

FADEAWAY #58 is a fanzine devoted to science fiction and related fields of interest, and is produced by **Robert Jennings, 29 Whiting Rd., Oxford, MA 01540-2035, email fabficbks@aol.com.** Copies are available for a letter of comment, or a print fanzine in trade, or by subscription at a cost of \$25.00 for six issues. Letters of comment are much preferred. Any person who has not previously received a copy of this fanzine may receive a sample copy of the current issue for free by sending me your name and address. Publication is (in theory anyway) bi-monthly. This is the January-February 2019 issue

OUR COVER PIC THIS ISSUE is by Steve Stiles. It arrived a little late for Halloween, but that's OK; the year 2019 looks like its going to be pretty scary to me.

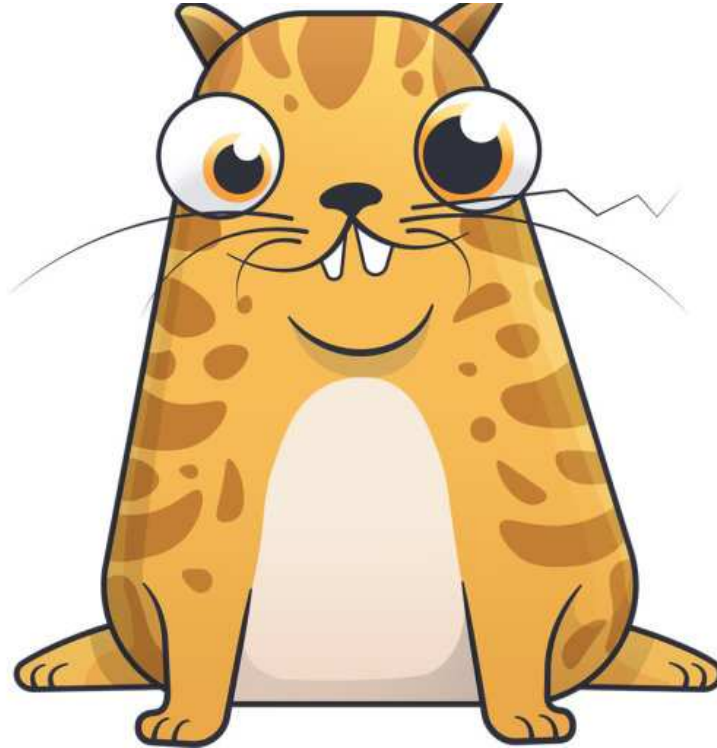
The bacover illo is by Stephanie Lux, and was originally intended to be the cover for a Star Frontiers role playing game module run at the second MASSCONFUSION game convention in 1984. We had permission from TSR to print that adventure module (and others) and sell copies to help support the convention. While some modules did get printed and offered for sale, this one did not get produced, which is too bad, because it was a pretty good adventure involving a space pirate who had hi-jacked a shipload of women being ferried out to a distant planet to become wives of the miners there. The low life was holding the ladies for an outrageous ransom, and the miners union decided to call on Johnny Credit Inc, the go-anywhere, do anything interstellar problem solving service to bring back their shipload of brides.

A lot of convention goers signed up for that two part adventure, and some asked if we were going to offer a printed version of the module after the con. Yes we were, but for a number of different reasons this adventure and five others did not get printed up or offered for sale. But we did print up the front covers for this and a few of the other ultimately unprinted game modules. I recently came across these unused covers while working in the warehouse, and decided to resurrect this one as a bacov for this issue of *Fadeaway*.

THINGS I WAS SERIOUSLY THINKING ABOUT GETTING INVOLVED WITH—

CryptoKitties: The Future Is Meow

BY [DAVE ROOS](#)



Twitch is one of the thousands of CryptoKitties out there in the blockchain universe. CRYPTOKITTIES

At an art auction in May 2018 in New York City, [a man paid \\$140,000](#) for a digital kitty cat. While this sounds like an excellent reason to finally give up on humanity, it's actually a fascinating glimpse into our technological future.

The six-figure cat is what's known as a [CryptoKitty](#). Like Beanie Babies of yore, CryptoKitties are collectibles. But unlike Beanie Babies, there is no fluffy object to hold in your hands. CryptoKitties are entirely digital.

The creators of CryptoKitties are big believers in the potential of [cryptocurrencies](#) and the [blockchain](#), the unhackable ledger that records cryptocurrency transactions. But they also understand that people's eyes tend to glaze over when you try to explain how the blockchain works, how cryptocurrencies are mined, what smart contracts are, etc. See, you almost fell asleep!

Instead, they decided to create the world's first blockchain-based game inspired by the internet's obsession with cute cat pics. Essentially, they are tricking us into using cryptocurrencies and smart contracts by blinding us with big-eyed kittens.

Here's how CryptoKitties works. You start by buying a cat on the CryptoKitties marketplace. Each cat is "genetically" unique, meaning that its unique DNA code is stored on the blockchain and cannot be

copied or changed. Because each kitty has unique DNA, it also looks different than all other digital cats. Heavier eyelids, thicker fur, perhaps wearing a wizard's robe.

Here the creators of CryptoKitties are playing with the idea of digital scarcity. In technical terms, they created a special digital token associated with each cat that is "non-fungible," meaning that it can't be replicated or lumped together with some other assets. No matter how the CryptoKitty is sold or traded, it preserves its unique pedigree on the blockchain.

Scarcity, as we learned with Beanie Babies, gives collectibles their value. The more desirable the "cattributes" (that's a real word now) of each CryptoKitty, the higher the purchase price. But to buy a CryptoKitty, you first need an online cryptocurrency wallet. The CryptoKitties marketplace runs on the Ethereum platform, so you'll need to buy some ether (that's the cryptocurrency) and stick it in your wallet.

If, like me, this is your first time buying cryptocurrency, it's a low-stakes introduction to the technology. Instead of betting your life's savings on the fluctuating price of bitcoin, you're throwing away five bucks on a digital cat that looks slightly drunk (the cheap ones ain't so cute).

Once you have a CryptoKitty, the next step is to mate it with another cat and produce more genetically unique digital offspring. (An algorithm determines how it looks or its "cattributes.") CryptoKitty owners auction off their most desirable cats as "sires" to the highest bidder. The resulting coupling is registered as a smart contract executed on the blockchain, where the offspring's genealogy is recorded for posterity.

Several of those auctions have reached six figures with [more than \\$24 million](#) spent on the CryptoKitties marketplace since it launched in November 2017. CryptoKitties pockets 3.75 percent of each transaction.

The creators of CryptoKitties didn't expect their digital collectibles to get this hot this fast, but their nefarious plan to get us all playing on the blockchain seems to have worked.

NOW THAT'S COOL

Until November 2018 the creators say a new CryptoKitty will be released every 15 minutes. Once they're all gone, the only way to get a new one will be to breed two others or buy one from another user.

Alas, I didn't learn about CryptoKitties until very late in October. However, I decided to give it a try. The initial investment sums can be low or high. I decided to go for low, but not too low. I viewed this whole thing as the equivalent of buying lottery tickets or taking in an afternoon at a race track, except I would never have to leave the comfort of my own home to get in on the action.

