



WARP 103
Winter 2019

L&Moir

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On the Cover

The Moon and Surf, After the Apocalypse.
An Acrylic painting by LE Moir

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<http://www.monsffa.ca>



MonSFFA CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Except where noted, all MonSFFA meetings are held
SATURDAYS from 1:00 P.M. to 5:00 P.M.
Espresso Hotel, Salle St-François, 1005 Guy Street,
corner René Lévesque.

NB: If you do not find us in St François, please ask at the front desk. We are sometimes moved to other rooms.

Programming subject to change.
[Check our website for latest developments.](#)

SATURDAY, JANUARY 19, 2019

Elections

Not-Balderdash: A Game developed and hosted by Danny Sichel

Programming for 2019: Your newly elected executive
awaits your programming ideas for 2019

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 2019

Starts at Noon

SFI Cinema Matinee presents Time Travel

A Time Traveller's Survival Guide: You find yourself somewhere in the past or the future. What should you do to avoid killing your own grandfather? If you are stuck there, how do you even support yourself? A few tricks to keep you from being burned at the stake or erasing a whole time line.

Presented by Sylvain Ste-Pierre

Debates with various moderators: Teams debate resolutions,
audience picks the winners.

SATURDAY, MARCH 9, 2019

Special Guests: David Shuman and Paul Simard of the RASC present Mars in 3D & lead a PowerPoint presentation and discussion on the colonization of our solar system. Sylvain St-Pierre will follow with a presentation on Space Law.

April 13

May 11

Sunday, June 9th Field Trip to Ecomuseum

July 20

Sunday, August 11th, Picnic in the Park

Sep 14

Oct 26

Nov 9, Book Sale Event

Dec 7, Holiday Feast

Really Fine Print: WARP is published quarterly by the Montreal Science Fiction and Fantasy Association (MonSFFA), a nonprofit organization of fans interested in sharing their love of science fiction and fantasy. The opinions expressed in WARP are those of the individual writers and do not necessarily reflect those of MonSFFA or the editor. To reprint any article, please contact the writer, or ask the editor to pass on your request. The use of copyrighted material is generally discouraged; but sometimes unavoidable; our apologies to the copyright holders, no serious infringement is intended. This is an amateur production, and your tolerance is appreciated by your fans.



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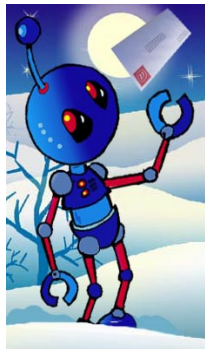
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You've Got Mail!

Dear MonSFFen:

Thanks to all for Warp 102. Here comes a fast letter of comment so that the next issue can come around asap. It's really cold outside, so why not stay in and get some writing done? (Greetings to Lillian Moir...it's been a very long time.)

My loc...Fandom: The Next Generation may be here, and perhaps The Next Generation After

That One, but we must keep in mind that they will find their own interests to be fannish about, and our own interests may fall by the wayside. I see mention of a panel on pulp magazines, and while it is a minor interest of mine, it is good to see that many pulp magazines have been preserved, and I hope someone is making digital copies of them, but even the best paper from that time can't last much longer than it has.

We're looking at finding shows for 2019, and in the next few months, getting lots more jewellery and shirts made. Our next show might be Anime North, if we can get a table in time.

Warp of 1991, and I have a letter in it. Some things don't change. I started writing letters of comment to fanzines in 1982, which means I have been doing this now for 37 years. I hope you've been enjoying the lists of conventions I put together; in some ways, it may be one of the few ways any fannish community

stays together in Toronto.

Regarding the list of conventions, I post it on our website, and an abridged list appears in WARP. I really appreciate all the work you put into this research!

Well done on the art showcase. I'd definitely like to see more. If you can get enough, perhaps an online showcase...

This is an idea of been trying to promote for quite awhile! We certainly have space for it!

Star Trek fans will soon be utterly spoiled for Trek content, if they aren't already. As Discovery continues, there will soon be another series starring Patrick Stewart as Jean-Luc Picard, animated series called Lower Decks (I think), and now comes a spin-off from Discovery on the dark activities of Section 31, starring Michelle Yeoh. Trek has truly become its own industry, its own genre.

Anyway, as I write season 2 of Discovery starts, but we will be out at a local historical society meeting, so our PVR will do the job for us. Take care, all, stay warm!, and see you with the next issue.

Yours, Lloyd Penney.



At this time the club was still using the system of numbering the WARPs by publication month, which is why this one is titled WARP 7.

I love this cover, which is described as “This issue’s whimsical cover, entitled “Come’n’get me” It’s a water colour by semi - pro artist Alain Langlois, who goes by the fannish name, Blackwell. More of his work is displayed on pages 27 and 28.

MonSFFandom reported on the May and June meetings, which were held at the YMCA. Paul Valcour was a guest speaker at the May meeting. He explained World Cons, and how cities bid for the honour of hosting them. Winnipeg was in a race with Louisville, Kentucky, but Paul felt Winnipeg had the edge. (He was right— Winnipeg won the site selection and *ConAdian* was held in that city in 1993)

The June meeting was headlined by Berny Reischl and Lynda Pelley who gave a presentation on their Sea Trek expedition. They had a display of souvenirs and about 2 hours of videotapes! Berny’s review of the cruise appeared in this issue of WARP as well, starting on page 15.

In the previous WARP, Kevin Holden had expressed an unflattering opinion of Lit Snobs. “Literature-only fans should get off their high-horses and realise that books have no monopoly on quality, he wrote. In this issue, Graham Darling responded with his editorial entitled *A Lit Snob Strikes Back*.

I’m a fan who doesn’t own a TV. This “pretentious and pathetic” claim, this “arrogant declaration”, this “proud boast”

(which generally leaks out as part of an apology for not having caught the latest ST:TNG episode) makes me, I suppose, of one those unnamed “lit-snobs” Kevin Holden was slamming in his occasionally ungracious editorial in the last WARP. Though I’ve never believed video chastity is one of the Three Divine Virtues, that editorial led me to reflect that this accident of my existence at least qualifies me to essay an essay on Life Without The Tube.

Graham Darling is now a published author and you can find him on facebook. I enjoyed meeting up with him again at last year’s Ad Astra.

Pages 11 and 12 list some Canadian and the major league American fan clubs, a few of which are still with us.

The book reviews are by Kevin Holden, proving that he does in fact read books. I remember that I read the Hyperion books because he rated them so highly.

At that time, MonSFFA was proud to boast that Baird Searles was one of our members. Baird was the author of *Epic, Films of Science Fiction and Fantasy, A Reader’s Guide to Science Fiction* and the prolific book-reviewer for Isaac Asimov’s *SF Magazine*. He was interviewed by Kevin Holden, and the first part of that interview appears in WARP 16.

The third and final part of Sylvain St-Pierre’s article on costuming follows. Here he gives practical advice such as how to avoid anachronisms such as glasses and hush puppies, how to manage in a second language setting, and so on.

Sensors is the usual collection of rumour and speculation, a lot of it about Maplecon and Star Trek.

You can download WARP 16 from our website:

http://www.monsffa.ca/?page_id=437

UPCOMING CONVENTIONS AND EVENTS With thanks to Lloyd Penny Abridged, *see our website* for more listings.

March 1 – 3, 2019 – Festival Draconis: tabletop roleplaying games, taking place as part of the Festival Montréal Joué 2019, at the Cegep du Vieux Montréal. Admission is free!

<https://www.facebook.com/events/60622236447595/>

March 2-3 – RubikCon 2019, CEGEP de Drummondville, Drummondville, QC. Video gaming, anime, comics.

<http://rubikcon.ca/>

March 15-17, 2019 – Toronto Comic Con Guests include John De Lancie, Ron Perlman, John Rhys www.comicontoronto.com

March 15-17, 2019 – Breakout Toronto 2019, Sheraton Centre, Toronto. Gaming convention. www.breakoutcon.com

March 15-17, 2019 – Furnal Equinox Graduation, Westin Harbour Castle Conference Centre, Toronto. Furry convention www.furnalequinox.com

March 23 & 24, 2019 – Tora-Con 2019, Rochester. Anime convention. www.toracon.org

March 23-24 – Ottawa Geek Market, Nepean.

<http://www.geekmarket.ca>

April 6 & 7, 2019, Montreal Geek-It! Self-described as “ epic convention of gaming, cosplay and other geek community” which expects “3000+ people will come together to celebrate geek culture, with even more online”. Grand Quai of Old Port in Montreal, <http://geekitcon.com/>

April 19-21, 2019 – International Fan Festival Toronto 2019 Anime convention, with comics and gaming.

<https://toronto.ifanfes.com/>

May 3-5, 2019 – Congres Boreal, Sherbrooke, QC.

