accomplished criminal lawyer, Colin Dufrayer. Along the way other allies come on board, often victims of the Brotherhood's malicious plots. In many cases, particularly in the first half of the book, his efforts are too little or too late, as Madam Koluchy and her confederates succeed in most of their schemes.

Even when a plot is discovered and some members of the gang are captured, often Madam and her pawns secure the loot anyway. None of the captured gang members break under police questioning, and if allowed out on bail, they invariably are whisked out of the country. As the chapters progress Head and his friends become more successful at thwarting the plots of the lady mastermind.

This leads Madam to attempt to kill Head and lawyer Dufrayer. I find these sections to be interesting and clever plot wise, but hardly conducive to the aims of a real criminal leader intent on eliminating a foe. A few blasts from a sawed off shotgun on a quiet residential street as Head is walking home from the park would have been as effective in this work of fiction as it is in real life, but of course, that wouldn't do for the purposes of the story.

I found this whole novel to be good reading. It took a bit of effort to jump into the upper-class British background against which the tales are set, but then the strong personalities and the ingenious crime plots the lady mastermind uses, along with the smooth flow of the writing more than make up for that.

It would be almost impossible at this late date to determine the exact particulars of this writing collaboration, but I suspect that Robert Eustace provided most of the specific plot details, while Ms. Meade did most of the writing and conversation. In particular I think Ms Meade was careful to describe Madam Koluchy in terms that would interest female as well as male readers. She is described as being the toast of society, a clothes horse who always dresses at the height of fashion, cordial and open to all, adored by many with a continuous stream of would-be suitors that she skillfully plays one against another.

What she loves above all else is wealth. The social position, the adoration of the social set are all byproducts of the wealth she has obtained, and she is willing to play any kind of game, engage in any kind of scheme so long as the monetary rewards are strong enuf. Love of money is her driving ambition, and as the stories progress, it also proves to be her weakness.

The stories finish up with more death and destruction, including the murder of some of Heads friends and associates, but in the end the arch fiend is tracked to her lair, where she escapes, is traced along a torturous retreating trail, then manages to escape yet again. In the end she is confronted by a clever female detective employed by the London Police. Madame Koluchy recognizes this specific danger, and almost succeeds in murdering the female agent, but Head comes to the rescue. Finally unveiled and cornered, Madam Koluchy commits suicide rather than be captured and disgraced with a public court trial.

Or did she? The death is ambiguous enuf that there was room for a sequel, but, alas, no second novel featuring the further adventures of this female scientific criminal mastermind was ever written.

If you are looking for some period piece fantastic detective adventures with interplay between two strong personalities involving ingenious crimes and resolutions, then this is certainly worth reading. And you can read it for free, or download it for free, by using this link to the posting on the Gutenberg Australia website--

<http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks06/0606121h.html>

---review by Bob Jennings

Defy the Stars by Claudia Gray; Trade Paperback, and e-book versions available

Although this book is marketed as young adult fiction, I would consider it to be essentially a love story set in a science fiction universe. Noemi Vidal is a 17 year old orphaned woman of Polynesian-Latin American ancestry who is a space fighter pilot for her home world of Genesis, which is in rebellion against the Earth. Abel is the most highly advanced android, called a "mech" in this book, in human space, but an accident caused him to be abandoned on a derelict space ship named Daedalus for 30 years. When Noemi discovers the ship and makes an emergency docking, she finds him. His programming requires him to obey her until he meets a higher authority, and by the end of the book they have managed to visit all the major planets where humans live. These are Kismet, a resort for the ultra-rich, Strong Hold, which is rich in heavy metals, and Cray, which is the most high tech world in human space. There are no alien intelligences. This is the first book in a trilogy, and I guess the author was leaving herself plenty of room for future stories. I found the characters very interesting, and it was difficult to put down, but the plot was driven by a lot of coincidences.

---review by Tom Feller

KURT VONNEGUT

by Jeffrey Redmond

The literary world lost a truly great man when Kurt Vonnegut died in 2007. He was a famed writer often compared with Mark Twain. One of Vonnegut's favorite expressions was: "So it goes" which he frequently included in many of his best-selling novels. So much of his own life was so fully reflected in his works.



Kurt Vonnegut Jr. was born on Armistice Day on November 11, 1922, in Indianapolis, Indiana. He was the son of a successful architect, Kurt Sr., and his wife, Edith Sophia. Edith was the daughter of millionaire and Indianapolis brewer Albert Lieber. The junior Kurt's great-grandfather, Clemens Vonnegut, was the founder of the Vonnegut's Hardware Store chain.

Vonnegut had a sister, Alice, and a brother, Bernard (whom he spoke of frequently in his works), both a few years older than him. Fourth-generation Germans, the children were never exposed to their heritage or the German because of the anti-German attitudes that had spread throughout the United States during and after World War I (1914-18).

During the severe economic downturn of the 1930s known as the Great Depression, the Vonnegut family lost most of their wealth and the household was never the same. Vonnegut's father fell into a severe depression. His mother became angry and abusive toward her husband and her children. She attempted to write short stories for the popular magazines, but sold none. This attainment and loss of the "American Dream" would become the theme of many of Vonnegut's writings.

Kurt Jr. went to Shortridge public High School in Indianapolis, where he became editor of *The Echo*. This student newspaper was the very first high school daily newspaper in the country. It was at Shortridge during his last two years there while working on the *Echo* where Vonnegut gained his first writing experience. At this young age Vonnegut learned to write for a wide audience that would give him immediate feedback, rather than just writing for an audience of one; a teacher.

After graduating from Shortridge in 1940, Vonnegut headed for Cornell University. His father wanted him to study something that was solid and dependable, like science, so Vonnegut began his college career as a chemistry and biology major, following in the footsteps of his older brother, Bernard, who was to eventually be the discoverer of cloud seeding to produce rain. While Vonnegut struggled in his chemistry and biology studies, he excelled as a columnist and managing editor for the *Cornell Daily Sun*.

By this point Vonnegut's parents had given up on life, being unable to adjust to or accept the fact that they were no longer wealthy, world travelers. On May 14, 1944, his mother committed suicide, overdosing on sleeping pills. His father was to remain a fairly isolated man the rest of his days, in full retreat from life, content to be in his own little dream world until his death on October 1, 1957.

In 1943 Vonnegut was going to be expelled from Cornell because of his below average academic performance. He quit college, enlisted in the army, and was sent to France as a part of the U.S. 106th Infantry Division. This unit was new and so was stationed along a supposedly quiet part of the lines, in

the Ardennes region of Belgium. Its ranks were filled with school drop-outs, parolees, and whatever else the draft boards could scrape up by 1944.

World War II and its many major battles were occurring throughout Europe, Asia, and North Africa. After the Allied invasion of Normandy and liberation of France, the Germany forces retreated and it seemed as if Hitler would be easily beaten. However, the sudden German counter-offensive in December 1944 caught the Allies completely by surprise

On December 14, 1944, Vonnegut became a German prisoner of war after being captured in the Battle of the Bulge. He was sent to Dresden, an open city that produced no war machinery. Thus it was off-limits to allied bombing. He and his fellow POWs were to work in a vitamin-syrup factory. However, on February 13, 1945, Allied air forces bombed Dresden, killing 135,000 unprotected civilians. Vonnegut and the other POWs survived the bombing as they waited it out deep in the cellar of a slaughterhouse, where they were quartered.

Dresden was virtually destroyed by the intense Allied bombing campaign, ordered by the British air commander Harris as a retaliation for the Nazi Luftwaffe's destruction of Coventry in England. Vonnegut would later write about the experience in what many consider his masterpiece, "Slaughterhouse Five".

A few months later Vonnegut was freed by Soviet troops and repatriated on May 22, 1945. Vonnegut was honorably discharged and returned to the United States in the summer of 1945. On September first of that year he married Jane Marie Cox, a friend since kindergarten, for he thought, "Who but a wife would sleep with me?"