I had some cash in my PayPal account from recent sales, so, what the hey, I decided to create a digital wallet and shuffle over a hundred bucks into it. Then, off to the cryptokitties website to shop for a digital feline or two.

Except there were things I did not anticipate. First off, none of the digital wallet services allowed a wallet to be created on a regular computer; all the services provided a free app that could only be applied to a smart phone like device.

I don't exactly have a smart phone. Well, properly speaking, I have two. One is a disposable TracFone that I keep in the car in case of emergencies. The other is an old, several generations retired used phone my friend Louis the computer wizard got me. Total cost of the phone (because it was outdated) was twenty bucks. I use it exclusively at the warehouse to access the internet when I am adding or changing the inventory in my

comic book sales data base and upload the new info to the sales site. That is all I use it for, and since that is all I use it for, any old portable phone that can link to the internet works fine. I have no interest in carrying a phone around or using it for anything else, so I don't.

Technically speaking the phone is still in Louis' name, since there is some sort of mumbo-jumbo involved in making a complete transfer. Louis never bothered because he didn't care, and I sure didn't care; all I wanted was an internet link for my comic selling biz at the warehouse.

Louis was perfectly amendable to setting up a digital wallet on the old phone and explaining to me how the whole process worked, just as soon as he came back from a visit to his sister and her family over in New York that weekend.

That gave me three days or so to actually think about the prospects. I read over the FAQs for the CryptoKitties website again and considered the whole process. My initial impression had been that fiddling around with these digital cat images would be a good way to generate some fast, easy cash. Very likely most of the other people involved with cryptokitties also had the same idea.

But on consideration it seemed to me that this system was neither quick nor necessarily easy. New cats could be bred easily enuf, but each new digital cat generated had the combined highest generation number of the parents. The higher the generation, the slower the recovery time for the parent cats. Obviously low generation kitties and cats with cute "catable" appearances were the most desirable.

For these reasons lots of people were maneuvering to buy one of the original kitties the site has been creating every fifteen minutes since they began the game. One of the big advantages is that first generation cats can breed and recover very rapidly, in about a minute, so the potential to create more cryptokitties rapidly is very high.

Unfortunately it turns out that bidding for those first generation original cats is very spirited. The cats are auctioned off and the price for the next one automatically starts with the highest bid amount from the last original kittie that was sold. Ooops! Without doing too much looking I discovered that it would cost hundreds of bucks or even more to buy even one of those brand new cats.

I would be reduced to buying cats on the secondary market. Prices ran the entire gambit from about five bucks up to twenty-five thousand dollars (no joke, 25,000 smackers!)

Breeding the cats and producing lots of new cryptokitties would involve keeping records, with names (or at least numbers) for the 'offspring'. There was probably some sort of computer data program specifically designed for this game system, but I could envision myself spending lots and lots of hours breeding different cats, trying to get cute ones, and then trying to keep up with dozens, hundreds, maybe even thousands of the things.

Then there would come the process of trying to sell the new digital cats or leasing them out for stud duty, a process that would take more time and effort and which might not produce favorable results. It was easy enuf to hear about successful sales of cryptokitties that raked in dozens of dollars, but I'm willing to bet that plenty of perfectly ordinary, not so cute digital cats don't get sold and have no prospects of getting a siring fee.

My immediate analogy was comic books and other collectibles selling on eBay. On any average day, there are between two and a half and three *million* comic books being offered for sale on eBay, but the sell-thru rate is less than one percent, and of the comics that sell, almost all are items that are genuinely rare or happen to be hot fad titles at the moment. I can easily envision exactly the same situation with my potential herd of cryptokitties.

Then there are the lessons of history to heed as well. Altho pitched as an interesting hobby, in actual fact the underlying appeal of the cryptokittie "game" is speculation, the belief that scarcity will create demand, that demand will lead to fabulous profits in a short time with only a modest investment.

This is not a hobby, and it certainly is not an investment. Like beanie babies in previous years, or sports cards, or Avon bottles, Cryptokitties are a speculation bubble. The bubble expands and profits are generated as long as there are people who are willing to get involved and put their money into the speculation. But like beanie babies, or Avon Bottles, or for that matter, chain letter pyramid schemes, once the influx of new people slows, the bubble breaks and lots of people get stuck losing lots of money. At least with sports cards or beanie babies the last investment losers had physical objects they could hold onto. With cryptokitties the losers would have nothing but electronic pixels and big holes in their bank accounts.

There may be big money to be made from cryptokitties, but I've decided not to get involved with the fad. I've got a warehouse full of books, comics, games, and video movies I'm trying to sell. That's enuf to

keep me busy for quite a long time to come without getting involved in a risky, potentially expensive digital speculative venture.

The Spider Vs The Empire State; by Norvell Page; Ace of Aces Books; Trade Paperback; 2009; 430 pages; \$16.99, no e-book version available

I've been meaning to talk about The Spider, the 1930s pulp magazine hero for a long time now. This trade paperback book which collects three interlinked Spider novels from 1938 gives me an opportunity to take a look at one of the best known and most significant pulp magazine heroes of yesteryear.

The Spider is well remembered as being one of the most violent, and vengeful characters of the hero pulps. It's an interesting, but very uneven series. Norville Page was an intense writer. When he is in the groove there is almost nothing better than a Spider adventure. The stories feature a human being as a hero who is not superhuman, who has doubts and fears, who gets wounded, who makes mistakes in judgment, whose friends are sometimes kidnapped and even tortured in addition to being in dire danger, and when he manages to win thru and overcome the bad guys the readers knew it was a monumental achievement because they suffered and battled along with the hero every step of the way.

When Page was not hitting his stride, the stories are burdened with excessive brutal action and repetitious circular plots that are shamelessly padded to meet the word requirements. In addition the villains The Spider faces are amoral monsters that would make a Nazi concentration camp director pale in comparison. Literally thousands of people die in most of these adventures, all to enrich some vicious human fiend armed with some sort of death dealing gimmick. Most often these blood baths take place in New York City, with the wreckage that occurs in addition to the staggering loss of life being monumental.

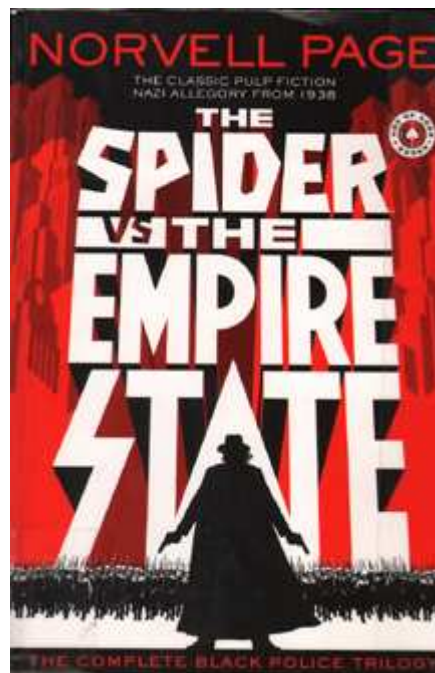
Then, generally with the next story, everything resets, as tho all that murder and mayhem never occurred at all. It leads to an odd sensation of surrealistic disconnect, to say the least.