French-language literary convention. www.congresboreal.ca



Starfleet Treachery

Barbara Silverman

The story so far: Captain Janeway is ordered to stop the impending coalition against Starfleet and the Federation. She ambushed the Maquis, capturing Chakotay. There may be an alliance between the Cardassians and the Dominion; the Federation needs to know if it's an alliance of mutual protection, or aggression. Chakotay may hold some answers, so Admiral Janeway was bringing him to Starfleet HQ for a meeting but Chakotay was beamed out of the shuttle craft. The admiral assigns his daughter to search for the Maquis leader. Immediately on entering the Badlands, Janeway's vessel is detected by Chakotay's ship. Negotiations are interrupted when both are hit by a massive displacement wave. Heroic efforts bring the engines back on line, but crews of both ships are transported to what appears to be a cornfield, but is in fact an immense space station. Declaring a truce in the face of a greater enemy, the two captains consider their options, but then Janeway is transported to a laboratory. Inexplicably returned to their ships, the captains confer and realize they are each missing a crew member. Cavit is increasing belligerent toward Maquis, to the point of becoming a liability to Janeway. The captains transport over to the Array. There they meet with an old man who refuses to help them recover the missing crew. Back on the Enterprise, Janeway is informed that a G-type star system is only two light-years away. It has an M-class planet, and oddly, the Array is aiming pulses of energy straight at it. Janeway leaves Cavit out of the tactical consultation, further infuriating him. Tuvok tells her the missing crew must be dead, but Janeway will not give up. Evans is sent over to assist in repairs on the Starfleet vessel, but Chakotay warns him to be wary of Cavit. The away team assembled to explore the planet includes Jarvis from the Maquis crew, but he clearly hates the Federation. The team engages the Kazon, and meet Kes and Neelex, learning from them that the Array is the Caretaker who has sent Torres and Kim to the planet. The crew members are found in a clinic and taken to the Maquis ship to be treated by the EMH.

CHAPTER 46

Back outside Janeway moved a few feet away from the building. Slowly she drew in several long breaths.

Tuvok walked up beside her. "Captain, are you all right?"

She wondered if the image of Kim and Torres in the Ocampa hospital would ever disappear. "I will be in a moment or two. After I clear my senses of the foul smell and hideous sight we witnessed. How did that medical attendant cope? Surely they are not accustomed to such illness?"

Contemplating Janeway's questions, Tuvok glanced back at the building. "An interesting question. The Ocampa appear to accept and not question, even the most unusual. They have put all their trust in this Caretaker, giving them the ability to deal with such horrific situations."

The captain slowly swept her gaze around the plaza. To her left and on the far side stood rows of two story dwellings. On her right the pathway down which they had come. Before her tables and chairs were scattered around the square. Many now occupied with men and women eating their mid-day meal. Janeway's instincts told her they were a good people, a peaceful people, existing but not living.

Janeway slowly shook her head from side to side. "How? Damn it, how did the Caretaker and the ships which he brought here fit in all this?"

Suddenly she turned to her security chief. "Mr. Tuvok, were you aware that the Maquis have a communication system similar to Starfleet's?"

Tuvok raised an eyebrow. "Yes Captain. This was not known to Starfleet."

"No." She replied.

Tuvok raised both eyebrows.

Accompanied by Kes and Neelix, Daggin joined them. "Captain, I hope Harry and B'Elanna will be all right. I spoke with them several times, they were different from the others. Those that came before spoke strange languages making communication difficult. Those with whom we could talk were not friendly, wanting only to be left alone."

Daggin smiled at the thought of his two new friends. "But not so Harry or B'Elanna. They refused to give up, fighting the illness. During the first couple of days they ventured outside the

clinic, asking question after question. Harry mentioned his home so far away, telling me all about his parents and girlfriend. It is difficult for me to comprehend such things. I know only of our world down here."

The captain studied the two Ocampa, there was something about these people. Their grace, their easy going manner, their compassion. So different from the world she knew.

Janeway smiled warmly. "Daggin, thank you. Not only for helping us but also for all that you did for Harry and B'Elanna. If it's possible, I'll let you know if we're successful in saving their lives."

Daggin nodded. "Thank you, I would like to know. Your home is so far away I will never have the opportunity of seeing them again. Tell B'Elanna and Harry I will never forget the stories they told and I wish them well."

Janeway felt a pang of regret. The captain had known these people for only a short time, but her instincts told her they would be good friends.

Daggin turned to Kes. "What are you going to do? Will you remain here?"

Kes shook her head. "No! I would never be happy, not after seeing the outside world. Neelix has asked me to go with him....which is both frightening and exciting. Where this will lead I have no idea, but good or bad I have to find out."

Daggin embraced his friend. "We will miss you. Perhaps someday you will return to tell us all about your adventures. May all be well with you."

He turned back to Janeway. "Captain, despite the circumstances I'm glad to have had the opportunity of meeting you, Harry, and B'Elanna. Now....if you have no further need I'll return to my work."

The captain gave Daggin a warm, sincere smile. "Of course. Thank you for helping us, I too am glad that we met. We never know what tomorrow might bring, perhaps someday we will meet again."

She was intrigued by the benevolence of the Ocampa. Their world was so small and isolated, yet unafraid, they had opened their hearts to strangers who were in need. Her world could learn



from the Ocampa.

Daggin raised her hand to his shoulder, in the Ocampa gesture of farewell. "I wish you a quick and safe journey."

As Daggin walked away Janeway regarded the courageous young lady standing before her. "Kes, how old are you? You mentioned the life span of the Ocampa is only nine years."

"Yes, that is correct. I'm one year old." Kes replied proudly.

The captain hid her amazement. Only one year! And yet, having lived all of that year in this complex, she fearlessly faced that which was strange and different. The heart and soul of an explorer!

Just then Chakotay returned. The look on his face did nothing to ease the concern Janeway held for Torres and Kim. Accompanied by Tuvok and fearing the worst the captain walked to meet him.

Chakotay's face was grim as he brought the captain up to date. "Not a moment too soon, it's amazing they're still alive. B'Elanna went into cardiac arrest, the doctor managed to revive her but it was close. If it does not happen again....there is a chance. Harry Kim appears a bit stronger, his vitals have been stabilized. The EMH is doing all that he can. However, at this point, he's not sure if they are curable. Tom stayed to help."

Janeway heaved a deep sigh, she could only hope that the doctor would be successful. "We have done all that we can for B'Elanna and Harry, their fate now rests on the shoulders of the doctor. The time has come for us to find a way home."

Having heard Chakotay's report, Neelix, his hand on Kes' arm, walked over. "Captain, now that you have found the missing pair, and they are in the good hands of your doctor, Kes and I must leave."



In a chiding voice Kes turned to him. "Neelix! What is your hurry?"

Slightly exasperated with his young friend, Neelix explained as though talking to a child. "The Kazon! Remember....they want the secret of the tunnels."

Kes laughed fondly at the man who, while she had been a prisoner of the Kazon had not only befriended her, but had also helped to free her. "Neelix.....Neelix, the Kazon can not reach us down here. Besides....Captain Janeway promised to protect us."

Janeway studied the young Ocampa girl. "Kes, we may need your assistance again. Afterwards, I'll make sure that both you and Neelix are safe."

Without hesitation Kes softly replied. "How can I be of help?"

Instead of replying the captain asked a question of her own. "What do you know about the history of your people?"

Kes shrugged her shoulders. "Very little! Against the approval

of the Elders, I was allowed to examine some of the old records. They tried hard to persuade me not to, but I can be very stubborn."

Of this, Janeway had no doubt.

The captain listened carefully as Kes continued. "The archives were difficult to understand, written in a complex language which we have not used for a long, long time. Unfortunately....I know little more than what I have already told you. The chronicles begin when an unknown disaster caused the Warming. If I understood correctly, at that time we were living completely on the surface. It was during this period that the Caretaker first appeared."



Janeway and Chakotay exchanged glances, the pieces falling into place.

Looking around the Maquis commander could see no indication of productive activity. "What do you and the others do down here?"

Kes' voice clearly indicated her disapproval. "Not much. Our lifetime is so short and everything is supplied. Mostly we sit around talking, playing games, or watching those large screens. The Elders are supposed to be in charge, In charge of what? Some of us, like Daggin, have started farming, the fresh fruits and vegetables taste so much better than the foodstuffs provided by the Caretaker. That's what started my curiosity about the surface. That....and something else."

She hesitated, looking around as though not sure if it was safe to continue.

Chakotay gently prompted. "Go on. It's important for us to know as much as possible."

Trying to put her impressions into words Kes thought for a moment. "Based on what I could translate, I believe at one time we were so much more. The old, old records hint at a much more complex society. For example, we are telepathic. If I understood the writings.....when we lived on the surface everybody had better control over their minds, we were capable of moving objects just by thinking. This ability has been lost....and....perhaps something else. I can't be sure, but it appears our life span was much longer than it is now."

With forlorn eyes, unhappy that she had so little information, Kes looked from Janeway to Chakotay. "I'm sorry, that is all I can tell you."

The captain placed her hand on the shoulder of the young Ocampa. "Kes, you have told us more than you realize. Would you and Neelix accompany us back to the ship? I want to discuss something with Chakotay and Tuvok. Afterwards you might be able to do something for us."



Did you know?

All our members are welcome to contribute to our website! We can even set up a page of your own to showcase your art or writing.

Contact <webmaster@monsffa.ca>

Our **Facebook Page** has 191 likes! Share our posts, let's see 200 followers before we publish the next WARP!

Looking for the Pot of Gold at the End of the Worldcon Rainbow

Sylvain St-Pierre

Saints be praised! Less than two hundred days before Worldcon 77...

Preparing for such an event is always hectic, but this one is turning out especially difficult. One would think that it should be easier than for Helsinki; after all, Ireland is closer to us and English is one of the official languages.

But hotels in Dublin are frightfully expensive and there are not that many available, especially since it looks like attendance is going to be huge. Despite accessing the reservation Web page at the very second it opened, I barely managed to secure a room in an acceptable place. This is a problem that will definitely need to be addressed sooner or later.

Add to this the fact that we want to attend TitanCon in Belfast the following week, and that the cursed Brexit might slow things down at the border. We will also need to go through the bother of getting two different currencies.