He spent the next two years in Chicago, attending the University of Chicago as a graduate student of Anthropology, and working for the Chicago City News Bureau as a police reporter. When his Master's thesis was rejected, he moved to Schenectady, New York, in 1947, to work in public relations for General Electric. It was here that his fiction career began. On February 11, 1950, Collier's published Vonnegut's first short story, titled "Report on the Barnhouse Effect." This story has since become an acknowledged science fiction classic. By the next year he was making enough money from writing to quit his job at GE and move his family to West Barnstable, Massachusetts, on Cape Cod, in 1951.

He worked full time on his writing. "Player Piano", Vonnegut's first novel was published in 1952, but was dismissed by critics as mere science fiction. It was not until the publication of "Cat's Cradle" in 1963 that Vonnegut's work reached a large audience. Vonnegut published several novels throughout the 1950s and 1960s, beginning with "Player Piano" in 1952. "Player Piano" depicts a fictional city called Illium in which the people

have given control of their lives to a computer humorously named EPICAC, after a substance that causes vomiting.

"The Sirens of Titan" (1959) takes place on several different planets, including a thoroughly militarized Mars, where the inhabitants are electronically controlled. The fantastic settings of these works serve primarily as a metaphor (comparison) for modern society, which Vonnegut views as absurd to the point of being surreal, and serve as a backdrop for Vonnegut's central focus. The hapless human beings who inhabit these bizarre worlds struggle with both their environments and themselves.

By the time "The Sirens of Titan" was in print he'd also had dozens of short stories published. Vonnegut had also worked as an English teacher at a school for emotionally disturbed students, and run a Saab automobile dealership. He'd seen his father die, and witnessed the death of his 41-year old sister, Alice, due to cancer. This had occurred less than forty-eight hours after her husband had

died in a train accident. Vonnegut adopted three of Alice's four children to add to his own three offspring.



The sixties were filled by the publications of four more novels, a collection of short stories, and a two year residency, 1966 to 1968, at the famous University of Iowa Writers' Workshop. The decade culminated with the publication of Vonnegut's sixth, and still best, novel, "Slaughterhouse Five", in 1968. This particular work was finished in Iowa City, while Vonnegut taught at the writers' workshop. By 1969, after "Slaughterhouse Five" had become a best seller, Vonnegut gained national attention and respect

The early seventies were an interesting and hectic time for Vonnegut. Much in demand as the voice of the college-aged generation, he spent time teaching creative writing at Harvard. He wrote a mildly successful off-Broadway play, got divorced, and saw his son Mark suffer a schizophrenic breakdown. By the time "Breakfast of Champions" was published in 1973, Vonnegut's life was starting to slow down just a bit as he dropped from his pinnacle in the national spotlight. The critically attacked "Slapstick" appeared in 1976, which was followed by 1979's "Jailbird".

Vonnegut combined science fiction, social satire, and black comedy in his novels, which won a wide following during the 1960s and 1970s. His themes spring from his contemplation of 20th Century horrors: Dehumanization in a technological society in "Player Piano" (1952) and "Cat's Cradle" (1963), and the random destructiveness of modern war in "Slaughterhouse Five" (1969; film 1972). He especially focused on the role of technology in human society in "Cat's Cradle" (1963), widely considered one of his best.

More recent works include "Galapagos" (1985), "Bluebeard" (1987), and the autobiographical "Fates Worse than Death" (1991). Although his work has been criticized as simplistic, it has equally often been praised for its comic creativity.

On July 9, 1999, he was honored by the Indiana Historical Society as an Indiana Living Legend. In May 2000, he was named to a teaching position at Smith College in Northampton, MA. He was 75 when "Timequake" was published in 1997, and he stated it would be his last novel.

Vonnegut had married Jane Cox, a childhood sweetheart, in 1945. But they separated in 1970 and were divorced in 1979. In November 1979, Vonnegut married photographer Jill Krentz. In 1991, Vonnegut and Krentz filed for divorce, but the petition was later withdrawn. He had seven children, three from his first marriage and three young nephews and nieces he raised as his own children. He and Krentz also adopted a daughter.

Kurt Vonnegut will remain one of the most influential writers of his generation. Known for his dark humor, pessimism and sharp edge, he was the author of fourteen novels and other works of fiction and nonfiction. His stories of human folly and cruelty have been assigned reading for at least two decades in college literature classes around the world.

Vonnegut's Works:

Novels:

Player Piano 1952
The Sirens of Titan 1959
Mother Night 1961
Cat's Cradle 1963
God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater 1965

Slaughterhouse-Five 1969
Breakfast of Champions 1973
Slapstick 1976
Jailbird 1979
Deadeye Dick 1982
Galapagos: A Novel 1985
Bluebeard 1987
Hocus Pocus 1990
Timequake 1999

Short Fiction and Essays:

Canary in a Cathouse 1961
Welcome to the Monkey House 1968
Wampeters, Foma and Granfaloons 1974
Palm Sunday 1981
Fates Worse than Death: An Autobiographical Collage of the 1980s
1991



In *Mother Night* (1961) there is a serious study of the dark and sinister side of Nazism, and the effects by the war on the psychology of the survivors. An American journalist infiltrates the German propaganda radio program, while secretly being a spy for the Allies. He discovers that all of his broadcasts mistakenly prolonged the war by encouraging the German people to continue fighting.

The American journalist even encounters Adolf Eichmann, the Nazi official in charge of transporting all Jews to extermination camps, in an Israeli prison after the war. *Mother Night* ends with the journalist unable to live any longer with his trauma and guilt, and hanging himself with (of all things) his typewriter ribbon.

His 1963 novel *Cat's Cradle* recounts the discovery of a form of ice, called ice-nine, which is solid at a much lower temperature than normal ice, and is capable of solidifying all water on Earth. Ice-nine serves as a symbol of the enormous destructive potential of technology, particularly when developed or used without regard for the welfare of humanity

Vonnegut's reputation was greatly enhanced in 1969 with the publication of *Slaughterhouse Five*. It was an antiwar novel which appeared during the peak of protest against American involvement in the Vietnam War (1955-75).

Vonnegut described *Slaughterhouse Five* as a novel he was compelled to write, since it is based on one of the most extraordinary and significant events of his life. One of the few to survive the destruction of Dresden, Vonnegut was ordered by his captors to aid in the grisly task of digging bodies from the rubble and destroying them in huge bonfires.

Because the city of Dresden had been filled with German refugees fleeing the Soviets, and was of little military value, its destruction went nearly unnoticed in the press. *Slaughterhouse Five* is Vonnegut's attempt to both document and criticize this event.

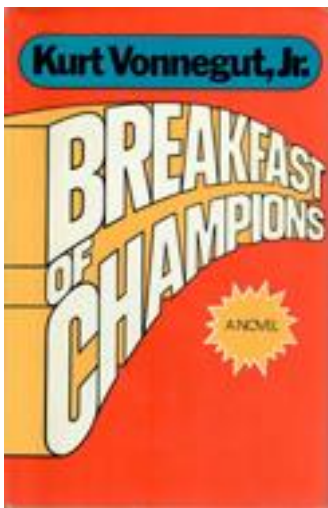
Like Vonnegut, the main character of *Slaughterhouse Five*, named Billy Pilgrim, is deeply affected by the horrible experience. His feelings develop into spiritual uncertainty that results in a nervous breakdown. In addition, he suffers from a peculiar condition, of being "unstuck in time," meaning that he randomly experiences events from his past, present, and future. The novel is therefore a complex, non-chronological (in no order of time) narrative in which images of suffering and loss prevail.

After the publication of *Slaughterhouse Five*, Vonnegut entered a period of depression during which he vowed, at one point, never to write another novel. He concentrated, instead, on lecturing, teaching, and finishing a play, *Happy Birthday, Wanda June*, that he had begun several years earlier. The play,

which ran Off-Broadway from October 1970 to March 1971, received mixed reviews, perhaps because it was too “unusual” for its time.

In it a Hemingway-like macho writer returns to visit his wife, along with one of the men who flew an atomic bombing mission against Japan. She believes her writer husband to be dead, and is engaged to marry a symphony musician (who lives in the same building with his mother). The entire tale is narrated by a little girl named Wanda June, who got killed in a car accident. She lives up in heaven with many dead soldiers, including a former Nazi SS officer, himself killed by the macho writer during WW II. There’s even her birthday cake, no longer needed, and hence the title of the play.