This book reprints three Spider stories from September, October and November 1938 in which a "reform" political party promising to clear away the inept, entrenched do-nothings in the New York legislature sweep a neo-fascist group intent on criminal pillage into power. The new governor and the newly elected legislative majority lose no time in passing a series of draconian measures designed to entrench themselves in power, locking out political opponents, authorizing a new state-wide police force called the Black Police with extreme powers, and ramming thru brand new tax measures that virtually eliminate taxes for the very rich while passing the burden down to the poor and middle class. In addition they enact legislation that will allow the governor or the director of the Black Police (the Lt. Governor in this case) to declare opponents as criminals and "public enemies" without a trial, making those persons outlaws whose property and financial assets are automatically seized, and who may be killed on sight by the Black Police.

The ranks of the Black Police are filled with career criminals, recruited from the prisons and given full pardons by the new Governor. Their tax collection and enforcement methods are gangster-era style brutality. Murder, pillage, rape are the immediate results. Opponents or anyone who cannot pay the repressive new taxes are dragged off to newly established concentration camps while their property is seized by the state.

If this all sounds vaguely familiar, it was meant to. During the 1930s when the world wide Depression was wrecking the economy of every country on the planet, the number of thinkers and doers who believed that fascism was the answer necessary to solve the problems of the Depression was widespread, even in the United States. Democracy was viewed as a failure. At the least, a dictator who would cut thru the legislative red tape and get things done was viewed as the only solution to the world's economic woes.

In many countries fascist governments swept into power with the full consent and approval of the people. In Europe, in Asia, in South America, fascist dictators took over many nations and began to manage the



legal and economic affairs of their individual countries, with a great deal of success, or so it seemed to many people in the US.

Meanwhile in other places, communism was viewed as the answer. Socialist and communist leaning governments were on the rise, with communist parties in Europe and Asia a vibrant political force to be reckoned with.

There was considerably support in the United States and Canada for both fascism and for communism. But by the middle 1930s these opinions began to waver. In the Soviet Union it became apparent that the communist party machinery had become a ruthless dictatorship in the hands of Josef Stalin, made especially evident with the political show trials launched beginning in 1936 where Stalin's opponents, real or imaginary, were paraded before state courts and pled guilty to extraordinarily ridiculous charges. Clearly these people had been tortured and had their families threatened so that they were forced to make confessions that would eventually lead to hundreds of death sentences.

In addition, at about that same time, it was revealed that most communist political parties around the world, including the Party in the United States, were actually directly controlled by the communists in Moscow, and the Party in Moscow was Stalin. Neither of these two circumstances sat well with most Americans. From the moment the Great Purges became public knowledge support for and membership in the CPA began to decline.

Meanwhile the most vocal and successful of the fascist dictatorships was Germany, which under Hitler had begun to make a strong recovery from the effects of the Depression with the National Socialist platform of private ownership, but state control of business and industry. Under Hitler, Nazi regulations had done a great deal to banish the worst effects of the Depression, but at a significant price.

In Germany all political parties except the National Socialists were banned. Political opponents were rounded up, and either assassinated or sent to concentration camps. Trade unions were outlawed, restrictions and public criticisms were made against Catholic and other Christian doctrines, while the violent anti-Semitism and blatant Aryan racism of the new order that had been largely ignored during Hitler's consolidation of power was brought home forcibly in 1938, particularly with the events of November 9th, "The Night of Shattered Glass" -- "Kristallnacht" in German.

The Nazi party orchestrated a vicious pogrom against Germany Jews. Over 250 synagogues were burned, approximately seven thousand Jewish businesses were trashed and looted, Jewish hospitals, homes, cemeteries, schools and retirement homes were smashed and pillaged while police and fire departments stood by and did nothing to interfere.

Dozens of persons were murdered outright and the following morning thirty thousand Jews were arrested for the crime of being Jewish and sent to concentration camps. Jewish businesses were not allowed to reopen unless they were owned or managed by non-Jewish individuals. New restriction on Jewish movement, education, access to public institutions, and occupations were also passed.

The Nazis tried to blame it on "public sentiment" and downplayed the destruction and the death count after most of the rest of the world, including some Fascist regimes in other countries, raised serious objections and questions.

But even before these final eye openers, most of the citizens in the United States were grimly aware that fascism was no longer a viable answer to the economic problems of the Depression. An overwhelming majority did not want to get involved with the affairs of Europe, or Asia, which were clearly going to be the locations of brand new wide-spread warfare. Our involvement in the Great War had been seen by most people as a national mistake, a bloody conflict in which the United States had no real interest, and from which



the nation gained nothing. When the European nations that America had made generous low interest war loans to refused to repay them, more people than ever were adamant that America should never again get involved in foreign wars, no matter what the provocation.

Anti-fascist sentiment led to a large number of novels and stories pointing out the dangers of the ideology. Sinclair Lewis's 1935 novel "It Can't Happen Here" was the first of a tsunami of stories that flooded book stores and magazines. The Spider's Black Police trilogy was right in tune with the time.

Plenty of people have pointed out the clear similarities in Sinclair Lewis's novel with then current events. In the novel "Buzz" Windrip, a political demagogue, is elected president of the United States with a political platform that promises drastic economic reforms, a return to "traditional" values and old fashioned patriotism. After he is elected he takes complete control of the government with the help of a paramilitary force that crushes all political opponents.

In addition to the clear analogy of Hitler's Germany, there was also a clear inference and connection to the behavior of Louisiana politician Huey Long who had been elected governor of Louisiana and had organized the state government as a criminal enterprise to enrich himself, his family, and his circle of political cronies. Long was preparing to run for President in 1936 when he was assassinated in 1935 shortly before Lewis' novel hit the market.

The strength of the novel is its chilling portrayal of power struggles, criminal activity, greed, malicious cruelty and ruthless ambition. Unfortunately all these qualities are readily apparent in the leaders of many traditional political leaders. Lewis did not really need to introduce a new kind of social or economic world order to make his story work.

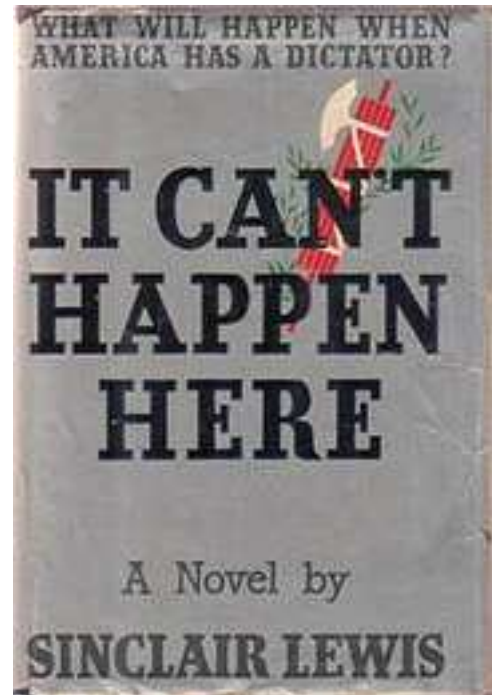
Most of the 118 Spider novels published from 1933 to the final issue in December, 1943 were written by Norvell W. Page. For a writer as well respected and as prolific as Page was, surprisingly little is actually known about him. Born in 1904 in Virginia, he attended William & Mary College where he met his future wife. By age 18 he was working as a reporter, mostly doing the police beat. He started with the *Cincinnati Post*, finally winding up in New York working for the several different papers before landing with the *World Telegram*.