But I am thankfully retired, with plenty of time for research. Needless to say, this would be an impossible task without the Internet. I remember my very early trips, when you had to find a few brochures for your destination in a travel agency, send a slow mail, wait for a reply, and repeat until everything was eventually finalized. All that is done in seconds now, and you can take a virtual walk down virtual streets to check things out. Still a lot of work, because you have so many more options to choose from.

All those efforts have paid off: airplane, hotels, inter-city transportation and con memberships are either firmly secured or pencilled in. Attractions to visit are carefully listed; there are so many of those that I doubt I will be able to go through my entire bucket list (but hey, I can try). I have reviewed far more restaurants than I'll need, and the menu will not be boring. A few pubs, too (it's Ireland, after all).

Quite a few Canadians are planning to go. I know at least four of them, so we can have our own little Maple Leaf party. I even found the perfect place for that.

There are still a few concerns, of course. The main one is that the number of participants is a lot greater than originally expected by the organizers. The Convention Centre Dublin seemed adequate in 2017, but the attendance at Helsinki demonstrated that the traditionally lower figures of European Worldcons no longer apply. After so many decades, the Old Continent has finally gotten a taste of fandom and is catching up with a vengeance.

Fortunately, the heads up came sufficiently early for corrective measures to be taken. Whether or not they prove sufficient remains to be seen. Members are certainly keeping a close eye on the process.

On the Northern Ireland side, there are some indications that TitanCon, too, is experiencing some growing pains. This regional convention, with a heavy **Game of Thrones** slant, is hosting the roving EuroCon event this year, and the influx from Worldcon visitors is expected to swell membership to the very capacity of the facilities and beyond. As of this writing, their



Website has not been updated in a while and they seem to be having difficulties migrating to a new registration platform.

Still, it's hard to conceive a totally unsalvageable Worldcon or major convention. There may be some inconveniences here and there, long queues and some crowding, but surely there will also be some delicious tidbits that you simply can't experience elsewhere.

As well, there is always mundane Ireland. Both the Republic and Ulster are replete with history and natural wonders, all of them attractive on their own. To name a few, there is The Book of Kells, the Irish countryside, the Giant's Causeway and the Titanic Museum. Lots to see and do.

And still a lot of preparations to take care of.

Worldcon 77, <https://dublin2019.com/>

TitanCon 2019th, <http://www.titancon.com/2019/index.php>

Montréal-Dublin FB Page:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/321309614983543/>



Hugo Retrospective: 2009-2018
Danny Sichel

HISTORICAL NOTE: *I began writing this in 2014, when the Puppies were infesting the Hugos, then lost it to a hard drive crash. I recovered it a few years later, but then all sorts of other things muscled their way onto my schedule. The opening is still valid, though, and now this is the 10th year since I began voting on the Hugos. So why not do an anniversary retrospective!*

Normally, at this point, I'd be composing reviews of the Hugo-nominated material. But this year, due to the "Sad/Rabid Puppies" imbroglios, there's a lot of things which got nominated via organized ballot-stuffing campaigns, and which are... to put it generously... not very good. Even the best is merely adequate. The stated rationales for the Puppy campaign(s) have been wildly inconsistent and self-contradictory; general opinion is that the actual reason is cronyism. However, one of the things that's been said was that nominees in previous years "don't match what people actually like".

To test this, I'm going to do a retrospective of the past several years of nominations, starting in 2009 – the first year I voted in the Hugos. I'm going to look at the lists of nominees, and see which of them I remember, and what I remember about them.

Hugo Retrospective 2009

Novels!

Anthem, by Neal Stephenson. Didn't read this one, because it wasn't included in the voter packet. But I looked at some samples somewhere. It's got something to do with humans watching an alien planet, I think, and a lot to do with the development of science on that planet? Lots of monasteries and neologisms. Maybe?

Graveyard Book, by Neil Gaiman. Picked this one up at a used bookstore before I found out it was in the packet. Basically retells Kipling's "Jungle Book", except with a live boy in a graveyard full of the undead. Not bad, with the usual Gaimanesque creepy legend feeling.

Little Brother, by Cory Doctorow. Don't recall reading this one either; apparently it's got something to do with kids vs Homeland Security (i.e., Big Brother).

Saturn's Children, by Charlie Stross. What happens to the robots after all the humans die? Freya is a sexbot who came off the automatic assembly line 6 months after our species went extinct, and at the beginning of the novel, she's a tour guide for the wonderfully peculiar society that the robots have developed in our absence. I rather liked it.

Zoe's Tale, by John Scalzi. Retelling one of the Old Manverse novels, from the viewpoint of Zoe (the daughter of the protagonist of books 1-3 in that universe). Don't recall much offhand, except that she's followed around by two grotesque alien bodyguards. Did I actually finish reading this?

Novellas!

The Erdmann Nexus, by Nancy Kress. I think I might have started reading this, but I don't recall finishing it. Something to do with group minds forming spontaneously in retirement homes.

The Political Prisoner, by Charles Coleman Finlay. I don't recall reading this. Online summaries indicate a planet that's in the midst of being terraformed, in the distant future, and a political officer who gets caught up in a revolution.

The Tear, by Ian McDonald. No idea. I can barely follow the online summaries. Ptey is from a planet where everyone can take on different 'aspects' (?) at will / if need be, and... he's shown doing so in a wide variety of settings.

True Names, by Cory Doctorow and Benjamin Rosenbaum. I definitely haven't read this story, but the online summaries look intriguing - two ultra-huge computational matrioshka brains are dueling to assimilate all the matter in the universe into their substrates, so that they can simulate everything.

Truth, by Robert Reed. Okay, at this point, I'm wondering – were these simply not in my voter packet? Captured noncitizen, government agent, "enhanced interrogation", claims of time travel. Sounds depressing.

Novelettes!

Alastair Baffle's Emporium of Wonders, by Mike Resnick. I read this – I found a copy of it and reread it, and it's familiar -- but it didn't stick. It's nice enough, though: two guys find the stereotypical Magic Shop as kids, and find it again when they're both withered and old.

Shoggoths in Bloom, by Elizabeth Bear. Oh yes, it's been years since I read this and I still remember pieces of the dialogue. A black university professor in the 1930s goes to Maine to study the coastal Shoggoths, and learns something amazing. And then is faced with a really, really bitter decision. Excellent. A worthy winner.

Pride and Prometheus, by John Kessel. I have no recollection of having read this, but I know it's a Jane Austen / Mary Shelley mashup.

The Ray-Gun: A Love Story, by James Alan Gardner. I'm usually a big JAG fan, but this is ringing no bells. Unless it was something meta? <consults summary> Ah. Yeah, I vaguely remember this, it's a story about stories about ray-guns. Not a big fan in this case.

The Gambler, by Paolo Bacigalupi. It's about a reporter who's trying to work for a media company in a time where social media has a big influence. I had trouble following it, it didn't seem particularly innovative or strange, plus it annoyed

me that Bacigalupi named the evil media conglomerate “Milestone Media”, which is the name of a pre-existing comics company run by some really good people. When you devise an evil company in your story, you should check to make sure that their name isn’t already in use. I mentioned this to Bacigalupi when I saw him at Worldcon, and he shrugged.

Short stories!

Exhalation, by Ted Chiang. The discovery of the Second Law of Thermodynamics, by pneumatic organisms in an entirely mechanical universe. A sealed mechanical universe. Melancholy, difficult to describe. Fascinating imagery, though – I remember, for instance, the researcher managing to extract his own brain and look at it. And that ending scene of everyone immobile.

26 Monkeys, Also the Abyss, by Kij Johnson. Kij Johnson often does really weird stuff. Sometimes it’s a coherent story, sometimes not so much. This one was pleasant enough, but definitely in the ‘not so much’ category. A woman buys a monkey show, with 26 live monkeys, and... they do

Hugo Retrospective 2010!



Not all the details in the retrospectives are necessarily 100% accurate, because the whole point is, what do I remember about them.

Novels!

The Windup Girl, by Paolo Bacigalupi. Set in Thailand, energy-poor future, bioengineered servitor class who are literally windup people. And yes, ‘servitor class’ includes sex slaves, of whom I believe the protagonist is one. I couldn’t finish this, and I remember seeing criticism that if you’re going to try to be as detailed in terms of pseudoscience as Bacigalupi did, you need to do a better job.

The City & the City, by China Mieville. I liked this one so much that I wrote an individual review of it for WARP. In fact, I wrote *two* individual reviews for it, and presented them in a patchwork. Police procedural weird fiction, where the weirdness is entirely in the minds of humans. I still remember my shock at realizing how Breach worked, for instance.

Boneshaker, by Cherie Priest. Couldn’t finish this one either, but more because I just didn’t have time than out of any complaints with the content. Something steampunky, I think, set in the Pacific Northwest... <checks summary> oh, zombies? Yeah, that sounds familiar.

Wake, by Robert Sawyer. An AI spontaneously forms from the Internet, and there’s a blind girl (named “Caitlin”?) involved, in that her vision implant allows it to communicate with her (although initially neither of them has the slightest clue what’s going on). Not bad. I remember Sawyer’s solution to what I personally call “Robinson’s Flaw” (the fact that (as pointed out by Spider Robinson) an AI wouldn’t necessarily have a survival instinct): the Great Firewall of China cuts the webmind into sections, and then once they re-merge, it decides it didn’t like that and would rather avoid repeating the experience.

Palimpsest, by Catherynne M. Valente. Okay, so there’s this other dimension, a magical city, called Palimpsest, and you can

stage shows. Magic tricks. Except there’s real magic involved. Sort of. I remember many of the images, but also that there wasn’t a clear plot.

From Babel’s Fall’n Glory We Fled, by Michael Swanwick. I have no recollection of having read this story. It’s on Clarkesworld, though... <skims> no bells are ringing. Looks moderately interesting, though.