There were several factors which could be interpreted as the cause of Vonnegut’s period of depression, including, as he admitted, the approach of his fiftieth birthday and the fact that his children had begun to leave home. Many critics believe that, having at last come to terms with Dresden, he lost the major inspiration for much of his work. Others feel that *Slaughterhouse Five* may have been the single great novel that Vonnegut was capable of writing. Whatever the cause, *Breakfast of Champions* marked the end of his depression and a return to the novel format.



In *Breakfast of Champions*, as in most of Vonnegut’s work, there are very clear autobiographical elements. In this novel however, the author seems to be even more wrapped up in his characters than usual. He appears as Philboyd Sludge, the writer of the book, which stars Dwayne Hoover, a Pontiac dealer (Vonnegut once ran a Saab dealership) who goes berserk after reading a novel by Kilgore Trout, who also represents Vonnegut. Toward the end of the book, Vonnegut arranges a meeting between himself and Trout, whom Robert Merrill calls his “most famous creation,” in which he casts the character loose forever. By this time the previously unsuccessful Trout has become rich and famous, and is finally able to stand on his own.

Breakfast of Champions and *Slapstick, or Lonesome No More* (1976) both examine the widespread feelings of despair and loneliness that result from the loss of traditional culture in the United States. *Jailbird* (1979) recounts the story of a fictitious participant in the Watergate scandal of the Richard

Nixon (1913-1994) administration, a scandal which ultimately led to the resignation of the president. *Galapagos* (1985) predicts the consequences of environmental pollution. *Hocus-Pocus, or What’s the Hurry, Son?* (1990) deals with the implications and aftermath of the war in Vietnam.

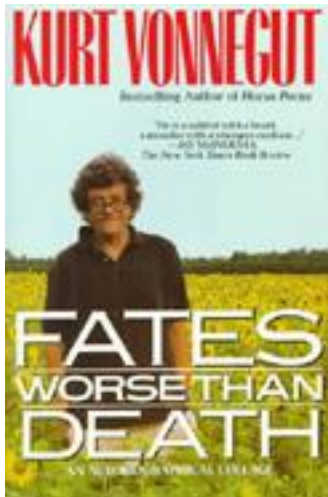
In the 1990s, he also published *Fates Worse Than Death* (1991) and *Timequake* (1997). Before its release Vonnegut noted that *Timequake* would be his last novel.

Although many of these works are highly regarded, critics frequently argue that in his later works Vonnegut tends to reiterate themes presented more compellingly in earlier works. Nevertheless, Vonnegut remains one of the most beloved of American writers. Critics ignored him at first, then denigrated his deliberately bizarre stories and disjointed plots as haphazardly written science fiction. But his novels became cult classics, especially “*Cat’s Cradle*” in 1963, in which scientists create “ice-nine”, a crystal that turns water solid and destroys the earth.

As the author of at least 19 novels, many of them best-sellers, as well as dozens of short stories, essays and plays, Vonnegut relished the role of a social critic. Indianapolis, his hometown, declared 2007 as “The Year of Vonnegut” - an announcement he said left him “thunderstruck.”

He lectured regularly, exhorting audiences to think for themselves and delighting in barbed commentary against the institutions he felt were dehumanizing people. “I will say anything to be funny, often in the most horrible situations,” Vonnegut once told a gathering of psychiatrists.

A self-described religious skeptic and freethinking humanist, Vonnegut used protagonists such as Billy Pilgrim and Eliot Rosewater as transparent vehicles for his points of view. He also filled his novels with satirical commentary and even drawings that were only loosely connected to the plot. In “Slaughterhouse Five,” he drew a headstone with the epitaph: “Everything was beautiful, and nothing hurt.”



But much in his life was traumatic, and left him in pain. Despite his commercial success, Vonnegut battled depression throughout his life. In 1984 he attempted suicide with pills and alcohol, joking later about how he botched the job.

“I think he was a man who combined a wicked sense of humor and sort of steady moral compass, who was always sort of looking at the big picture of the things that were most important”, said Joel Bleifuss, editor of *In These Times*, a liberal magazine based in Chicago that featured Vonnegut articles.

“The firebombing of Dresden explains absolutely nothing about why I write what I write and am what I am”, Vonnegut wrote in *Fates Worse Than Death*, his 1991 autobiography of sorts. But he spent twenty-three years struggling to write about the ordeal, which he survived by huddling with other POWs inside an underground meat locker labeled Slaughterhouse

Five (Schlachthof Funf in German).

The novel, in which Pvt. Pilgrim is transported from Dresden by time-traveling aliens from the planet Tralfamadore, was published at the height of the Vietnam War, and solidified his reputation as an iconoclast.

“He was sort of like nobody else”, said Gore Vidal, who noted that he, Vonnegut, and Norman Mailer were among the last writers around who served in World War II. “He was imaginative; our generation of writers didn’t go in for imagination very much. Literary realism was the general style. Those of us who came out of the war in the 1940s made it sort of the official American prose, and it was often a bit on the dull side. Kurt was never dull.”

Many of his novels were best-sellers. Some also were banned and burned for suspected obscenity. Vonnegut took on censorship as an active member of the PEN writers’ aid group and the American Civil Liberties Union. The American Humanist Association, which promotes individual freedom, rational thought and scientific skepticism, made him its honorary president.

His characters tended to be miserable anti-heroes with little control over their fate. Vonnegut explained that the villains in his books were never individuals, but culture, society and history, which he protested were making a mess of the planet.

“We probably could have saved ourselves, but we were too damned lazy to try very hard. And too damn cheap.” He once suggested carving this quotation into a wall on the Grand Canyon, as a message for flying-saucer creatures.

He retired from novel writing in his later years, but continued to publish short articles. He had a best-seller in 2005 with *A Man Without a Country*, a collection of his nonfiction work, including jabs at the Bush administration (“upper-crust C-students who know no history or geography”) and the uncertain future of the planet. He called the book’s success “a nice glass of champagne at the end of a life.”

In recent years, Vonnegut worked as a senior editor and columnist at *In These Times*. Bleifuss said he had been trying to get Vonnegut to write something more for the magazine, but was unsuccessful. “He would just say he’s too old and that he had nothing more to say. He realized, I think, he was at the end of his life,” Bleifuss remembered.

Vonnegut himself once said that “Of all the ways to die, I would prefer to go out in an airplane crash on the peak of Mount Kilimanjaro.”

He often joked about the difficulties of old age. “When Hemingway killed himself he put a period at the end of his life. Old age is more like a semicolon,” Vonnegut told the Associated Press in 2005. “My father, like Hemingway, was a gun nut and was very unhappy late in life. But he was proud of not committing suicide. And I’ll do the same, so as not to set a bad example for my children.”

Vonnegut also taught advanced writing classes at Smith College, and in November of 2000, he was named the State Author of New York.

Vonnegut was critically injured in a fire at his New York City brownstone Jan. 30, 2000. He often marveled that he had lived so long despite his lifelong smoking habit. He also suffered brain injuries after a fall at his Manhattan apartment home in March 2007.

The satirical novelist who captured the absurdity of war, and questioned the advances of science in darkly humorous works, died on Wednesday April 11th, 2007. He was 84. Oh, Kurt Vonnegut. We will miss you, old warrior. Rest in Peace. “And so it goes”.

###

THE SKYSCRAPER IN B FLAT

by FRANK LILLIE POLLOCK



This story originally appeared in the June, 1904 issue of The Black Cat Magazine

In Chicago it would not have been a skyscraper, for it was only seven stories high, but here it towered far above every building in the city. It was built by Hickson W. Bond on the corner of Platte Avenue and T Street, a locality which only a year ago had been an almost valueless suburb, given over to corn and potato patches. But a real Western boom had since inspired the town, streets had been extended and paved, Platte Avenue had a car line, houses and stores were going up like mushrooms, and there was not nearly shop and office room enough for the demand. Consequently every one with a little capital was building.

Bond found his title to his lot disputed, and he had scarcely broken ground when he was checked by an injunction. The Greenberger Brothers, who controlled half the real estate business of the town, had bought up the

contending claim, and the matter was fought out in the courts. Bond won, almost to his surprise, for his adversaries had spent much money and were confident of success.