He started writing western fiction for the pulp magazine market in order to help support his parents who had been wiped out in the stock market crash of 1929. His knowledge of the west came from stories he had read in magazines, with heavy influences from the western movies of the period. An editor suggested he write stories about something he actually knew about, which led him to the detective fiction market, at which he was very successful. By the early 1930s he was turning out a hundred thousand words a month and there seemed to be no limit to his ability to produce innovative and interesting crime yarns.

In 1933 he was one of the founders of the American Fiction Guild, a nationwide association of pulp and popular fiction writers. He was immediately elected president of the New York chapter. He contributed a backup story to the first issue of *The Spider Magazine*, and with the third issue was signed by the publisher as the regular writer for the series under the house name of Grant Stockbridge.

The first two Spider stories had been written by R.T.M. Scott, (or possibly by his son Robert using his father's name) but they were slow moving and old fashioned, harking back to the sort of material printed in the detective magazines of the late 19teens. Publisher Harry Steeger has been given the credit for creating The Spider as a direct imitator of the popular Street & Smith hero The Shadow, and he wanted something that moved a lot faster. Page was the man who could provide that. He was initially hired because he could turn out material very fast, since the magazine needed some stories to stockpile for the upcoming monthly issues. At approximately 60,000 words per story, Page proved he was equal to the task. In 1934 he quit his newspaper job to concentrate full time on pulp magazine writing.

The Spider assignment turned out to be his biggest break, and also his biggest curse. Initially he was able to turn out Spider novels rapidly and still have time to write material for other magazines as well. The problem was that Page was instinctively a writer of novelettes and short stories. 60,000 words stretched his





Screams of agony followed in the wake of the Spider's bullets.

abilities. It is reported that he sometimes had difficulty plotting his stories, but could fill out the pages with action sequences and conversation. He made up for the defect by unleashing The Spider thru a lot of non-stop action, some of it not really related to the central plot. He also relied on friends to help suggest plot ideas, including his longtime friend Theodore Tinsley who was the backup writer for The Shadow pulp magazine.

Within a short time Page had settled into a sort of loose routine of featuring fantastic criminals, most often masked and unknown, who relied on remarkable inventions or especially malicious criminal activities to terrorize the city of New York, wrecking havoc, killing hundreds, then thousands of innocent people who got in their way, before finally being unmasked and slain by The Spider.

The motif was that The Spider was the nemesis of the underworld who dealt out lethal justice to the racketeers and criminals that preyed on the innocent citizens of New York, or anywhere else he was needed. He had a platinum cigarette lighter whose base slid aside to reveal the Spider's seal, an image of a hideous spider, which crimson mark The Spider left planted on the foreheads of the assorted bad guys he killed. Because he was guilty of murder (at the least), and used unlawful methods to get to the bottom of each month's murderous crime wave, the law considered The Spider a criminal himself, no better than the killers he fought against. There was a large reward out for his capture, but both the denizens of the underworld and the police were prone to start firing at will the moment the Spider showed up on the scene.

In reality The Spider was Richard Wentworth, wealthy young socialite and amateur criminologist. Wentworth was a close friend of New York City police commissioner Stanley Kirkpatrick, and was well known to the rank and file of the police force. Altho Kirkpatrick was Wentworth's friend and ally, he was firmly convinced that Richard Wentworth was The Spider, and had declared that he would arrest him and send him to the electric chair if this was ever proven. In most stories Kirkpatrick tried to test his theory, but Wentworth was always able to parry those accusations, sometimes not very effectively.

Wentworth was known to be acquainted with The Spider, and sometimes The Spider was known to provide useful information to Wentworth, which did not aid his constant denials that he was The Spider.

In fact major criminals had no particular problem figuring out that Wentworth and The Spider were one and the same. Even the suspicion that Wentworth was acquainted with The Spider was usually enuf to get them involved in efforts to silence or kill Wentworth at the earliest opportunity, often before the unknown criminal mastermind actually unleashed his lethal reign of terror.

Wentworth had been an army major during the Great War, a man in excellent physical condition, a crack shot with any firearm, and also an accomplished violinist. In his younger days his teachers and family had tried, unsuccessfully, to get him to pursue a career as a classical musician. As befitting his vast wealth, Wentworth's violin was a priceless Stradivarius.

The Spider came with a crew of friends to aid him in his endless battles against the forces of evil. Chief among those was his true love, Nita Van Sloan, a beautiful young woman with soft violet eyes who shared all the dangers that Wentworth underwent. Wentworth tried to shield her, but she managed to become deeply involved in almost every case The Spider encountered. Often she was the damsel in peril, but just as often she could take care of herself. She was an expert with most modern weapons, and carried on the battle whenever her true love Richard was shot or otherwise incapacitated, which happened a lot more frequently in The Spider adventures than with any other pulp magazine hero. Tho their love was deep and pure, they knew they could never be married and risk settling down or having children. The danger was too great, since Wentworth might be unmasked as The Spider, or his constant battles against the underworld might result in his death at any moment.

Nita was acknowledged as the second in command when the Spider went missing or was seriously wounded, and on several occasions she donned the disguise and actually substituted for The Spider.

Wentworth's faithful companions included the bearded Sikh Ram Singh, a hereditary warrior who was fanatically devoted to Wentworth. He is an expert with knives, and was seldom without several. He was also pretty blood thirsty, always happily suggesting that any foe be dispatched with his throwing daggers of sliced to pieces immediately. Occasionally he and Wentworth spoke in Hindustani, a language which only they understood.

Ex-Sergeant Ronald Jackson was Wentworth's chauffeur. He served under Wentworth in the Great War, and passed up an officer's commission to remain under Wentworth's command. He was an expert with most weapons and excellent in hand to hand fighting. Jackson was killed off by The Avenger in the February 1935 issue, and buried with great honors and intense sadness on the part of Wentworth and his friends. However the readers would have none of that. The outcry was strong enuf that Page brought him back from the dead a few issues later, with a pretty lame explanation of his supposed death and resurrection, but readers did not raise any objections to that bit of hocus-pocus.

Wentworth's butler, the elderly Jenkyns, a long time family servant, also knows his secret identity, and aids with the adventures. Altho a reasonably decent shot with a pistol, his character is usually on the sidelines of most issues.