Evil Robot Monkey, by Mary Robinette Kowal. Cyborg chimp in zoo, human-level intelligence, making pottery, pesky children throwing things at him, chimp gets angry. I vaguely recall that this was inspired by the desire to have a pun on “hairy potter” – and that I was initially annoyed by how short it was. <consults free copy on Kowal’s site> Yep, it’s still too short.

Article of Faith, by Mike Resnick. I have no recollection of this story. Hmm. It’s on Baen.com... ah. Robot helps out a minister and then gets religion. No, still don’t remember having read it before, and I’m not terribly impressed by what I see now.

only get into it via dreams. But you can only go into the parts of it that are on your map, but everyone who tries to get there has a different section of the map that’s magically tattooed on their body, and if you have sex with someone who has a section of map on their body, it gets copied onto yours, and and also if you perform new and weird sex acts your map expands. Or... something. I remember that in the opening chapter there was a woman sensuously licking a bee and feeling it sting her tongue. I also remember deciding that I did not want to read more of it, because it made me uncomfortable.

Julian Comstock: A Novel of 22nd-Century America, by Robert Charles Wilson. Dystopian future, I remember censorship and references to modern Internet stuff, possibly eBay, and also garbage. I also remember not liking it enough to push through more than a chapter, because it did nothing for me.

Novellas!

Palimpsest, by Charlie Stross. Yes, there were *two* nominees named ‘Palimpsest’ that year, in different categories. This was such a cool story, combining time travel and deep time. Deep, deep, *deep* time. I remember how when you’re inducted into the Time Patrol one of the first things you have to do is kill your grandfather in his adolescence, so as to become an unperson. And I remember scattering human populations up and down the timestream. And I remember about how, in the long run, they had trouble with losing hydrogen to space because without hydrogen you can’t run the water cycle for your planet’s climate, “so about thirty billion years back, we deuterated the biosphere”. And a continent worth of memory and oh so many amazing notions.

Act One, by Nancy Kress. No recollection of this. Let’s see... <checks summary> Formerly-famous actress and her devoted

manager accidentally get tangled in genengineered bioterrorism while trying for a publicity stunt. Sounds *vaguely* familiar, especially the part where she's in a movie about genengineered babies, but... nothing.

Shambling Towards Hiroshima, by **James Morrow**. This, I remember. I remember this very well. What if, instead of dropping nukes on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the US sent giant radioactive lizards? Except that this is a ludicrous idea if you have no prior exposure, so what if they make a movie of their giant radioactive lizards destroying a city and then show it to Japanese officials? Except that the giant lizards aren't actually *that* cooperative, so they'll have to build a miniaturized city and put a guy in a costume and show him wrecking it. As told by the guy who wore the costume, 40 years later. Amusing, with a sad ending.

Vishnu at the Cat Circus, by **Ian McDonald**. No recollection of this one either, although from the title it obviously takes place in his 'Cyberabad' universe of post-Singularity India. <checks summary – yep>

The God Engines, by **John Scalzi**. The Gods are real. And we've enslaved them. And we use them to run our space empire. I'm remembering various individual scenes right now – this was a hugely, hugely grim story, but such amazing ideas and imagery. Also this is the first time that I remember noticing a trick that Scalzi puts in all his writing (there's always a character of whom a certain thing can be said).

The Women of Nell Gwynne's, by **Kage Baker**. This was one of her "Company" stories, wasn't it? With a sort of 'Charlie's Angels in the 17th Century' feel to it? <checks summary> 19th century, actually, but yeah. Gwynne was 17th century, but this was *an establishment called "Nell Gwynne's"*. Not entirely my thing, but now I'm remembering details from *other* Company stories.

Novelettes!

Overtime, by Charlie Stross. You know his Laundryverse stories? This is the Laundry vs Santa. Lots of time paradoxes. Amusing.

The Island, by Peter Watts. Okay, let's see, there's a giant living island floating in space, and a hyperspace bypass construction crew that needs to route spacecraft through the island (because their post-Singularity bosses are too busy to care about ecological issues), and there's a question of whether the island is sapient... I remember it was somewhat confusing, but I also remember the horror of the ending - "stop stop stop STOP STOP STOP **STOP ST--**". And there was a very irritable uplifted chimp. Not bad.

It Takes Two, by Nicola Griffith. Poignant little story about an executive who agreed to take part in an experiment to see whether she could be chemically induced to fall in love. I liked this a lot. The confusion felt by the executive and her designated partner after the mindwipe... the other executive who says that he's seen love screw up other people's lives so he's had himself immunized against it (and then she tells him the story about the man who knows that his anti-tiger-attack stone works because he's never been attacked by a tiger)... I remember that the bartender wore a cowboy hat... basically this is the sort of story that I feel like digging up and reading again.

Eros, Philia, Agape, by **Rachel Swirsky**. The ancient Greeks had multiple words for different types of love, of which those are three. I remember that there were robots – or, rather, an artificial person – in this one. A woman has a relationship with her ideal man, except he's artificial and she knows it, that's why he's ideal. And, hm. Relationships ending, taking care of children, remaking (or sacrificing!) your own personhood for the sake of someone else... it was sad.

Sinner, Baker, Fabulist, Priest; Red Mask, Black Mask, Gentleman, Beast, by **Eugie Foster**. Weird dystopia in which you wear a different mask every day, and it determines not only your role in society but your actual identity. Also, pheromones and sweat are important – humans are in a sort of anthill community with a Queen. The protagonist – who we don't initially realize is all one protagonist, I think, because he has a new mask each day? – is recruited by the Rebellion. And it doesn't go the way the Rebellion had anticipated. I remember strongly disliking the ending, but after a few years I understood the point: the Rebellion had tried to put a role on him too. And part of giving someone freedom is that sometimes they'll do things you'd rather they didn't.

One of Our Bastards is Missing, by **Paul Cornell**. This was part of Cornell's alternate history in which Europe is still many little kingdoms and technology has become hugely more advanced in certain areas such that they've colonized the solar system – I think, *I think*, the idea was that teleport gates were invented in the 16th century (do I remember that the story of Newton and the apple is about him realizing the existence of wormholes?) – but in other areas they're drastically behind us, such that they have no understanding of relativity (which provides dramatic irony because there's Mysterious Phenomena that *we* understand completely but *they* don't). Anyway, there's espionage – very James Bondy – and dirty tricks and people being forcibly disappeared. And... an aristocrat who doesn't want to marry another aristocrat. I'd be mildly interested to read this one again.

Short Stories!

Bridesicle, by **Will McIntosh**. Very strong memories of this one. Woman is killed in a car accident and wakes up decades later in a 'dating center': dead women in cryosuspension, and men looking for women who will agree to anything. If she can't convince a man to like her within 5 minutes, he'll push a button and she'll go back into suspension. Reviving someone's full body (instead of just their head) is expensive – why would you do that for someone who's not going to agree to anything you want? To make things worse (worse *for her*, I mean), she's gay. Extra complication – there are 'hitchers', personalities of other people, dead people, who you can carry in your head with you so as to not lose them; I remember that this struck me as an unnecessary addition – although having a copy of your mother's personality embedded in your backbrain, where she can constantly criticize all of your life choices, could very plausibly cause a car accident. Also the woman eventually finds out that her girlfriend is trapped in the dating center too. Ending is, surprisingly, not as unrelentingly miserable as it could have been. I feel like reading this one again.

Non-Zero Probabilities, by N.K. Jemisin. I remember that I liked this one, it was about a plague of astronomically improbable events, ultra-weird super-luck and Rube Goldberg events and total fluke chain reactions, etc, in New York. Don't remember much more about it, though.

The Bride of Frankenstein, by Mike Resnick. No idea. Frankenstein's experiments as seen from his wife's perspective? <checks summary> ... huh, that's exactly it, but I'm not sure if I *remembered* that or *inferred* it.

The Moment, by Lawrence M. Schoen. I have a vague notion that this involves a museum on an asteroid, and old Earth TV broadcasts, and... perhaps the moon landing? If you go to the

right place, you can intercept footage of the moon landing? Maybe? <checks summary> Okay, I remember a bit more about this one now. It *is* about the moon landing. And, effectively, a museum. And my use of the word 'footage' is oddly appropriate.

Spar, by Kij Johnson. I remember that I loathed this story. Woman is shipwrecked in space and survives in an escape pod by having pretty much nonstop sex with an alien monstrosity. She isn't enjoying herself, and she's pretty sure it's not enjoying itself either. Also she's constantly flashing back to the man she was with until he was killed in the shipwreck.

Hugo Retrospective 2011!



Novels!

Blackout / All Clear by Connie Willis. Willis's longer works are rarely to my taste; I recall I didn't finish this. It was a two-volume novel in her "semicompetent time-travelling historians get in bad trouble" series, which I've tried to read but bounce off of.

Cryoburn, by Lois McMaster Bujold. I remember this very, very clearly. I was thinking about it the other week, in fact – the long-term social effects of having cryogenic suspension available for the population at large, and control over their estates and votes being handed in proxy to the cryo companies, and then Miles Vorkosigan gets involved because of course he does, and there's all these conflicting plots plus gorgeous themes about life and death and mortality and aging and also there's a genengineered sphinx pet and the last three words of the novel are a total punch in the face.

The Dervish House, by Ian MacDonald. I have no recollection of this. <consults summary> I vaguely recall that the opening chapter didn't induce me to read any more. Aftermath of a terrorist incident in future Istanbul? Bleh.