With his surprise was mingled some apprehension. The Greenberger Brothers were hard men to outwit, and they did not easily forgive any one who succeeded in doing it. They made their money like Hebrews and spent it like Christians, to their own ends. They had it in their power to embarrass him seriously, for he was operating a large business on a small capital, which had been sapped by recent litigation.

He proceeded with his building, however, and was relieved to find that the Greenberger Brothers made no sign of hostility. He strained his credit, but the building was finished early in October, with a great flourish of trumpets from the city press, proud of its new skyscraper. It was constructed, as usual, of steel girders covered with a thin shell of masonry, and was handsomely fitted up with marble and mosaic, with electric elevators, and mail chutes, and complicated heating apparatus. It was christened the Platte Building, and was almost filled with tenants as soon as its offices were opened for rent. The Central National Bank established itself upon the ground floor, and, at the prevailing rates of rent, Bond foresaw a golden harvest. He needed it badly, for he was skating on thin ice.

All went very well for a time. Bond's rents began to come in, and he was elected a member of the Board of Trade. Then, no one seemed to know how, a report began to go about that the Platte Building was unsafe, that the building laws had not been enforced, and that the framework was insecure. Bond privately attributed these slanders to his late antagonists, but fortunately he was able to dispose of them by a signed statement from the Building Inspector. But such rumors always leave some poison behind.

Late in the afternoon of the 18th of December, several of the occupants of the upper floors of the Platte Building noticed a faint tremor of the framework as if from the jar of heavy traffic outside. It was extremely slight, however, and at five or six o'clock almost every one left the building without having given the phenomenon a moment's thought.

Several business men returned to the building after dinner that evening, to deal with the unusual work incidental to the end of the year. These, when they arrived, found the watchman of the bank in animated conversation with two policemen in the outer hall. He had telephoned for help, under the impression that an attempt was being made to undermine the vault.

The whole building was vibrating with a jarring tremor. The floors tingled unpleasantly under the boot soles, and a faint, tense humming sound seemed to come from every inch of the walls. It was quickly clear that it could be from no burglarious mine. The police searched all the adjoining ground. There was nothing to account for the disturbance, and none of the neighboring buildings appeared to be affected in the least. There was no heavy traffic on the street at that hour and there was no wind.

Some one suggested an earthquake, but an earthquake is not localized in a city block. Bond was called by telephone. He arrived half an hour later, and found a large and increasing crowd on the sidewalk, touching the walls experimentally to feel the tremor, and listening to the increasing, droning humming of the framework. He at once started up-stairs to investigate, in which adventure no one cared to follow him. The whole building was empty. The scores of office doors were shut and dark. The elevators had stopped at six o'clock.

The cashier of the bank presently arrived in a state of much perturbation, and, after fussing about for some minutes, went to the vaults and came out laden with ledgers and tin boxes. Upon this suggestion, all the office occupants began to think of rescuing their books and papers. Cabs and express wagons were summoned, and the drivers were offered handsome rewards to go up to the higher floors where the owners of the endangered valuables dared not go.

By this time the oscillation of the building was really alarming. It wavered exactly as a bridge does at the passage of a heavy train. The news had spread rapidly through the city and a mob of a thousand persons very soon filled the street. Among these were most of the tenants of the Platte Building offices, but few dared to go inside.

Those heroes, however, who had ventured up-stairs, were working manfully. Excited by the shouts from below and by their own haste and danger, they fell into a perfect frenzy of rescue. Office doors were smashed recklessly open. A number of small safes came thundering ponderously down the circular stairway, and ledgers and boxes were dropped by dozens down the well. The men burst open locked desks, flung armfuls of documents and stationery out the windows, and turned on all the electric lights till the tall building glowed like a factory.

Presently some one raised a cry that the building was rocking, and the crowd, which now extended for several blocks, surged wildly back. It was true. Almost imperceptibly, but certainly, the dark top of the skyscraper was swaying against the starry sky. The workers inside the building came down-stairs at a run, and were cheered frantically as they emerged. The few police, taking advantage of the crowd's retreat, established regular fire lines, and warned every one from the adjacent buildings. It was not hard to keep the affrighted people back, however, and every face was upturned toward the enormous structure that was expected immediately to come crashing down.

But it did not fall at once. The swaying motion increased, but very gradually, while the humming note of its vibrations rose to a sound of tremendous volume. Gently and slowly to and fro it rocked, and a shade further at each oscillation. In a few minutes the shell of masonry and stucco began to peel off and fall, in lumps at first, and afterwards in great sheets. Through the exposed iron skeleton streamed floods of electric light from the still burning lamps. The whole immense crowd fell silent, and there was no more noise or shouting. The magnitude and mystery of the event overawed them.

Just inside the fire-lines stood Bond, his hands clenched in his coat pockets, impotently peering from under his hat brim at his tottering fortunes. They were all locked up in that unstable frame of steel. So far as any theory of the catastrophe was concerned, his mind was blank. Only he felt convinced that an enemy had done this, and, being Western bred, he was not disheartened; — only wrathful and perplexed.

Hour after hour passed. In spite of the midnight December cold the crowds grew, and still the skyscraper did not fall. It swung ponderously, far out to the right, pausing as if hesitating to topple over, and then far back to the left. The slam of swinging doors resounded crashingly from every floor as it reeled. It seemed impossible that the fabric could endure longer, though it was a mere network of locked girders, almost as strong and elastic as a steel bar.

All that night the firemen and police swarmed helplessly about the tottering building. Bond had offered a thousand, then five thousand dollars, for a successful scheme for steadying it. All street cars were stopped within four blocks. They sounded the earth in the neighborhood and found it solid. Men were even sent into the sewers with delicate instruments to detect any subterranean trembling, but none could be observed. All the disturbance was localized in the building.

When the gray dawn came up over the prairie the skyscraper was still standing, though it swayed now like a flagstaff in a high wind, and it was very evident that its collapse was at hand. All the glass was broken from the windows, a great part of the masonry had fallen, and it looked like the gutted ruins from a fire. As it reeled from side to side with a terrific rush and swing the creak of the drawing rivets could be heard through the humming of its tense framework.

Bond's only hope now was that it might not destroy too much other property in its fall. He had been furiously busy in helping to clear the adjoining buildings. He had been on his feet all night, but he did not feel either cold or fatigued. Only he decided at this stage to telephone to his wife, who must be in a state of extreme anxiety, for she had sent two or three messenger boys to find him during the night.

The nearest telephone happened to be in the store of a piano dealer in the next block. The proprietor, like most of his neighbors, had remained down town all night, and was just sitting down to a tray from a restaurant when Bond entered. As he opened the telephone cabinet something snapped loudly with musical ring in the shop. Bond, whose nerves were at concert pitch, jumped, and the proprietor swore. "Another string gone!" ejaculated the dealer. "Every blessed piano in this shop, I believe, has snapped its B-flat string since last evening. It's the noise from that cursed building of yours."

Getting up, he fingered half a dozen keyboards till he found one still intact, and struck the B flat sharply. The note was exactly attuned to the vast hum from the shaking skyscraper. A moment later and this string also flew asunder.

"The Platte Building is tuned to B flat," observed the musician, dryly. "Every piece of metal has its musical note, you know. If you struck this note inside your building it would set every frame vibrating. You haven't had any brass bands playing there lately, have you?"

Bond's mind caught the idea like a flash. He recollected some elementary experiments in physics, and the laws of vibrations. He thought hard for a half minute, and then hurried back to the street, without having touched the telephone.

As he returned toward the skyscraper he glanced up, and his heart misgave him. The risk was too great. The enormous dismantled framework seemed to sway till it almost overhung the adjoining buildings. But,

mustering his nerve, he went on, pushing roughly through the packed crowd. The police, recognizing him, let him through the lines, but when they saw him approach the crumbling doorway, they ran after him, shouting.