Richard Wentworth lives, depending on which issue you happen to be reading, either in the penthouse of a fifteen story apartment building he owns, or in a luxurious three (or was it five?) story private dwelling near the riverfront with gardens and tennis courts within its gated and heavily fortified confines, or in a specially constructed apartment inside a commercial office building Wentworth has controlling interest in. In all cases his dwelling(s) are always described as nearly impregnable, heavily fortified units equipped with secret entrances for escape routes if necessary, which was a wise precaution, considering how often Wentworth was ambushed in his own home by kill crazy criminal foes.

Sometimes Wentworth went undercover into the underworld in disguise. Most frequently that disguise was as Blinky McQuade, a furtive small time safe cracker who wears very thick glasses and is almost blind without his specs. Altho an expert safe cracker, Blinky only pulls jobs when he needs the money. He lives in run down quarters in the slums, and spends his off hours drinking in known underworld dives where he is both respected for his ability to crack even the toughest boxes, but is also despised because he won't rack up the big jobs and live high and fancy like any first class crook would.

In most of his stories The Spider wore an antique-style opera cloak, a fright wig, and hideous facial makeup that made him look like a nightmare figure, but the covers of the magazine routinely showed his alter-identity Richard Wentworth wearing a black cloak and a business suit, with his features "disguised" by a plain domino mask. The editors of the magazine never really explained this, altho fans have speculated that maybe in The Spider's earlier adventures that's the way he dressed. If so, I haven't noticed it.



RICHARD WENTWORTH



For whatever reason the artists who did the inside illos for *The Spider's* magazine couldn't seem to decide what Richard Wentworth was supposed to look like. His portrait pics changed every few issues, and so did the illos showing Nita and the other supporting characters. The interior art was most often done by J. Fleming Gould who handled the inside art for the first 109 issues.

Each issue usually contained eight or nine beautifully drawn full page or double page illustrations, including a double page opening set, and several character shots. The work is almost always exceptional, presenting some of the best interior artwork seen in any pulp magazine. Why Gould couldn't seem to decide on what Wentworth and his cast of friends actually looked like is beyond me.

The Spider usually carried two automatic pistols and was a crack shot, easily the best marksman of any hero to stalk thru the pages of any magazine or novel of the era. He never missed; unless something juggled his arm or his target fell before the shot was fired. His acute accuracy and withering firepower was a source of deep fear among the criminal class.

Wentworth/The Spider was also an expert swordsman. Page was apparently fascinated with the sport of fencing, because every fourth or fifth issue featured a saber duel between The Spider and some opponent. One of the

very few recurring villains on the series (the Spider usually deliberately and with grim malice killed the criminal masterminds when he managed to corner them) was The Fly, who was an expert swordsman himself. These duels with sabers, cutlasses, or epees were described in lavish detail related over several pages.

In the Empire State trilogy Wentworth initiated a saber duel with General Lewis, the head of the New York National Guard, in order to cause him to abandon his loyalty to the criminal Black Police and throw in his lot with Wentworth's underground resistance movement.

Indeed, the danger and the ferocious intensity of the battles the Spider fought were the prime ingredients that kept readers coming back month after month. The Spider was a very human hero. When you read a Spider adventure, you followed Richard Wentworth every step of the way. His every thot, his conclusions, his triumphs, his mistakes, his defeats, his deepest fears, everything was related in direct full-depth personal characterization that went well beyond anything else any other pulp hero and most mainstream detective novels had to offer.

Wentworth as The Spider was also a vulnerable hero, awash with emotion, and to demonstrate just how dangerous these battles with the underworld were, often Wentworth's friends were kidnapped and tortured, or placed on the verge of hideous mutilation by the human monsters who were ruthlessly slaughtering innocents and looting the city. Wentworth's musings were often bitter, particularly when he realized, as he did every single story, that his dedication to thwarting criminal maniacs and saving people from the plots of those fiends not only made him a hunted outlaw, but prevented him from ever marrying Nita and leading a normal life. His bitterness and frustration was often punctuated with mild swearing. The words hell, damn and Good God were often found in the pages of *The Spider* stories, but seldom in any other pulp magazines.

Norvell Page was initially paid \$500 for each Spider story he wrote. This was, interestingly enuf, more than Walter Gibson was originally being paid for writing the Shadow novels during his early issues. Apparently Popular Publications, who produced *The Spider Magazine*, had a sliding rate scale. With issue number six the payment escalated to five hundred fifty dollars, and with the ninth issue (June 1934) the rate went up to six hundred dollars per story, a penny a word; good rates for pulp writing in the early 1930s. With the twelfth issue the pay scale went up to \$625 per story, then in May, 1935 (issue #20) the rate of pay went up to seven hundred dollars, then to \$725 or \$750 for later stories. On the other hand, if sales faltered, the pay scale could go down too.

There were also interesting bonuses involved. In addition to looking favorably on any stories Page might submit to any other magazine in the Popular stable, there were spin-off extras. For example, the December 1939 issue had The Spider battling a horde of nearly invincible robot monsters who are looting the city and killing hundreds. The exact same plot was used later for a Superman Sunday comic strip sequence. The similarities were so close that Popular's publisher threatened to sue National Comics, owner of the Superman feature. A behind the scenes agreement was reached, and as a bonus Page received a check for \$800 as his share of the settlement.

Page also received a bonus (how much is unknown) when Columbia Pictures decided to turn the character into a fifteen chapter serial in 1938, titled "The Spider's Web". Page may also have helped with the plotting of the serial. This chapter-play was the first of two Columbia serials devoted to the character. The original Spider pulp magazine stories were far too violent to ever pass the Motion Picture Production Code, the movie censorship board, but there was enough implied mayhem in the production to suggest the nature of the character.

The Spider's supporting cast of characters are all present in the serial, but in addition to toning down the violence, his costume was changed. This wasn't as much a major change as might have been the case with some other pulp or comic book costumed heroes. In the serial The Spider appeared in a black body covering poncho-like cloak decorated with a white spider web motif, topped by a fedora.

In the pulp magazine stories The Spider also routinely used a very thin, stronger-than-steel flexible silk rope, dubbed 'the Spider's web' that he used to climb up and down buildings or swing to other objects while in action. Despite the serial's title, the web-rope never made an appearance in the chapter-play.

"The Spider's Web" was the most successful serial of 1938. *Motion Picture Herald*, the trade magazine for theater owners and exhibitors, reported the serial jumped the gate and end gross of every Saturday feature it was shown with, and was easily the most popular serial with young viewers who were interviewed.

Columbia was quick to note the appeal of the character and tried to negotiate another Spider serial immediately. However Popular Publications, publisher of *The Spider* magazine was also aware of the serial's strong popularity and asked for more money. This led to a breakdown in negotiations. The rights to a second Spider serial were not signed until 1941.

The constant pressure to produce a new Spider thriller every month led Page to create more and more bizarre situations, often without a word of explanation of how/why the menace came into existence. For example, in the giant robot story, the creator of the nearly invincible giant





machines is eventually revealed to be an elderly half crazed character trying to make his son look like a genius-hero. How the machines were created, how they operated, or even where they were hidden when they were not out smashing the city to flinders was not explained.