Feed, by "Mira Grant" (actually Seanan McGuire). Beautiful take on the zombie apocalypse: namely, it's in *our* world. The one where zombie movies have been a thing for decades, and people came up with 'zombie survival plans' as a fun game. Humans are damn adaptable, and now it's thirty years after the zombie apocalypse, and life goes on. Ton of fun ideas in this one, including the detail about how George Romero was considered a saint such that 'George' and 'Georgette' became the world's most popular baby names. When I met Romero at the Montreal Comic Con, I told him about the novel; he was amused and intrigued.

The Hundred Thousand Kingdoms, by N.K. Jemisin. If the gods were real, we would have enslaved them, and then used them to conquer the rest of the world. But once you've got an empire which is literally the entire world, you have to administer it. Centuries later, there's interesting things going on. Still pretty good, although the sequels got a bit confusing.

Novellas!

The Lifecycle of Software Objects, by Ted Chiang. Oh, this was gorgeous. If you want an AI that's equivalent to a 20-year-old human, you'll have to spend 20 years actively training it. Or rather, *raising* it. Experience is algorithmically incompressible.

And if the AI has 20 years of experience, is it really artificial? Very, very strong memories of this, such that I want to dig it up and reread it.

The Lady Who Plucked Red Flowers Beneath the Queen's Window, by Rachel Swirsky. You know the idea about summoning an ancient spirit of vast mystical power? Imagine what it's like to *be* that mystical spirit. You only get to see the world every few decades. And when you start to get angry at people who aren't using magic The Right Way, they realize that you're dangerous and then nobody summons you for ten thousand years. History goes by in a blink. Yeah, I'd like to read this again.

The Maiden Flight of McCauley's Bellerophon, by Elizabeth Hand. It took me a few years to understand the point of this one, which is: what if, as all this weird spooky is-it-SF-or-supernatural stuff is going on, the people in the story watch it, and wonder about it... and then never do anything? They just let themselves be perplexed? The rest of what's going on in the story is melancholy – dying historian, friends who falsify evidence to support her pet theory so as to make her happy, and then *SOMETHING SPARKLY* happens. And... sometimes in life, we don't find out what happened. It annoyed me when I first read it, but now I like it.

The Sultan of the Clouds, by Geoff Landis. No idea, unless this was something about Venus? <checks summary> Yeah, habitable zone in the Venutian atmosphere. No recollection of having read this.

Troika, by Alistair Reynolds. Again, no idea. The summaries I've just looked at indicate that it's about cosmonauts exploring a Big Dumb Object, intermingled with a parallel strand about government oppression, and that evokes some very faint images, but.... nothing.

Novellettes

The Emperor of Mars, by Allan Steele. No idea. Keywords in my head include 'childhood fantasy'. Hm. Okay, free on Steele's site, and it's about a guy stuck on the Mars base who has a mental collapse and turns to antiquated Mars SF for comfort. Sad, vaguely remember having read it, still don't like it.

Eight Miles, by Sean McMullen. I remember seeing the name on the Wikipedia list of Best Novelette nominees, and thinking 'what the hell was that?', and checking on my ballot and seeing that I'd ranked it #1. And I dug through my files until I found the

story again, and I said *oh yes, THAT one!* I remember reading this story at a newsstand, and then buying the issue. I remember nominating the story, and I remember voting for it. I just didn't remember the title. 19th-century balloonist hired to take a mute deformed woman 8 miles in the air for reasons that I'm not going to spoil, although the fact that this was a science fiction story should give you some major hints.

The Leviathan, Whom Thou Hast Made, by Eric James Stone. What if we discover giant alien space whales? What if we set up a diplomatic mission to learn from them? What if one of the embassy staff tries preaching to them? What if one of the giant alien space whales wants to become a Mormon? And... there's some unpleasant detail about sexual politics – something that was common among the space whales, but then the humans showed up and told them it was bad. I remember not being thrilled by this.

Plus or Minus, by James Patrick Kelly. No idea. Summaries indicate that it was a sort of more nuanced version of 'The Cold Equations', with teen angst and human cloning... still nothing except a vague feeling of 'a bunch of people who I'm not interested in'.

The Jaguar House, in Shadow, by Aliette de Bodard. I'm sure that this is alternate history, and that it involves the Aztecs becoming a major technological power. And possibly someone sneaking around. But that's it. It's free on de Bodard's site, and I'm wrong – it's a *resurgent* Aztec technological empire, in what's more or less our future (Americans exist). And there are a lot of names that I got confused about. Didn't like it.

Hort Stories (Nomination Weirdness Meant There Were Only Four this Time)

For Want of a Nail, by Mary Robinette Kowal. Life on a generation ship, a few centuries out, when some of the important things have started to wear out and can't be replaced. Like, you can't salvage all the crucial data from this computer because there's no compatible adapter within a hundred light years. And there's some much more poignant details too. Strong memories of this story, which is ironic given what it's about.

Amaryllis, by Carrie Vaughan. Slice-of-life vignette on a fishing trawler in the years after civilization has... not *collapsed*, but become very different. 'Scarcity' is a word that comes to mind. I remember that this was nicely done, but nothing special.

The Things, by Peter Watts. Essentially fanfic about John W. Campbell's Thing From Another World – how it thinks of us, with our specialized cells and our single-purpose organs, it's like we're walking cancers. It hates and fears us. Spooky, good, but I keep conflating it with Sam J. Miller's "Things with Beards".

Ponies, by Kij Johnson. I remember that I hated this story. It's about childhood cruelty, and ostracism, and harming your pets, and magic talking unicorns who get killed. I remember that when I reviewed it for Warp in 2011, I said "I hate this story, and if you like it I hate you too." And I still do.

From Cathy's Library

A room without books is like a body without a soul.



The Lies of Locke Lamora Scott Lynch



With three books published, I thought I might give this series a try, but after reading the first in the series, I remain undecided about its merits. It's hard to care about a gang of foul-mouthed thugs, for one thing. Their leader,

the POV character, Locke Lamora himself, is by any definition a sociopath, and that's being kind. In fact, there is absolutely no one in this degenerate city anyone sane could find even remotely likeable.

There is a lot of exposition, much of it through flash-backs. Because the book actually begins with a flash-back, the jumps forward and backward were confusing until I got the time line unravelled.

OTOH, I wonder what happens to the survivors of the gang warfare? Is it worth the \$\$ to find out? The basic plot of "Lies" is intriguing, once you scrape off all the dirt.

Since I wrote the above short review for MonSFFA's website, I've read the sequel, **Red Seas under Red Skies**. It's much better,

in my opinion, as it introduces a few characters I can actually like. Locke Lamora starts to develop a conscience of sorts, Jean Tannen falls in love, and there are sailing ships! Pirates! I've ordered the next book in the series.

Spinning Silver Naomi Novik

I was disappointed when Naomi Novik decided to wind down the *Temeraire* series, but then she published **Uprooted**, which blew me away. And now, **Spinning Silver**, is even more marvellous, and unquestionably the best book I've read in a few years.

Miryem's father is so incompetent a money lender, that Miryem has to take over collecting the debts to keep the family from starvation. She proves to be really good at it, and invests funds wisely, hence the title – she claims to spin silver into gold. As in Rumpelstiltskin, a boast overheard by the Stryk king leads to her metaphor being taken quite literally.

But this is just the start of her problems! Like **Uprooted**, it has myth and fairy tales at its core, but it adds many layers to the plot which ultimately involves the Tsar, the king of the very grim Stryk, various planes of existence, and lots of snow and ice.



Arabella of Mars
David Levine



With **Arabella, the Traitor of Mars**, I think David Levine has completed this saga, which could be described as an alternate history of sorts. Or maybe you could call it steam punk, or even a novel of manners.

There are three books in the series: **Arabella of Mars**, **Arabella and the Battle of Venus**, and **Arabella the Traitor of Mars**. Together, they follow the story of Arabella, born on Mars, who is not much interested in the proper dress and manners of the time.

The wonderful sailing ships on the covers are propelled through the inner solar system by solar winds. As in Earth's oceans, there are currents running through the "ether" which exists between the planets.

When we meet Arabella, her mother has decided she should

live on Earth with relatives to learn proper manners because she has been too much in the care of her Martian nanny and picked up bad habits and attitudes. When she learns that her uncle has designs on the family fortune, Arabella runs off to Mars on a sailing ship disguised as a boy. After dealing with that family crisis, and a rebellion on Mars, she then finds out her fiancée (of whom no one approves because he is not WASP, and she will never be accepted in polite society—not that Arabella cares about polite society) has been captured by Napoleon's navy. Off she goes without much thought and even less planning, to rescue him from captivity on Venus. Of course, she winds up a captive herself, but being on Venus means she learns of Napoleon's secret weapons, and eventually becomes the darling of the British Empire after the Battle of Venus. Fame is fleeting—while on Earth, Arabella learns of the Prince Regent's dastardly plan to subjugate Mars and eradicate the Martians and their culture, using an addictive drug and force of arms. They may call her a traitor on Earth, but Arabella is a daughter of Mars first and isn't going to stand for this.

I enjoyed the series. It was fun to see what might happen if the scientific beliefs of that time regarding space, gravity, the planets, and so on were fact. It's well written, in a Jane Austen sort of way, but mostly I read it just for the fun of it. After two books of Locke Lamora's lies, swearing, cheating, and scheming, a book with polite people and words like *d--n* spelt with dashes was a bit of a shock! Not that these well-mannered people were any better intentioned, though.