But by that time he was already upon the stair. Bond had not been used to much violent exercise lately, but he went up the eight flights of the circular stairway at a run, without noticing them. The jar and sway of the floors was like the sickening heave of an earthquake. Through the broken walls the light poured freely, mingling with the glow of electricity in the halls. The floors were littered with every sort of office supply — the doors were splintered and swinging. The building looked as if it had been shelled and afterwards looted.

On the topmost floor the motion was so violent that he was obliged to lean against it to keep his balance. The wreckers had not ascended so high, and all the doors were still shut and locked along the hall. In fact, few of the rooms on this floor had even been rented, and it was used mostly for storage.

At the extreme end of the hall a door bore the gilt sign: — GOTTHARD KLEIN, VIOLIN MAKER-- Musical Instruments Rebuilt and Repaired. The door was locked, but Bond burst it open with his shoulder. There was a bright outer office, with several glass cases, badly damaged, containing beautiful violins. Beyond this a door stood ajar into a room, from which proceeded a clear, musical tone.

Bond rushed towards it. The inner room was fitted up as a workshop, and was half open to the outer air by the fall of the masonry. On an elaborate joiner's bench was clamped a bass viol, and upon it a peculiarly shaped bow ran regularly to and fro across two strings, with a monotonous iteration of sound. This bow was attached to a flexible steel rod that played from a purring electric motor beside the instrument.

Bond scarcely knew what he had expected to find, but he was astonished. There was no one in the room. But he brought a hammer smashing down upon the whole musical apparatus, and the ceaseless B-flat drone was silent. Then after a glance about the place he went down-stairs again, sliding most of the way on the banister rail.

For half an hour after he reached the sidewalk again there was no visible change in the condition of the skyscraper. It still reeled and tottered. Then, by minute degrees, the oscillations grew slower and weaker. In an hour and a half it was plain that the building was regaining its balance. It was then nearly eight o'clock.

Bond thereupon looked up the address of Gotthard Klein in a city directory, and started to find him, with cold rage in his heart. The place turned out to be a pretty suburban cottage, with early smoke rising from the chimney. The door was opened by Mrs. Klein herself, a middle-aged, fresh-faced woman, with a faint German accent.

"Is Mr. Klein in? I must see him," demanded Bond, sternly. "I am the owner of the Platte Building, where he has his office. You know, of course, what has been going on there?" he added, at the woman's look of bewilderment.

"No," she said, doubtfully. "I have no time to read the papers. Gotthard is here, yes, — but so sick! He will not know you. The doctor says it is pneumonia. He should not have worked yesterday. He had to come home and go to bed at three o'clock. I have not closed an eye this night."

She led Bond in, and gently opened a door into an adjoining bedroom. There lay the violin-builder, flushed with fever, his eyes shut, but muttering incoherent German words. Sobered by this sight, Bond stepped back and softly closed the door again.

"Your husband builds violins. Does he do anything else?" he asked.

"He makes also guitars, sometimes, and mandolins. And he invents, oh! Wonderful things. He is working now on a violin to play itself, like the machines to play pianos. But I ought not to tell you of this. It is not finished."

"Hum!" said Bond, meditating. "Do you know that he went away yesterday and left the electric power turned on and his invention running?"

"No — heavens! Will he have to pay for all this time? Is it running yet?" she ejaculated, horrified in all her thrifty soul.

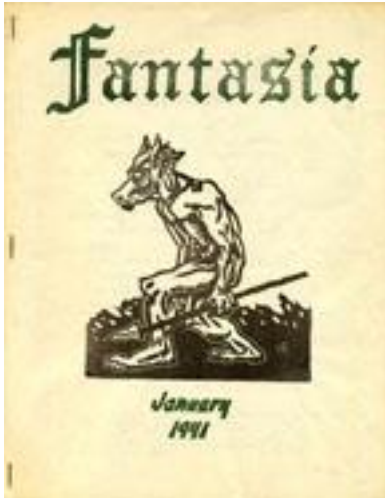
"No," said Bond. "I turned it off."



N3F Founding Members: Lou Goldstone

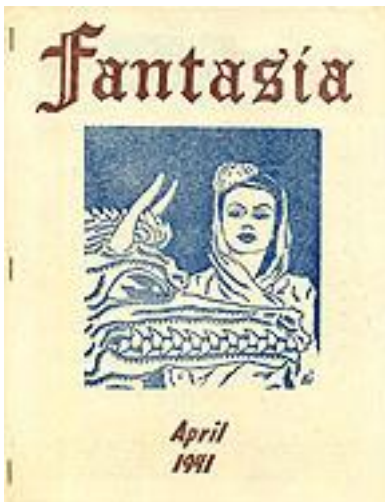
by

Robert Lichtman & Jon D. Swartz



Louis C. Goldstone, Jr. (November 17, 1920 – November 8, 1983) was a San Francisco science fiction (SF) fan, most active in the 1930s and 1940s. He published the fanzine *Fantasia*, attended the first Staplecon in 1943 (organized by Forrest J Ackerman), and was a member of the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society (LASFS) and the Golden Gate Futurian Society (GGFS).

Fantasia was published for three issues in January, April and July 1941. Each issue contained fiction, poetry, articles and an editorial. In addition, in every issue Goldstone included a full-page pictorial mid-issue of his artwork – each of which illustrated a poem (George Sterling’s “A Wine of Wizardry,” a passage from *Beowulf*, and a passage from Goethe’s *Faust*, respectively). He also did all the other artwork, both covers and interiors, in every issue, all neatly reproduced by silk screen – some in multiple colors.



Goldstone was nominated for the 1946 Best Fan Artist Retro Hugo (won by Bill Rotsler) that was presented at LACon III in 1996. The basis of his nomination was primarily the incredible cover he did for the program book of Pacificon, the 1946 World Science Fiction Convention – the first one after World War 2 interrupted the series. Other nominees for this retro award were Alva Rogers, Joe Gibson and Jack Wiedenbeck.

Professionally, Goldstone did the cover art for L. Ron Hubbard’s novel *Death’s Deputy* (1948) and John Taine’s *The Cosmic Geoids and One Other* (1949). The artwork for Hubbard’s novel had originally appeared as the cover for Forrest J Ackerman’s fanzine, *Voice of the Imagi-Nation*, on its 50th and final issue in July 1947. Goldstone and Hubbard knew each other, having roomed in a large house in Pasadena owned by rocket scientist Jack

Parsons.

In later years Lou produced more abstract work that was displayed and sold at the Artists’ Cooperative in San Francisco, of which he was a long-time member along with his wife, Cynthia Goldstone.



He and Cynthia moved to San Francisco in 1958 and rented a large flat on Dolores Street just two doors away from the historic Mission Dolores. After his death in 1983, Cynthia continued living in the flat until her own passing in 2012. I (Robert) first met them in the early ‘60s, and visited them many times over the years. Both were vegetarians, and Lou was famous among his friends for the incredible Indian curry dishes he prepared for social gatherings at their flat. He was soft-spoken with a good sense of humor. Politically he was definitely “left,” and he self-styled himself as a Maoist – but he was never doctrinaire when politics became a topic of conversation.



He had letters published in *Amazing Stories* (November 1938 issue), *Fantastic Adventures* (November 1939), *Startling Stories* (November 1939), and *Future Fiction* (July 1940).

Lou appears in a group photo (with Forrest J Ackerman, Tigrina, and other SF fans) on page 261 of Harry Warner's history of SF fandom during the 1940s, *All Our Yesterdays* (Advent, 1969). He can also (and more easily) be seen in a 1958 photograph at <http://fanac.org/fanzines/LASFS/LASFS1-16.html>.

Of course, Goldstone was also one of the 64 charter members of the National Fantasy Fan Federation (N3F), joining in 1941.

Sources: *All Our Yesterdays*, *Fancylopedia 3*, ISFDB, SFE, and other internet sites. An earlier version of this member profile, written entirely by Jon Swartz, appeared in the February 2018 *TNFF*. It was sent by Swartz to Robert Lichtman to check for "errors." Robert, who knew Lou from the early '60s until his death in 1983, made some corrections and expanded the article. He also provided cover scans of all three issues of *Fantasia*, the cover of John Taine's book, and the cover of the Pacificon program book, all of which appear here.



cinema

BLACK PANTHER

My son Isaac and I have been impatiently waiting for this one since the introduction of the T'Challa/Black Panther in "Civil War". Chadwick Boseman's charismatic portrayal of the character had us both saying we've gotta see more of this guy. "Black Panther" is an atypical Marvel Universe movie in several ways.