In the "Empire State" series, similar problems emerge. In the second novel of the trilogy, the evil masked mastermind who has engineered the criminal takeover of the entire state (and how did that happen you might ask? You might ask, but you will find no answers in these stories), unleashes a deadly plague on those who oppose him. This plague acts like a fast moving form of leprosy, creating numbness, brittle body parts, paralysis and then death. How was this hideous disease developed? How is it spread? There are no answers provided in the story.

Wentworth manages to figure out that early use of an experimental leprosy antitoxin will slow down the disease, and he leads battles to obtain a supply of the serum. In the final conclusion of the series, when the hidden mastermind is exposed and killed, we still have no information about how/when/why the mystery disease came into being, or even how to effectively stop its spread. These details and many others are all swept away in the mad rush of battle, counter

attack, rescue, and relentless action as The Spider and his gallant band of freedom fighters rush to confront and somehow overcome the forces massed against them.

This is a persistent problem with The Spider stories. When Page is clicking along there is nothing better than a Spider adventure. But far too often in my opinion, there are many loose ends that are never explained, or even justified. The emphasis is on the grim determination of The Spider to deal with the monstrous plot of the month, and on lots of nonstop action. This ploy works most of the time while reading the stories, but the lack of explanations, or even logic in the basic plot structure thwarts the believability of the character.

When Page pays attention to detail the stories are magnetic. In the third novel of this trilogy the Spider is attempting to stop the forces of the Black Police from bombing a dam in a nearby state that will flood the countryside downriver killing thousands, thus diverting attention for a final spree of looting and mass murder that the hidden Master is planning before moving on to the next stage of his plans. The pace is relentless and detailed, a high tension thriller with Wentworth winning minor points, then losing against the overwhelming odds, rushing to minimize the horrible efforts of the crime syndicate, attempting to save and rescue people from the resulting flood. The entire sequence which spread over several chapters is riveting.

The pressure of creating new and ever more shocking Spider stories was enormous. The Spider was a top selling pulp magazine, but every month something new, deadly, and ever more bizarre had to be created to top the stories that had gone before. This constant strain eventually led to Norvell Page having a nervous breaking down in 1937 while writing the Living Pharaoh series. The four novel series was rewritten and finished up by Emile C. Tepperman, who was the writer on the Operator #5 series. He took over the feature and wrote the next eight Spider novels. Interestingly enuf Tepperman was only paid \$500 for each of those stories.

Page took a long break from the Spider, about nine months of rest before returning to the character. Even after he returned to The Spider he was spelled from time to time by fill in novels written by Wayne Rogers, and occasionally by Tepperman. There were many good stories after Page's return, but the plots became even more fantastic and far more brutal with a focus on endless action to the detriment of believable story plots or any rational explanations for the events that filled those issues.

In December 1943 The Spider magazine was discontinued. Fans of the character like to blame the wartime paper shortage for the cancellation, but other factors were involved. For one thing sales had slipped. Signs the magazine's sales were faltering are revealed by the pay vouchers paid for the novels. With the April 1941 issue the pay scale was cut from \$550 to \$450 per novel. After the March 1943 issue there was a three month gap before the June issue appeared, thereafter the schedule was officially bi-monthly. December 1943

was the final published issue. All total The Spider magazine ran 118 issues. A final Spider novel had been written by Donald G. Cormack (titled "Slaughter, Inc.") but it was filled with background mistakes and was not published until many years later.

The main reason the magazine shut down was that in 1943 Page simply abandoned The Spider to take on a job writing for the government Office Of War Information in Washington, DC. Many fans have wondered why he would give up a career as a successful wordsmith for a government job at a set salary. My guess is that Page took the job because not only was it a salaried position, but because the job provided full health benefits and a retirement plan. After World War II ended he continued writing for the government, switching over to the Atomic Energy Commission's Public Information Division in 1947, a job he held until his death in 1961 at the age of 57 from complications of an earlier surgery. Norvell Page never returned to pulp magazine writing, and he never looked back.

Fans have remembered The Spider well thru the years. After The Shadow and Doc Savage he is the third best known and remembered hero of the pulp era. Thru the years there have been numerous efforts to reprint the Spider stories in paperback, in trade paperback, in hardback, and in digital files. Companies as diverse as Berkley Books in 1964 to Sanctum Books today have been involved in the process, but usually the reprint efforts have fallen short. Apparently the general public has far less interest in the character than dedicated pulp fans do.

The longest, and presumably the most successful effort has been the reprints undertaken by Girasol Collectibles located in Ontario, Canada, who produced trade paperbacks reprinting two different Spider novels each book, including all the original illustrations. Those trade paperbacks appeared on a regular schedule between the years 2003 and 2015. They managed to reprint all of the original 118 Spider stories, but they are out of business as a publisher, and those volumes still in print are now selling for \$25.00 each. Most recently Sanctum Books, the outfit that has been reprinting The Shadow and Doc Savage have taken over the option, altho their reprints have followed a loose and pretty erratic schedule with long months between issues.

This particular trade paperback reprinting three of the Spider's most politically oriented adventures is a mixed bag. You get to see Page's writing at its best, and also at its worst. Altho the publisher makes a big deal of the Spider's three issue anti-fascist theme, the reality is that Norvell Page had visited this exact theme many times before, and would revisit it again several times afterwards.

In the January 1936 issue Richard Wentworth faced "The Mayor of Hell", where a corrupt senator with strong-arm criminal backing and a weak state governor manages to seize control of the state government and the New York City administration, ramming thru crippling taxes, filling the police forces with known criminals, hi-jacking newspapers and radio stations while launching a campaign of pillage and systematic looting. This particular story (reprinted in the Girasol double novels #15) is far better than the Black Police trilogy. It is a blazing suspense filled action thriller written by Page at the very height of his creative powers. The battle of The Spider, alone, wounded, thwarted at every turn, but determined never to surrender and to somehow stop the evil combine that has enveloped his city is compelling reading so intense that it is difficult to put the story down.

On the other hand, most of the later efforts using the same theme display's Page's writing at some of its worst. They are mostly maudlin, filled with pseudo patriotic rhetoric, and efforts to rouse freedom fighters against a New York State government that has fallen into the hands of ruthless political combines that plan on siphoning every penny raised thru ludicrous fines and taxes into the coffers of the men running the political gangs.

Again, in my opinion this particular book reprinting all three of the Black Police stories shows the best and the



worst of page's writing style. When Page pays attention to detail and fully describes sequences or events the effect is dynamic. But his faults also show thru, in particular his inability to come up with consistent plot sequences, or adequate reasonable explanations for the situations the bad guys throw against The Spider and his freedom fighters.

Then there is the very fact that this series, as with most Spider stories, reuses the idea of a masked, master criminal whose identity is unknown to even his close associates. To be blunt, that's kid stuff. Real political opportunists don't need to hide behind a secret masked identity---they are happy to parade in public, rallying their allies and crowing over the defeat of their opponents. In this particular trilogy, after several promising and realistic leads exploited in the first two novels, in the final story, when the hidden mastermind is finally revealed, it turns out to be a minor third tier character, someone who is absolutely unbelievable for the role of a criminal mastermind who could take over and crush an entire state government. It was a disappointing conclusion to the saga.