MY BROKEN-ANKLE DIARY – Miscellaneous Reviews

Keith Braithwaite

While on the job early in December, I slipped on a nasty patch of ice and severely injured my ankle. As I lost my footing, somehow my left leg twisted under me and I felt a jolt of intense pain as muscles and tendons stretched well beyond their design parameters! My lower leg and foot had taken the full weight of my body as I tumbled to the ground. I was sure I had suffered a bad sprain. A visit to the hospital a few hours later revealed that the sprain I anticipated was, rather, a more problematic broken ankle!

I came home that evening in a cast with orders from the doctor to stay off my foot for an initial three weeks. I'd be off work for somewhere in the neighbourhood of eight or ten weeks, possibly longer. My holiday plans were blown to pieces and I had to rely on Amazon to complete my Christmas shopping.

Once the cast came off, I was fitted with an orthopedic boot to protect my ankle while it healed. Pretty much confined to my bed for those first weeks, save a daily few hobbling excursions on crutches to either the bathroom or the living room couch for brief periods, I was happy to eventually gain a little more mobility. I graduated to lumbering about, steadying myself with a cane, as my recuperation progressed. But essentially, excepting the occasional car ride to the bank or grocery store assisted by a family member, I was housebound with little to do but read or watch TV.

So that's what I did:

SFX and SciFiNow Magazines

In the early weeks of my convalescence, my ankle ached constantly, day and night, and such nagging discomfort made it difficult to settle in or focus on anything for very long. As a result, my genre reading in those first weeks was limited to science fiction news and entertainment magazines, notably the broad coverage of the field provided by **SFX** and **SciFiNow**. I had at hand a few 2018 issues of each, which provided me a wealth of material to peruse – film and book reviews, interviews with

novelists, actors, television producers, and other industry professionals, assorted industry news bulletins, and feature pieces on topics from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and the "300 Reasons Sci-Fi Conquered the World" to the making of Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* and the birth of Superman.

As both magazines are British publications, I was not surprised to find comprehensive coverage of UK SF/F – unfailing, there is an item on Doctor Who! – amidst the articles about the latest blockbuster MCU movie or edgy new American sci-fi television series. But in contrast to most entertainment news



magazines with which I am familiar, these two cover rather more than just the realm of film and television. The big sci-fi movies and popular television shows are front and center, naturally, but these magazines delve substantively, too, into the worlds of SF/F publishing, comic books, gaming, toys and collectibles, and fandom, all readily digestible in everything from one-pagers and short sidebars to longer-form feature articles.



Editorialists offer opinion pieces on, for example, the enduring appeal of the mad scientist, or the parallels between the ethos of punk rock and science fiction's New Wave movement of the 1960s.

Columns cover casting news and chronicle the progress of films in development, while reporters offer such oddities as a fond remembrance of London's Scala picturehouse, which was a locus of art house, LGBTQ, and notably, cult/horror cinema from the late-1970s through the early '90s. Fans would convene at this locale to salute such genre curiosities as *Plan 9 From Outer Space*, *Barbarella*, *Eraserhead*, *Evil Dead*, *Videodrome*, and *Akira*. There's always something a little off-beat between the covers of these magazines to pique one's interest.

These are big, glossy, periodicals typically of 100-plus pages, illustrated with flashy headers, colourful graphics, and a lot of photographs. Note, however, that they are somewhat pricey; a single issue will set you back \$13.99 Canadian! But I find them worth the expense, perhaps not on a monthly basis, but easily a few times a year.

Finally, an especially rewarding quality of both of these publications is their regular revisiting of classic and obscure screen offerings from yesteryear, as well as the landmark literary works that helped define and drive forward the genre. Such appreciation for that which came before is a plus for me, and has, on more than one occasion, turned me on to something cool.

The Big Bang Theory

During the Christmas break the Comedy Channel was running a *Big Bang Theory* marathon. This top-rated situation comedy both celebrates and sends up geekiness and nerd culture, and in the process, drops some serious science and engineering on viewers in a not-so-serious way. The series will come to an end soon, and it was fun to revisit some of the show's laugh-out-loud moments, many of them involving eccentric, socially-challenged physicist Sheldon Cooper's interplay with his equally nerdy friends and fellow scientists Leonard, Howard, and Rajesh ("Raj"), as they desperately try to navigate conventional society, represented by attractive blonde neighbour Penny, a waitress/aspiring actress who is drawn into their circle. The show's supporting cast includes a few goofy characters, too, like Penny's squeaky-voiced friend Bernadette (Howard's girlfriend, later wife), neurobiologist Amy Farrah Fowler, Sheldon's girlfriend (later, wife), and the woeful Stuart, proprietor of the

local comic book store.

The show's cast are top-notch comedic actors, adept at both snappy dialogue and physical comedy. Some critics are saying that the show has run its course, the characters having evolved to a point at which their story arcs are about ready to conclude. Perhaps.



The show will have been on the air for 12 seasons when it bows out, and that's a long time for any sit-com. Nevertheless, I think I will sincerely miss the characters when they're gone, and recall with a smile the countless mirthful, as well as heartfelt moments I've enjoyed watching *Big Bang* over the years. And that, I would argue, is what makes a great show.

A few of my favourite scenes and episodes include:

- Sheldon's explanation to Penny as to why he annoyingly insists on reserving exclusively for himself a singular spot on the couch in his and Leonard's apartment. The humour of the moment is cleverly revisited in a later episode, when Penny finds herself earnestly regurgitating Sheldon's logic verbatim to a rival for the boys' affections, much to everyone's surprise and Sheldon's delight.
- The episode in which Sheldon, in no doubt of his intellectual superiority, competes against his friends in Caltech's Annual Physics Bowl. The clumsy pre-competition trash-talk he aims at female scientist Leslie Winkle, who has joined Sheldon's friends in their effort to take him down a peg, is side-splitting stuff.
- The many moments in which Howard's ladies'-man swagger is on display. His ridiculous opening lines and pick-up techniques anything but charming, the man's delusional confidence in what he believes to be his suave manner with the fairer sex, including on a number of occasions, Penny, is just priceless!
- Sheldon's broadening of the rules of the "Rock, Paper, Scissors" game of chance in order to increase the probability of avoiding a tie when the people playing are familiar with each other. He explains the rules of his expanded version, "Rock, Paper, Scissors, Lizard, Spock," to Raj: "Scissors cuts paper, paper covers rock, rock crushes lizard, lizard poisons Spock, Spock smashes scissors, scissors decapitates lizard, lizard eats paper, paper disproves Spock, Spock vaporizes rock, and as it always has, rock crushes scissors." The game is employed again in subsequent episodes. A memorably humorous gag.
- The sequence in which both Penny and Leonard are nervous about their upcoming date and independently seek advice from Sheldon, who is reluctant to become involved but finally, regarding their potential romantic relationship,

brilliantly cites as a parallel the renowned physics experiment commonly referred to as Schrödinger's Cat. Leonard later arrives at Penny's door to pick her up and take her out to dinner but she wants to talk first, concerned that if the date goes badly, her friendship with Leonard might suffer. Nervously, he asks her if she's ever heard of Schrödinger's Cat, to which she replies, "Actually, I've heard far too much about Schrödinger's Cat." He suddenly kisses her, causing her to comment breathlessly, "Alright, the cat's alive. Let's go to dinner." Funny, romantic, and smart.

- Any instance in which "Soft Kitty" is sung!
- The scene in which Leonard and Sheldon speak to each other in Klingon so that Penny and Amy won't understand what they are saying. But the girls quickly respond by switching from English to the secret language Amy had, on another occasion, taught Penny, levelling the playing field. The resulting back-and-forth gibberish, sub-titled in English for the audience's benefit, is a hoot!
- The scene in which Penny and Sheldon exchange Christmas presents. She gives him a napkin from the restaurant at which she works that has been autographed by Leonard Nimoy. Penny explains that the actor had come in to the establishment for a meal. Nimoy, of course, played Star Trek's Mr. Spock, one of Sheldon's heroes. "Sorry the napkin's dirty, he wiped his mouth with it," adds Penny, a morsel of information that utterly floors Sheldon, who realizes that he now possesses the actor's DNA and could potentially clone his own Leonard Nimoy! He gratefully showers Penny with gift baskets and offers her an uncharacteristic and awkward hug by way of thanks – a both hilarious and heart-warming moment.

NOVA

From the fictional physicists of *The Big Bang Theory*, I moved to the story of a couple of real physicists: Albert Einstein and Niels Bohr.



I watched with interest an episode of the excellent PBS science series NOVA, relating the story of Einstein's problems with quantum mechanics, and in particular what came to be termed "quantum entanglement," a concept that especially vexed him.

In the early years of the 20th century, Einstein and the brilliant Danish physicist Bohr were at the forefront of a fuzzy new theory that attempted to understand and explain the nature of reality. Quantum mechanics is the science of the very small, dealing with the behaviour of matter as it interacts with energy at the atomic and sub-atomic levels.

The Quantum Revolution which occurred from 1900 through the mid-1920s in physics promised to fundamentally change the field, so recognized by Einstein in the wake of Max Planck's

work on thermal radiation and his development of Planck's Law, the first quantum theory. Einstein, Bohr, and other scientists like Louis de Broglie, Werner Heisenberg, Max Born, and Erwin Schrödinger all contributed to the development of what we know today as quantum mechanics.

Following 1927's Fifth Solvay Conference on Electrons and Photons in Brussels, attended by 29 of the world's most notable scientists, Bohr, a vocal supporter of the new theory, concluded that the Quantum Revolution was over and that nothing more need be done, but Einstein remained skeptical, arguing that quantum mechanics did not wholly describe physical reality and was, therefore, incomplete. The idea that objects did not exist until observed – the probabilistic underpinnings of quantum theory – was, for Einstein, akin to magic. He was an adherent of the principle of locality, which, in the classical model of physics, states that an object is directly influenced only by its immediate surroundings.