First, the film nearly stands on its own without connection to the rest of the MCU. It is helpful to know about T'Challa's elevation to King of Wakanda after the death of his father in "Civil War", but that is recapped in Black Panther" so it's not necessary to have seen the earlier movie.

Second, the film builds a spectacular science fictional setting with the hidden kingdom of Wakanda. The vibranium-powered world is both beautiful and dangerous. It is immensely satisfying to see a jet-pac toting, space operatic setting developed with so much panache. "Black Panther" isn't such much a superhero film, as a sci-fi film with superheroes in it.

Third, T'Challa has to earn his place as King of Wakanda and Black Panther. It's not enough that he's the crown prince. He must fight challengers to earn the crown. Then he must consume a potion that will give him the power of the Black Panther, but it is by no means certain that he will survive the vision quest provoked by the drug and pass the judgment of his ancestors.

Fourth is the fantastic cast of supporting characters. Lupita Nyong'o, Danai Gurira, and Letitia Wright steal their scenes as Wakanda's master spy, army general, and chief scientist. I've been anxious to see Lupita Nyong'o in a role that actually casts her as the beautiful, intelligent woman she is. Danai Gurira has played a battle-toughened warrior in "The Walking Dead" for several years and brings a seasoned believability to her role as Wakanda's top defender. Letitia Wright is just so cute and lovable as T'Challa's supergenius little sister Shuri that I'd go to see her in a solo movie. Which could happened is the fan theory is correct and Shuri takes over as Iron Man after the anticipated demise of Tony Stark in the Infinity War.

Finally, there's the fact that Michael B Jordan plays the first really plausible super villain in the character of Erik Killmonger. The villains have been a real problem for the MCU. The other exception is Michael Keaton's Vultur in "Spider-Man: Homecoming". Killmonger has a really strong motive for wanting to displace T'Challa as King of Wakanda and has a very plausible reason for wanting to gain control of Wakanda's technology. He's not interested in taking over the world for himself. He wants to give Wakanda's tech to the oppressed



African diaspora and turn the tables on the colonizers and slavers. From what we see of his back story we really can't blame Erik for wanting to stick it to The Man.

The maguffin in the movie is vibranium, a magical extraterrestrial metal, and Wakanda happens to be sitting on top of the only earthly source. Captain America's shield is made of it. It's both a repository and a source of energy. It can be used to power flying cars and energy beam weapons. It causes mutations in living organisms that bestow super powers. It can do whatever the script says.

Life in Wakanda revolves around protecting and using vibranium. Studying and exploiting the properties of the substances have made Wakanda the richest and most technologically advanced place on Earth, altho this is known only to the Wakandans and a few outsiders. The country is protected by a stealth dome that from the outside makes it look like the Wakandans are peaceful but poor subsistence shepherds. Inside the dome, the city is the World of Tomorrow, with gleaming towers, majestic waterfalls, monorails, and flying cars.

The characters have many different ideas on how to handle the wealth. The King's advisors mostly want to keep Wakanda hidden and safe. Spymaster Nakia (Myong'o) and Killmonger have seen the suffering of people outside the dome and want to give Wakandan technology to the oppressed black people of the world. T'Challa is caught between these liberal and conservative factions, as he must venture out to stop the flow of black market vibranium by people like Klaw, a mercenary arms dealer. T'Challa must also defend his claim to the throne against Wakandona tribal challengers before he can drink the juice of the vibranium-enhanced heart shaped flower which endows him with the power of the Black Panther. In resolving these conflicts the film addresses issues like the right to power, leadership, philosophy, entitlement, and the response to colonialism. It's fun, fast-paced and thoughtful with great performances from all of its well-chosen cast.

I've encountered locals in East Tennessee who has trouble understanding the African accents of the main characters. It's funny, because the lead actor, Chadwick Bosman, is from South Carolina and had to learn an African accent for the part. I've teased my Congolese colleague Mutombo Muvundamina by asking how it feels to suddenly have the most fashionable accent on the planet?

---review by Gary Robe



Annihilation

I have not read Jeff VanderMeer's Southern Reach trilogy, of which the Nebula Award-winning Annihilation is the first book, so I did not know what to expect aside from what I could glean from the previews.

As nearly as I could tell, some sort of alien presence called "The Shimmer" has taken over a swamp somewhere in Florida, and all efforts to investigate it have failed. One of the expeditions included Kane (Oscar Isaac), a sergeant in special forces and the husband of Lena (Natalie Portman), a biologist. After a year, Kane mysteriously reappears outside the swamp but quickly goes comatose. Then a five woman expedition, led by Dr. Ventress (Jennifer Jason Leigh), a psychologist, and including Lena, a paramedic (Gina Rodriguez), a physicist (Tessa Thompson), and an anthropologist (Tuva Novotny), enters the area.

They discover that they are in a place where the laws of physics and biology do not apply. Their ultimate goal, a lighthouse, resembles designs by H.R. Giger for Alien. Not everyone survives, of course, and the ending was reminiscent of 2001: A Space Odyssey. Some reviewers have compared Lena's journey to that of Orpheus's. I would recommend it

only to viewers who are comfortable with ambiguous endings.

---review by Tom Feller



A Wrinkle In Time

I was really looking forward to the arrival of this film adaptation of the novel. The advance trailers looked great, especially the shorts of Camazotz with the kids bouncing identical balls in front of identical house in identical rhythm. It was a perfect capture of one of the defining points of the book, and it boded well for the adaptation.

Director Ava DuVerney got a lot of pre-release flack over her “blackwashing” the story by casting black actors for the key roles of Meg and Kate Murray, and Oprah Winfrey as Mrs. Which. I had to re-read the book to find that there really isn’t much description of the characters except that Kate Murray is described as exceptionally beautiful. There’s no real reason for Kate and Meg to be Caucasian except for readers’ projections of their own bias.

Mrs. Which and Mrs. Who are pan-dimensional pan-galactic beings, so casting Oprah and Mindy Kaling in the parts of characters who are more like incarnate hallucinations than people makes sense. I’m pretty sure Oprah is on the monitor of MiB headquarters to begin with. I’d believe that if Madeline L’Engle was still alive she might have some comments about the pettiness of those complaints.

Madeline L’Engle had methemoglobinemia, a rare genetic condition that made her blood and skin bright blue. I can’t imagine the prejudice and

discrimination she must have endured. If intolerant people get worried about black, brown, red, and yellow skin tones, how would they react to blue? I imagine if Ms. L’Engle was still with us she might have said that DuVerney had not gone far enough in diversifying with casting a blue person.

“A Wrinkle In Time” and its sequels are books that just about everyone of a certain age in America has read. For me, “A Wrinkle In Time” stands beside “Charlotte’s Web”, “Stuart Little”, “Charlie and the Chocolate Factory”, and “Chitty, Chitty Bang Bang” as the foundational documents of my youth. The ideas in “Wrinkle”, that you can travel in all of space and time by only the power of your mind if you’re smart enough, and that excessive conformity opens the door to evil, were big mind-expanding concepts when I was ten.

L’Engle’s books introduced me to science fiction that didn’t require spaceships and ray guns, and aliens didn’t need to be ten-foot tall green skinned hexapoids (or red-skinned naked ladies), but could be both stranger and more beautiful than anything I could imagine. So with a huge load of nostalgia I bought tickets to “A Wrinkle In Time” the movie.

I really wanted to like this movie, and I am still bummed out by how disappointing it is. Parts of it are brilliant, especially the scenes toward the end on Camazotz. Mrs. Who’s transformation into a flying lettuce was both amazing and thoroughly alien.