I will also note that altho publisher Age of Aces reprinted all the original magazine illustrations directly connected with the adventure from each Spider issue, for some reason they group all of them together at the opening pages of each story instead of spacing them thruout the book in the appropriate places where the illos would compliment the action sequences. This just looks like sloppy editing to me.

This book is still in print and available direct from the publisher or from many internet book selling sites. Considering that most of the out of print Spider trade paperback volumes are selling from prices ranging from twenty five dollars each and up, the asking price for this book is very reasonable. However despite its historic interest as a direct parallel with military fascism within the Spider's universe, I didn't feel that these three tales were the best Spider stories dealing with the theme.





READER REACTION

Ken Faig Jr carolfaig@comcast.net

Great send-up of dime novels, readers & collectors in #57. I used to own at least one dime novel (from I think the 1880s or so), but let it go in my big downsizing.

Lots of interesting letters in #57, too.

I think we're seeing the death of "used" merchandise--but especially furniture as you mention. It used to be that many furniture stores would take your old stuff when delivering your

new--but no more, as I found out when I recently looked to replace one broken & one aged recliner. (I have poor luck with recliners. I eventually break them, and if there is one thing that is nearly impossible to find, it's a recliner repairman. Maybe La-Z-Boy sees that all those guys are otherwise employed. Or possibly there's a website howtorepairyourrecliner.com lurking out there that I haven't found.)

The risk of bedbugs was blamed for rejection of old stuff, but the bottom line was that my old stuff was now officially trash which had to be hauled away. So I paid \$85 to get rid of my old recliners. Just where all this stuff goes I have no idea. I had what I considered some decent furniture to dispose of when we moved from our last home to our apartment. I eventually paid \$1500 to a hauler to remove unwanted items from my home and it saddened me to see what I considered to be decent furniture busted up to fit into the hauler's truck.

At least I did manage to sell the books I didn't have room for, but that's also getting harder & harder to do. Automobiles may be one exception from the decline of used merchandise--the new ones are so expensive, many of us can only afford to buy used. Of course, most of us also buy used homes--the upscale buyers who restrict themselves to new construction only are probably a small minority.

I remember that my parents bought new construction when they bought their first suburban home in 1955, but it wasn't without problems. The septic tank didn't work right, & my mother had to work hard to petition for sewers. We ended up the last on the sewer line & we had to dig up our line at least once because there was so little fall to the street sewer. Later, a pumping station was built so that the sewer could be extended down the hill (& back up again) to the east of our house.

When I went to my 50th high school reunion in 2016, one of my surviving classmates had become an entrepreneur whose business involved a dog trained to detect bedbugs. Just what he does after his dog detects the bedbugs, I don't know--maybe the infested items are burned.

Trash and recycling are recurring necessities/problems. Years ago, people in rural or suburban settings used to bury garbage. Living in retirement in a condo apartment building, I know that (i) having the trash removed and (ii) the hallways swept are two of the biggest desiderata. My wife & I buy too much packaged food--we'd probably be healthier if we did more from scratch cooking but with just two to cook for, it's difficult to summon the energy.

The color looks great in the digital *Fadeaway*. I think the PDF is the wave of the future in the field of writing and reading. Imagine all those PDFs journeying almost instantaneously across cyberspace while an average printed book will set you back \$20-25 to mail to anyone outside the U.S. Gone are the days of book

post & surface mail. Of course, the book isn't yet ready for its last stand. Some POD publishers have found local printing the solution to outrageous overseas shipping costs.

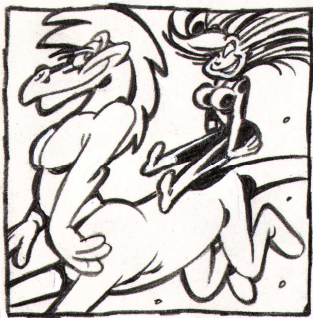
///You are probably right about the end of the used merchandise era so far as furniture goes. On the other hand, yard sales, flea markets, and garage sales do a booming biz recycling a lot of old household goods and clothing. A lot of things that in past times would be repaired and used until they almost fell apart, simply can't be repaired any more. As with your busted recliners, it is often a case of there being nobody who knows how to do it any more, or cares to bother.

I may have mentioned before that I have friends who collect old movies in 16mm format. This is a dying hobby, not just because many old movies are now available on DVD discs, but also because there is nobody left who can repair the old projectors. I have a friend with fifteen 16mm projectors, of which only two work. Cannibalizing old machines to get working models might be viable, except there is nobody in the area that even knows how to repair these machines, and in most cases any critically necessary replacement parts cannot be obtained. The same situation exists with reel-to-reel tape recorders, phonographs, and plenty of other old electronic equipment.

For small appliances, and even for many large ones, it is cheaper to buy new machines than try to fix the old ones. Newer refrigerators, washers, driers, air conditioning units and the like are much more energy efficient and are designed to last longer than the old ones anyway. So far as electric shavers, portable radios, can openers, mixers, electric fryers, cameras, and the like, nobody even makes an effort to repair those items any more.

Luckily these days a lot of the materials used to make the old stuff can get recycled. Scrap metal of every variety is worth money, and in theory most plastic can be recycled. Busted up furniture generally winds up in community incinerators where at least it helps produce electricity.

I think a lot of this depends on a generally optimistic economic condition. During the recent economic meltdown of 2008-2012, people kept their autos and major appliances until they literally dropped dead. Second hand stoves and washing machines actually had buyers, whereas they don't today. Another national financial hiccup could produce a sea change in attitudes toward used merchandise.///



Joy V. Smith; pagadan@aol.com

Fun cover. Re: trash. I have a friend who brings her trash bags and recycling stuff to us to put in our trash and recycling carts. (We usually have room.)

I confess that I really like Buckaroo Banzai--and the cast. It's fun! And thanks for the closing scene. I love that too. And "No matter where you go, there you are." I love that line.

I'm impressed by the time you put into the Grain and Salt articles, and I love the titles. (Yes, it's true, I'm easily amused.)---

"The Young Racketeers and the Big Payoff; or, Sharing the Wealth With the Boys In Blue

5. The YR Managing a Road House; or, Clipping the Rubes At Roulette

6. The YR Managing a Brothel; or, Teaching Young Cats Old Tricks

Re: Sharing the Wealth..., I recently watched the Prohibition documentary (Ken Burns). Lots of historical and political background that reminds me too much of today. (Back in the day there were lots of payoffs to politicians and police. Hmm. Today I think it's mainly to the former. I add this because of all the campaign advertising going on now.)

More interesting info in the letters and asides--You are busy! Oh, remember that in the books Fu Manchu did not have that mustache!

Ken Bausert; 2140 Erma Dr.; East Meadow, NY 11554-1120

Well, I started reading your latest issue today and did so with a full smile on my face because, unlike your friends at the monthly serial club meeting, I HAVE seen Buckaroo Banzai... actually, a couple of times. But, before you lose all respect for my taste in film, I must explain.