The episode zeroes in on Einstein's difficulties with quantum entanglement, in which pairs of quantum particles share a strange connection, and instantaneously influence each other despite their being separated, even by a great distance. Thus, nature's fundamental building blocks move or change in concert, mirroring each other as if the space between them does not exist. Einstein called this "spooky action at a distance" and sought to prove that entanglement could not be real. He devised a series of thought experiments challenging the quantum-mechanical explanation of things, to which Bohr offered a crushing defense in each instance.

By 1935 Einstein had left Nazi-ruled Germany for America and taken a position at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey. Recruiting physicists Boris Podolsky and Nathan Rosen as his assistants, Einstein finally found what he believed to be a foundation-shaking flaw in quantum mechanics. The three published a paper arguing that the equations of quantum mechanics predicted an impossible connection between particles, noting that according to the math, the observation/measurement of one quantum particle's properties would instantly be echoed in that particle's counterpart, even if that counterpart was exceedingly far away. "For Einstein," articulates the episode's narrator, "it's simply common sense that if objects are separated in space, for one to affect the other, something must travel between them,"

An example is given of a particle at Princeton interacting with another in the Andromeda Galaxy. For a connective signal of some kind to travel from the Princeton particle so very far across the vastness of space to the Andromeda particle to describe the properties of the first to be emulated by the second would take time. Considerable time. And according to Einstein's well-established Theory of Special Relativity, which states that absolutely nothing can exceed the speed of light, it just wasn't possible for such a distance to be bridged in the figurative wink of an eye. And yet, that was exactly what quantum entanglement implied would occur. Something must be missing from the equation, Einstein reasoned, that would explain the perplexing behaviour of these particles, a "deeper physics" as yet unknown. And therefore, quantum mechanics was incomplete.

This Einstein, Podolsky, Rosen Paradox, or EPR, as the argument became known colloquially, has



fascinated generations of physicists through much of the 20th century. Bohr delivered his rebuttal a few months after the EPR paper was published but no one at the time was able to devise an experiment to test whether he or Einstein was right.

Regardless, the mathematics of quantum mechanics allowed the development of the atomic bomb, lasers, transistors, and was at the root of our modern digital revolution. With quantum mechanics behind these technological advances, there seemed little point in carrying on the discussion and interest in EPR within the physics community faded. That is, until the mid-1960s, when the question was taken up anew by scientists like John Bell, John Clauser, Stuart Freedman, and subsequently others, who felt that EPR had never been satisfactorily addressed. Over a number of experiments carried out from the early 1970s to the present day, they came up with the most conclusive answer yet as to whether we live in Einstein's well-ordered universe of space/time, or Bohr's of weird "spooky" connections.

Or perhaps, intriguingly, some mind-blowing, amalgamation of both!

But of particular interest to me was an episode entitled *The Day the Dinosaurs Died*. Documented were the recent discoveries of a team of scientists who drilled deep into the Chicxulub Crater at the tip of Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula, extracting geological samples that yielded data allowing for an accurate reconstruction of the asteroid impact that, 66 million years ago, ended the Age of Dinosaurs.

Struck by an asteroid approximately seven and a half miles across travelling at over 40,000 miles per hour, Earth sustained a wound nearly 20 miles deep that displaced in seconds a quantity of rock comparable to the Himalayas! The point of impact is marked by a scar, the massive Chicxulub Crater, the only super-crater on Earth, measuring 124 miles in diameter.

Within an estimated 11 minutes of the asteroid's impact, tons of vaporized and molten debris is thrown up into the atmosphere and a fireball of some 10,000 degrees Fahrenheit generates a heat/shock wave that races outwards at speeds in excess of that of sound, decimating everything in its path. All animal- and plant-life within 600 miles of ground zero is annihilated!

But how did this admittedly devastating but nevertheless local event wipe out dinosaurs all around the world?

In probably as little as a few hours, this rising plume of super-heated debris envelopes the entire planet, darkening the skies dramatically and causing the atmosphere to heat up like a giant oven, igniting all-consuming global wildfires.

Life-giving sunlight is cut off by smoke-filled skies, preventing the natural process of photosynthesis from occurring, ultimately disrupting ecosystems on both land and sea. Further, amidst the death-dealing debris hurled into the atmosphere is sulfur-containing gypsum, which rains back down to Earth in the form of sulfuric acid, poisoning the oceans for much of the sea-life.

In the end, 75 percent of all life on Earth went extinct because of this cataclysm.

Among the survivors were a variety of small mammals that managed to subsist on insects and seeds, and which, now no longer in competition with the dinosaurs that had dominated for eons, thrived and over time, evolved into larger forms. 10 million

years after the extinction event, some mammals rivaled dinosaurs in size. Eventually, man would arise and come to monopolize the Earth.

But man might never have emerged, intones the narrator as the episode concludes. Had that doomsday rock come down in the mid-Pacific or Atlantic, things might have been very different. In the deeper waters of Earth's oceans, the impact likely would not have resulted in so disastrous an amount of debris being thrown up into the atmosphere as to trigger a global catastrophe.

And so, but for a few seconds go we, for had that asteroid arrived moments earlier, or later, relative to the Earth's rotation, the Age of Dinosaurs might not have ended!

Marvelocity: The Marvel Comics Art of Alex Ross

My library includes a sizeable collection of genre art books. Each November, as the festive season draws near, I take the opportunity to draw the attention of my children to the roof over their heads, the clothes on their backs, and the food on the dinner table, subtly listing for them, at the same time, a number of art books that I have not yet acquired, and that might make, for me, a nice Christmas gift.

This past December 25th, I was elated to find under our tree the new Alex Ross album featuring the acclaimed artist's work for Marvel Comics. I discovered Ross when I picked up the four-issue mini-series *Marvels* (1994) he had co-created with writer Kurt Busiek. I was altogether impressed with the comic, the tale of an everyman living in a world populated by **The Fantastic Four**, **The X-Men**, and other superheroes, and I positively loved the artwork. I had never before seen a comic book in which each interior page, each panel was a beautifully rendered full-on painting! I've been a fan ever since.

Alex Ross is the Norman Rockwell of comic book illustrators, if Rockwell's approach was a mite less folksy and lighthearted, and a bit more dramatic and intense. In his introduction to this book, filmmaker J. J. Abrams, who also compares Ross to Rockwell, notes that comic book art has always been "a wonderful step removed from what's real" permitting "all sorts of wild and wonderful acrobatic feats – physical and narrative – to be performed."



Indeed. Comics so often demand a stylized, and sometimes hyper-stylized approach to art – not a criticism, just an observation – in decades past, for reasons having to do with the technical limitations of printing processes, and more recently, purely for artistic ends.

Ross' work stands apart from this standard in that he imbues his larger-than-life subjects with a realism that brings them squarely into our everyday world. We see in his images of these fantastically god-like, colourfully-costumed super-beings individuals who could really exist, not merely on the paper page,

but in our own actuality. Like Rockwell, Ross is capable of photographic precision -- we can see the seams in his subjects' uniforms, folds in the material, creases in a leather mask or glove, reflections of light on metal armour -- but the painterly skills of both these artists in composing and lighting their pictures, and portraying nuanced stance and expression is what truly captures the very souls of the characters they paint.

Rockwell's small-town Americana not only looks real, but feels emotionally real, too. Ross is equally adroit at bringing to life the comic-book world. He is a superb draughtsman and an architect of dynamic composition and dramatic lighting, often bathing his subjects in bright, colourful light.

This collection of selected works for Marvel is accompanied by numerous thumbnails, preliminary sketches, rough page layouts, design concepts, and delightfully, Ross' childhood drawings of Marvel's best-known heroes. There are even photos of some of the three-dimensional figures of Ironman, The Fantastic Four, and others he fashioned from construction paper, cloth, and coloured tape at age seven or eight! The text informs as to his influences, career, and provides background on the illustrations presented.

Ross works from life, employing artists' models like Frank Kasy, the archetype for his Captain America, and on occasion, his own family members and friends, or he, himself. He relies on photographic reference when developing a piece and steers clear of any kind of digital aid, preferring traditional brush and paint. A section of the book outlines, step by step, his process when creating a painting.

A marvellous collection!

Raise the Titanic

I am something of a Titanic buff, having become captivated by the tale while in high school after reading Walter Lord's book about the doomed luxury liner, *A Night to Remember*. I was pleased, therefore, to have received another cool present this past Christmas, the DVD issue of the 1980 film *Raise the Titanic*, a movie I have not seen since its initial theatrical run.

This is a Cold War-era adventure/thriller based on Clive Cussler's book of the same name, one in his series of Dirk Pitt novels. With nuclear hegemony on the line, the story involves a bold mission to locate the most famous shipwreck in history and raise the hulk in order to recover from its cargo hold a vital MacGuffin loaded aboard the vessel in 1912, destined for America. Recruited to direct the undertaking is former naval officer Dirk Pitt, an expert in underwater operations and marine salvage. The Russians, meanwhile, have taken an interest and deploy surreptitious forces in an attempt to secure the prize for



themselves.

I remember walking out of the theatre at the age of 22 pleased by the movie and feeling that I had been thoroughly entertained. It's possible, however, that my keen interest in all things Titanic may have coloured my opinion. I was curious, now, to know if the movie held up, so I popped the disc into my DVD player.

Raise the Titanic is a mixture of genres -- action, suspense, techno-thriller, and James Bond-like spy movie -- and I found that the film, while not exemplary, did hold up reasonably well. I was entertained again by this quite serviceable adventure yarn seasoned with just a dash of quasi-science fictional near-future flavour.