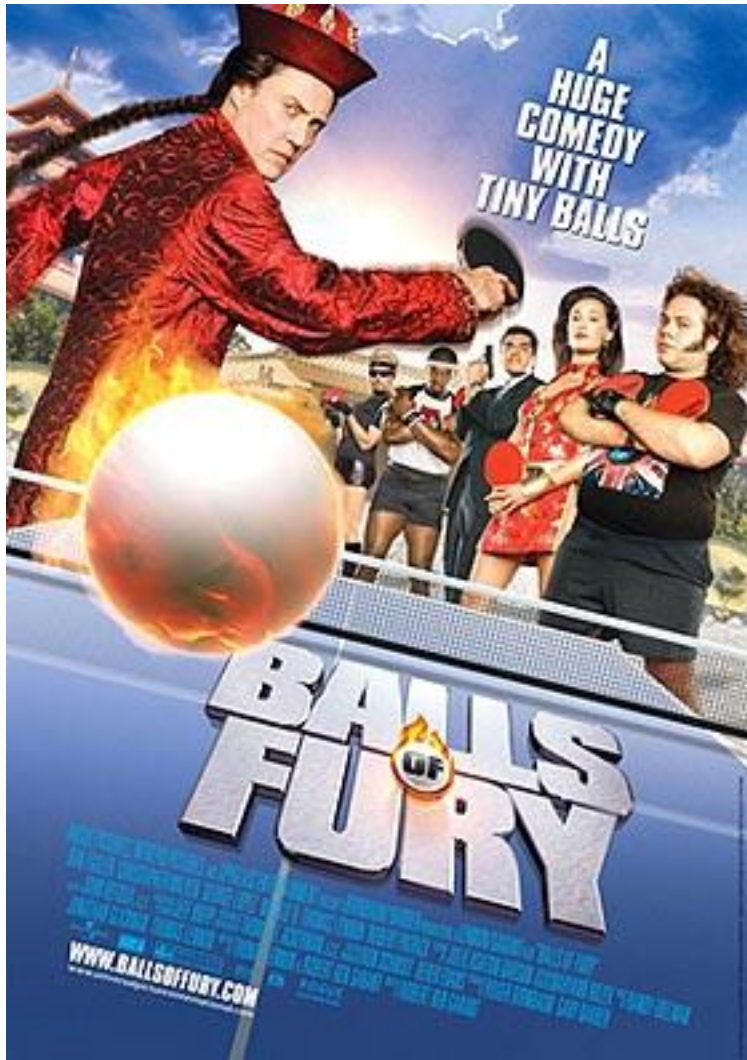
But so much else in the movie fell flat. I blame a lot of this on director DuVerney. She may be an Important Filmmaker, but her pre-Wrinkle projects were historical drama and documentaries. I just don’t think she has the imagination to pull off filming a fantasy. In many scenes she depicts wonderful things that are nearly devoid of a sense of wonder.

Part of the problem is that much of DuVerney’s camera work relied on tight close-ups of the actors’ faces. That might work for a Martin Luther King biopic where the story focuses on dialogue and body language. In a fantasy setting it’s far more important to let the camera tell the story. Think of the long sections

of “2001: A Space Odyssey” with no dialogue at all. As Frank Poole’s ship dives through hyperspace, nobody understands what is happening. The short shots we get of Frank’s face show him terrorized to the point of catatonia. There’s no dialog because there’s nothing to say but “what the hell’s happening?” The Harry Potter films do a great job of filling the screen with so much more than the actors moving around. Everywhere you look there’s something happening. There is almost none of that in “A Wrinkle In Time”.

I’m say to think what “A Wrinkle In Time” might have been if Disney had chosen a director better suited to the material. I read that Oprah’s price for appearing in the movie was hiring DuVerney as the director. If they could have settled for a white female then I wonder what Doctor Who director Rachel Talalay would have done with the material. She certainly has timey-wimey fantasy built into her DNA!

---review by Gary Robe



Balls of Fury

The feature film of the evening was “Balls of Fury”, a 2007 comedy film starring Dan Fogler. This was a send-up of all the oriental martial arts movies ever made, and was hilarious. I personally thot this was one of the funniest movies I’ve seen in several years, with flawless performances by everyone involved, a comedy plot that kept the laughs going right up till the very end.

Instead of the clichéd white-guy-who-must-be-trained-in-martial-arts-to-defeat-a-master-of-supreme-evil, the hero of this flick is a has-been ping-pong champion recruited by the FBI who must relearn his skills to become a competition champion, who will be invited to a world class competition of ping-pong champions hosted at a secret location by the oriental Fu-Manchu like super villain.

Ping pong happens to be a national obsession in mainland China, so of course the idea that a round eyed white American could possibly learn this skill well enuf to win games against world class players is a consistent point of ridicule by all the oriental characters thruout the movie.

In addition, the unlikely hero doesn’t realize until he arrives that this happens to be a ‘Sudden Death’ championship, in which the losers of the matches experience a very sudden and abrupt death. The master villain fancies

himself as the very best ping-pong player in the world, so he may be sponsoring the matches just to eliminate the competition. Can our bumbling, overweight, socially inept hero deal with the supreme ping-pong skill and confidence of the leader of a world wide crime cult? Well, it sure seems unlikely.

I don’t want to go into too much detail here, but trust me, this is a one very funny movie. If you haven’t seen it yet you should give it a viewing right away. It can be seen for free on several internet sites, or you could buy the DVD. Copies are on sale at very reasonable prices by a number of internet sellers, including Amazon.

---review by Bob Jennings

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 as well as the e-zines that I have received since the last issue of *The Insider* was mailed out. Copies of fanzines both print and pixel types intended for review should be sent to---**Robert Jennings; 29 Whiting Rd.; Oxford, MA 01540-2035 or fabficbks@aol.com**

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 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.



RAT SASS #8 Taral Wayne, at Taral@bell.net; 24 pages, quarterly, e-zine currently posted on the efanazines.com website

Technically speaking this is an apazine. Typically speaking apazines are usually all but incomprehensible to people who are not members of the apa. That's because most of each apazine issue is devoted to mailing comments; a sort of slow motion conversation in print in which none of the commenters bothers to discuss the backstory leading up to the comment, because all the other members have copies or have already read the previous comments. In addition, this fanzine is part of a quarterly apa, which makes the time diffusion even more obscure.

Except that Taral doesn't like to do mailing comments. He claims to hate doing mailing comments, so most of each issue of this zine is devoted to comments about his life and experiences, particularly his dealings with fandom and with mundane life. Mailing comments only occupy a few pages of each issue.

This is another case of “I don't know how he does it”. Perzines are a fanzine category about the personal lives of the editor, including commentary, and opinions on life around the editor. Taral makes the focus of his perzines even smaller. His zines discuss his personal life primarily in relationship with his activities in fandom, or more properly this issue, his efforts to get away from interacting with fandom.

You would think that kind of emphasis would be boring as hell. Introspective, picky, he produces commentary that sometimes reaches the point of being whiney. Taral primarily regards himself as an artist, a cartoonist who specializes in interesting furry animal type cartoons (alho he does turn out other kinds of art as well). My opinion is that however good he is as a cartoonist, he is much better as a writer. He is able to effortlessly turn the most hum-drum subject into something that is enticing and very readable, with a flow of words and opinions that holds the reader's attention from first to last.

That was certainly the case with me. From page 1 up thru the last page, 24, I couldn't stop reading this fanzine. Even the mailing comments were interesting, and I've never seen another Rowbrazzle apazine in any form.

This issue he discusses New Year's Resolutions, which he says he almost never makes, and rarely keeps when he does make them. His resolutions are to have less to do with fandom and stop worrying about overdue art projects. He has some justification for this. First, he recently suffered a couple of minor strokes, and then too, his recently completed artwork for several fan projects was either ruthlessly butchered, or has yet to see publication in either print or pixel format. Why do some fans do stuff like that? After pushing and demanding that the material be done by this or that deadline, why the hell can't they keep up their part of the bargain and at least put the stuff out? Who knows? It's a source of endless frustration, and not just to artists like Taral either.

Even tho the subject matter for the whole issue is about trying to get away from fandom and be a lot less involved with it, he seems to be still actively involved at many levels beyond producing issues of *Rat Sass*. He also discusses his disenchantment with comic books both old and new, and his desire to further simplify his life by getting rid of a lot of books and paper he has accumulated over the course of his lifetime.