Back in the 1980s, I worked with a guy named Mike, and Mike had a brother, Ray; they and their friends were into the custom car/hot rod culture. Even though I was quite a bit older than them, I was accepted into their crowd because of my background in the custom car scene. Ray often had guys over to his house for "movie night," at which time we'd drink, order pizza or Chinese food, or have a barbecue, and he'd put on a movie - the weirder or wilder the better. I remember seeing Maximum Overdrive, with music by AC/DC, for the first time there, and -of course - Buckaroo Banzai!

Now, I don't think anyone ever thought Buckaroo Banzai was a great movie; it was just strange, and that's what they were after on these movie nights. We'd all be eating, drinking, laughing, and probably commenting about the movie while it was on, and just goofing around in general. It's easy to like a movie as bad as Buckaroo Banzai when you're having a great night hanging with the guys.

My most memorable quote from the film was, "Laugh-a while you can, Monkey-boy!" (One of John Lithgow's/Dr. Emilio Lizardo's famous lines.) For a long time afterward, we would use "Monkey-boy" on each other whenever one of us made a mistake or did something stupid. (I actually think John Lithgow was great in his part, BTW.)

I'm happy you wrote such a great review of the film in your latest issue because I now know the complete background of the movie. And, even though I never knew what the hell was going on, half the time while I was watching it, I enjoyed learning now what the producers were TRYING to do.

Dale Speirs; Calgary, Alberta CANADA optuntia@hotmail.com

Downloaded *Fadeaway* #57 from efanazines.com, just in time for our latest postal strike. Canada Post is now mainly in the parcels business, but the posties are still stuck in the 1960s. Rotating strikes are underway. I had ordered from Amazon.ca a copy of an anthology CHALLENGER UNBOUND, a collection of pastiches about Professor Challenger. Incredibly, it just managed to miss the rotating strikes at each stage of its travels. According to the Canada Post tracking app, it left the Amazon warehouse and the Mississauga sorting plant just hours before Toronto posties walked off the job. I picked it up at my box number four hours before the Calgary posties went on strike.



Your saga of garbage disposal had me baffled. In Calgary, the City collects all residential garbage using the bin system. Each homeowner has three bins supplied free by the City. Black for landfill, blue for recyclables, and green for compostables. The garbage trucks have hydraulic lifts that grab the bins and empty them into the appropriate section of the truck. No fuss, no muss. Garbage hauling is a flat rate on our monthly utility bill, currently \$19.90 a month.

I saw the movie BUCKAROO BANZAI on its first theatre release, and thought it very disorganized. I am not prepared to believe rock musicians can save the world through better science. Most rock musicians have trouble naming a scientist other than Einstein or Hawking, or explaining why the Sun always comes up in the east. The only thing from the movie that stuck with me was the quote "No matter where you go, there you are".

Re: comic pricing that overvalues mint compared to Very Fine. The same thing is true with stamps and coins. There is a demand among uneducated collectors to slab stamps and coins in plastic. The Scott stamp catalogue overvalues all the common stamps, which creates problems for dealers. People who inherited Grandpa's stamp album think they're rich, and then learn he only collected worthless packet-grade common stuff.

Re: your comment on page 27 about "mowing the stupid lawn". Use my system. Except for the front walkway and the boulevard, my yard is hidden by high solid-board fences and thick shrubbery. I never water or fertilize the lawn, which helps because Calgary usually has dry summers. Normally I mow the hidden yard about twice a year, and the visible portion (a half-hour's work) about six times.

Calgary's annual readercon When Words Collide was once more a success. Details from my zine OPUNTIA #421, available as a free pdf from either efanazines.com or fanac.org The average age of attendees

was about 30ish, young enough to vitalize the field of writing and reading science fiction, and old enough to ignore the SJW crowd.

Canada legalized marijuana by federal law on October 17, 2018. The following day, while riding the LRT, I saw my first stoner, who pranced down the aisle and then collapsed at the end of the compartment. It was obvious he was high, not drunk, since drunks stumble and are bleary-eyed, while stoners are overactive. While constantly babbling gibberish to himself, he then proceeded to eat a jumbo cup of soft ice cream, several chocolate bars, and was working on a sub sandwich as I got off at my station. I always thought it was a joke about stoners getting the munchies. Brave new world.

///I am a bit surprised by your comment that you downloaded the issue from the efanazines.com website. I send you and the other Canadian readers a PDF file of each issue via email. If you have not been receiving the recent issues you might want to check your spam filters or whatever. I am using the email address optuntia57@hotmail.com. Please let me know if that is not correct.

You are fortunate to live in a city that provides weekly trash pickup as part of their city services. The town where I live does not have that, and likely never will. Instead, each household or business must make an arrangement with one of the many local trash hauling services in the region. As I mentioned in my write-up, these services are not cheap, and none of them offer a monthly pickup service (which would still be more than I would normally use, since it takes me between four and five weeks to fill up a standard garbage bag---unless I'm having a great sales week and have created more than the usual amount of scrap cardboard and paper from packing the books/comics etc to be mailed out to customers).

Instead of paying these very costly fees for my paltry amount of trash, I have resorted to the method(s) I described in the article. As I said, I think the city of Worcester has the very best idea---they sell city trash bags in two separate sizes, and as the bag(s) are filled up they are left curbside for weekly pickup. Large families use lots of bags, people like me use one bag every month or so. I was very happy with that process for about twenty-two years, schlepping my filled bag in to mix with my friend's weekly trash bags, but alas, those days are over.

Not mowing the lawn, or any part of it, is not an option for me, I'm afraid. The town has an ordinance that lawns have to be reasonably neat and manicured, but the rules are never enforced. On the other hand, we have had house burglaries in the area for a number of years. The home next to me was hit a year and a half ago. The thief kicked out the bathroom window and made off with jewelry, money and some war medals the old man had.

Several houses in my general vicinity decided not to bother mowing their lawns at all, at least they did that a few years ago. Having very high grass anywhere on your property seems to be an open invitation to house burglars who assume the family is on vacation. A thief kicked in the back door of a home on the adjacent road that had grass growing right up to the picture window in the front, only to find that this was not a closed or vacationing house at all. An older woman was actually living there, and apparently hated mowing the lawn even more than I do. The would-be thief met her having coffee at the kitchen table. She flung a cup of hot java at him, and he left in a hurry. That very afternoon she was out mowing the lawn.

This state has recently legalized medical marijuana, with shops slowly popping up across the region. Possession of small amounts of pot had already been de-criminalized here as well, and the police normally won't bother anybody who is using the weed in a social, recreational situation. I've never been interested in the stuff myself, at any age. Smoking dope, or tobacco, or anything else is absolutely something I don't want to do.

If the guy you saw zonked out of his mind was on the public transportation system, couldn't the transit police or any other officer have arrested him under the same laws that allow the police to arrest drunks and other people who are visibly intoxicated in public? It seems like a pretty damn dumb thing to board public transportation while wasted on grass, but I suppose stoners are not really noted for being especially bright.///

Jerry Kaufman; jakaufman@aol.com