Taral has earned his chops as an accomplished artist, dealing with furry toons and realistic art as well. There is a seven page portfolio of his work included in this issue, all of it excellent. Just glancing thru the wide variety of subjects and types on display make it self-evident why so many editors of fanzines and special projects want to make use of his artistic talents. Whether he will hold to his New Year's Resolution to do less art remains to be seen. I for one, hope that this is a resolution he breaks completely.

The issue closes with a review of the newish book "Furry Nation", a volume devoted to the sub-section of comics/SF fandom known as furry fandom, a faction devoted specifically to cartoon furry animals, only the focus is on more adult themes than the traditional kiddie toons. Taral has been involved with these folks for many years. But he was not enchanted by the book, perhaps because he has been a part of it for so many years. The book is a display/discussion of discovery and exploration. As he notes, Taral has already lived thru all that, and preferred a more detailed history and analysis of the genre. Those themes are not to be found in this particular book.

There's nothing like a Taral Wayne fanzine. He has an innate naturalistic style of writing that flows and reaches out to the reader and makes him part of the narrative. He keeps putting fanzines out, and you can read this one for free at the efanzines.com web site. While you are there, after you've devoured this one, you might try some of his other pixel zines, particularly *Broken Toys* (the entire run is posted there), plus all the other issues of *Rat Sass*.



DASFAX April 2018 8-1/2x11", 8 pages; published monthly by the Denver Area Science Fiction Association; c/o Tay Von Hageman; 4080 S. Grant St.; Englewood, CO 80113; it comes with a club membership; membership fees are \$15 per year, or available for The Usual.

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

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

This issue carries another part of his series titled "My Golden Age of Science Fiction". He Talks about the joy of reading science fiction magazines in his teens, experiencing science fiction movies, his disenchantment with most post-1959 Robert Heinlein novels, and his low opinion of the so-called New Wave SF movement, coupled with his low opinion of most science fiction written by Harlan Ellison. Then he discusses the lasting impact that Heinlein's "The Moon is a Harsh Mistress" has had on him.

He reminisces about the family moving, his futile efforts to organize science fiction clubs in high school and college, exposure to bigger community libraries with different science fiction books, and his life-long fascination with astronomy.

This is a pleasant bit of nostalgia about revisiting those enduring periods of elation after being exposed to the varied world of science fiction literature, particularly magazine science fiction. Nice stuff. The series will continue next issue.

Dasfax carries another long article every issue. You do not have to be a member of the Denver club to get copies of this fanzine, altho supporting memberships are offered at very reasonable rates and would certainly be appreciated.



THE KEN CHRONICLES #46

5-1/2x8-1/2" fold over saddle stitched; 22 pages; published quarterly from Ken Bausert; 2140 Erma Dr.; East Meadow, NY 11554-1120; \$2.00 or The Usual

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

This issue features an unusual and clever cover photo. That may appear to be an owl peering from behind the window of that upstairs window, but it is actually a large, fat cat, carefully peeking out from the almost-drawn shade. Ken is an ardent photographer, and each issue of his fanzine is filled with photos of the people and places he has recently encountered.

This issue he discusses places and buildings from his youth that are still around, mostly unchanged in the physical sense, but often altered in other ways.

The focus is on Jones Beach on Long Island including the famous (or infamous) art-deco Jones Beach Hotel, which is still around despite having small rooms, expensive rates, and not actually being near the beach front at all. Ken wonders how they managed to survive. It's a puzzler all right, but they still keep their rooms filled.

He discusses the back story of Neir's Tavern, which bills itself as the oldest watering hole in New York, being founded in 1829. However, it is not the oldest continuously operating tavern. There were changes in ownership, closures, and a recent remodeling with an expanded menu. Ken gives the chow a mixed review. He liked the hamburger platter, but thot their house chili was awful—"all ground beef in a bowl with no beans and no flavor, but plenty of fat in the bottom of the bowl." And it wasn't cheap to buy either.

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

There is a whole subdivision of print perzines from people discussing their lives and reaching out to touch other people who also want to present their life experiences in print. This is different from on-line blogs. Most on-line blogs tend to be stream-of-consciousness mutterings about daily life, a sort of web-based diary that lets anybody with a computer read pages that in past days would have been kept in a closed and locked journal. A print perzine forces the writer to organize thots and subjects and make a presentation that will attract the person reading it, and also induce that person to keep reading. That's not to say there aren't fanzines that are totally insane/random mish-mashes that pander to the most self-indulgent narcissistic impulses, but a majority of print perzines do not do that. They feature writing and the kinds of articles that used to show up in the little literary magazines, (back when little literary magazines were an actual literary genre). Ken's reviews and comments about the current batch of perzines he has received make interesting reading.

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

RADIO RECALL April 2017

8-1/2x11"; 12 pages; published monthly by the Metro Washington Old Time Radio Club---access thru their website: <http://www.eotrc.com/> Available thru club membership, or \$2.00 per issue, or selected trades (contact the club secretary first); or, occasionally, by pure editorial whim

This is the latest of the new, revamped and reformatted club newsletter of the Washington, D.C. Old Time Radio club. The new editor is Martin Grams, a recognized researcher in the hobby who has published a fair number of well written books about old time radio.

The new format includes a much larger type-font. Readers no longer have to squint or drag out a magnifying glass to read the issue. There are also lots more photos and illustrations. Missing is the regular letter column, but the loss is more than compensated for by the depth and variety of the articles offered here.

This time round editor Grams looks at the classic history of Detroit radio station WXYZ, originally printed in a book by Dick Osgood back in 1981 titled "XYXIE Wonderland". This book has been out of print for decades, but has recently been reprinted in a new edition by Bold Venture Press with a \$29.95 retail price. Why is this important, you might well ask? Because station WXYZ was the originator of such classic OTRadio programs as

The Lone Ranger, Sgt Preston of the Yukon, The Green Hornet, Bob Barclay American Agent, Ned Jordan, Ann Worth, and Warner Lester The Manhunter, among others. It was also the spawning ground for dozens of actors and announcers who went on to dominate the world of network radio and television over the years. WXYZ also pioneered and almost single handedly developed the process of program syndication thru the use of transcription disks.

Even more important from a historical point of view, is that Dick Osgood, who was a part of the WXYZ radio family, was able to interview a great many people who were involved in the history of the station from the very beginning up thru 1981. He did not have to rely on second-hand research, he had access to the station records, and the people who made the station work. His judgment of George W. Trendle, the ex-lawyer who took over the station in the heart of the Depression is not flattering, but his assessment pretty much matches the reality as related over the years by a great many people.



The reissue of this significant book is good news indeed, as is the news that editor Grams has a new book out debunking the long standing myth that the Lone Ranger was based on real-life marshal Bass Reeves. You'll find this belief all over the internet, not backed by the slightest shred of evidence. Marty has done an excellent job using accurate historical documentation to prove that there was never a connection between Reeves and The Lone Ranger.

Other good stuff in the issue: a discussion of the "Calvin and the Colonel" cartoon TV show that was created and written as an updated, cartoon version of the Amos & Andy radio show. Freeman Gosden and Charles Correll were the creators and provided the voices of the title characters. The entire history of the project is contained in a new book by Jerry Beck.

There are a few brief obituary write-ups, and a short article devoted to OTRadio in the comics. Radio-to-comic book crossovers were around almost from the beginning of comic book publishing, often comprising an important part of a comic company's offerings. During the late 1940s thru the late 1950s, for example, one fourth of DC Comics total output was related to characters and programs that originated on radio. There is a department related to recently discovered OTRadio programs, with dates, plus other news and reviews.

This is a very nice package. Anyone who is interested in OTRadio will find this interesting and informative. The Metro Washington club also offers selective articles from many past issues on their website as part of their club offerings, and those are also well worth exploring.

SHAMELESS PLUG DEPARTMENT!

I want to take the opportunity to mention my own fanzine, *Fadeaway*. Issue #54 is out, 50 pages long, featuring Dale Nelson's look at libraries he has known and (mostly) loved; plus an in-depth examination of Sax Rohmer's Sumuru novels, along with a long and lively letters department. A sample copy is sent free to anyone who has not previously received a copy. You can contact me direct at fabficbks@aol.com