The production's special effects crew did commendable if not flawless work, succeeding in fairly realistically depicting first, the locating, then raising of the Titanic, climaxing in a majestic shot of the great liner breaking the surface. While the effect is respectable, it's not entirely convincing, the slow-motion camera work betraying the illusion. We know we're looking at a scale model, though quite an impressive one!

That intricately detailed replica was some 55 feet in length -- not so miniature a model! The underwater and ship-raising sequences were executed in a huge water tank overlooking the Mediterranean Sea that was built especially for the production on the island of Malta. Shots of the expedition's deep-sea submersibles first coming upon Titanic's wreckage presciently anticipate the images captured by the Robert Ballard expedition five years after the film's release, when Titanic was found for real.

That development blew the whole premise of the story out of the water! The implication of both book and film was that the ship had remained largely intact when it came to rest on the ocean floor, a conjecture not uncommon at the time. But Ballard found that Titanic had, in fact, broken in two, with the fore and aft sections of the hull separated by a good distance, and the ship's stern crushed almost beyond recognition. Obviously, Titanic could never be refloated as Cussler's story describes.

Raise the Titanic was met with mixed reviews upon its release, slammed as flat and bogged down by unnecessary subplots. Cussler, apparently, hated the movie, unhappy that scriptwriters (well over a dozen reportedly contributed to the screenplay) had jettisoned much of his material, leaving but a shell of his story.

I find these criticisms a tad harsh; the movie really isn't all that bad! But of course, my keen interest in all things Titanic may be colouring my opinion still.

Raise the Titanic recouped less than 20 percent of its exorbitant production costs. The financial bath taken by producer Lew Grade on the picture is said to have dissuaded him from any further involvement in the film industry. Said Grade of the money-losing venture, "It would have been cheaper to lower the Atlantic."



Bird Box

Among the genre offerings that I watched on Netflix was the much-discussed Sandra Bullock vehicle *Bird Box*, billed as a post-apocalyptic horror/thriller.

The film became mired in controversy when it was found to

have used shots of Québec's deadly Lac-Mégantic rail disaster, upsetting townspeople, who asked that the footage be removed. Producers declined to do so. In addition, *Bird Box* spurred an Internet meme in which people, mimicking characters in the movie, blindfolded themselves and attempted to walk around out on the street, or drive a car! Several of these idiots injured themselves in the process, prompting Netflix to issue a statement discouraging participation in the so-called "Bird Box Challenge."

The movie itself opens with a woman in a cabin – Bullock's character – sternly, grimly, threateningly warning two young children in her charge not to remove their blindfolds once outside for any reason, lest they perish! "If you look, you will die," she states harshly. The three are about to attempt a perilous journey downstream a river in a rowboat. Moments later, all of them blindfolded, they make their way stumblingly down to the waiting craft at the water's edge and set off for what radio communications have informed them is sanctuary.

The storyline then jumps back five years earlier as this woman, Malorie, and her visiting sister, Jessica, listen to a television newscast reporting on a widespread and inexplicable outbreak of mass suicide that originated in Romania and has spread across Europe and into parts of Russia. With a routine visit to the hospital on her agenda that day, the pregnant Malorie accepts a ride to her appointment from her sister.

I should warn you, at this juncture, to beware of spoilers ahead.

Her check-up completed, Malorie, fraught with apprehension about becoming a mother, is leaving the hospital when she observes a woman, trance-like, slamming her head violently and repeatedly against a large window as hospital personnel try to intervene. Malorie races outside to join her sister, who had gone ahead to get the car. She jumps into the passenger seat and with alarm in her voice, tells her sister that, "Whatever it is that's happening in Russia, the thing that's making everybody crazy, it's here! It's here now!" Signs of the strange affliction begin to manifest around them and they attempt to drive away from the growing chaos, but on the panic-filled street, Jessica is suddenly overcome by the phenomenon and crashes the car. She and Malorie crawl out of the overturned vehicle and Jessica immediately steps into the path of an oncoming truck, killing herself!

A stunned Malorie staggers to her feet and is swept along by a frightened stampede of people fleeing an ominous unseen presence of some kind. As bedlam explodes on the streets, Malorie is knocked to the ground by the fleeing crowd in front of a house, where a shotgun-wielding husband and his wife stand on the lawn, shocked at the unfolding scene. Spying that Malorie is pregnant, the woman scrambles down the walk to help her up and afford her refuge. Her husband calls after her, "Lydia! What are you doing?" – he wants her to follow him to safety inside the house – "You can't help!" But she continues towards Malorie and rather than running to help his wife, he retreats into the house. Before she can lead Malorie back up the walk, Lydia is overcome by the same suicidal impulses as Jessica and calmly climbs into a smashed car on fire across the street. The wreck explodes, engulfing her in flames.

At that same instant, a man breaks from the crowd and comes to Malorie's aid, instructing her to direct her gaze downward as

he helps her up the walk to the house and pounds on the front door, joined momentarily by a young female police cadet. On the other side of the door, the husband, Douglas, refuses them entrance. But the homeowner overrules him and lets them in. Douglas stares resentfully at Malorie, who he sees as the reason for his wife's demise.

There are a number of other people in the house, who, like Douglas, are stereotypes, the kind of characters we've seen a hundred times before in movies about the shell-shocked survivors of an apocalypse – the compassionate, upstanding, take-charge hero, who forms an attachment to the female lead; his followers; the religious type, for whom the end of the world was foretold; the perpetually cynical pessimist, convinced that all are hopelessly doomed; the optimist, convinced that the authorities will fly to the rescue at any moment; the kindly types, the nervous types; the young, attractive types who form romantic attachments; and the quiet, unobtrusive one, who turns out not to be what he seemed. Douglas, clearly, is the hero's hard-hearted, self-centered, risk-averse counterpart, interested only in his own self-preservation.

Comparing notes, this group of newly-cast-together survivors determine that forces unknown – demons, monsters, let's call them entities – somehow tap into and amplify your greatest fears or sorrows, and drive you to commit suicide. If you don't look at them, you live! The group gets to work immediately covering all the windows in the house to block the view outside, and when venturing outdoors, they must don blindfolds and feel their way around.

Later in the narrative, on a mission to acquire a supply of food, a contingent of the group manage to drive to a nearby supermarket guided only by the car's GPS and proximity alarm system. At the supermarket, a salient bit of information is divulged. Malorie comes upon some caged birds and decides to take them back to the house with her. Abruptly, a supermarket employee under the influence of the entities tries to get at Malorie and the others from behind a loading-dock door, and they notice that the birds begin to go haywire in their cage. Birds, it seems, react when in the presence of the entities, playing the role of the figurative and literal canary in a coalmine.

Two more characters join the group as the story moves along. Olympia is a timid woman who pleads for refuge and is permitted into the house by the others over Douglas' objections. She is also pregnant and about as far along as Malorie; the two of them will end up delivering their babies at the same time. Gary arrives a little later, and is let into the house by a sympathetic Olympia. From Gary we learn that there are people who have not been driven to kill themselves despite exposure to the entities responsible for this global calamity, calling to mind the incident at the supermarket. These people seek to ferret out and convert to the cause, if you will, those who have to date escaped the effects



of the scourge. Douglas doesn't trust him and tries to eject him from the premises at gunpoint but finds himself disarmed and locked in the garage, the others having had just about enough of his behaviour.

But wait a minute; they may as well have all been wearing red shirts!

We know right from the very start that of this group, all but Malorie will either be dead or otherwise out of the picture, so we need not become too attached to any of them! We can further deduce that one of the youngsters in her charge is her own, the other, Olympia's. The narrative makes the five-year jump back and forth a few more times, from the group holed up in house to Malorie in the present with the kids in the boat, in case we haven't yet caught on. This takes some of the air out of the movie's tires!

The only question we may now wonder about is how each will meet their end, and in what order, not that it matters much, or that we really care. And anyway, the order in which they're written out of the proceedings is fairly predictable – nice guys first, assholes next, and the selfless hero last, leaving Malorie and the kids alone to make it all the way to the closing credits.

On the plus side, the concept is a chilling one and the film effectively establishes a suitably disquieting mood. There are a few grisly moments that stay with you and commendably, the "monster" is never seen, leaving the work of horrifying us largely to our own imaginations, almost always the best approach to instilling in an audience true terror. There are no cheap jump-scares to set off heart monitors, with the overall mood of the film instead making for one extended, unnerving experience. The pacing of scenes is praiseworthy, and the acting first-rate. I give the cast props for making the best of their clichéd characters.

It's regrettable that a couple of moments, expressly, seemed a tad too convenient as to feel forced. The first is Malorie's coming across those pet birds in a supermarket – odd place, a grocery store, to find pet birds, it seems to me! The film's title, by the way, refers to Malorie's placing of her early-warning birds in a box for that trip downriver. My second improbable moment is that Malorie and Olympia, just by happenstance, deliver their babies on the very same day – what are the odds? – a plot point that stretched my suspension of disbelief a little too much!

But in the final analysis, the movie falls down largely on the structure of its storyline, which I found telegraphs way too much, diluting much of the tale's suspense.

Titans



Netflix also allowed me to binge the new DC series *Titans*, a gritty adaptation of the Teen Titans comics, circa 1980s.

The pilot episode – there are 11 in this first season, which was filmed in Toronto and Hamilton – sets things up, focusing largely on establishing the

principal characters, notably Dick Grayson, now a police detective in Detroit struggling to shake off his Robin alter ego, and young misfit Rachel Roth (Raven), who exhibits burgeoning supernatural powers, and whose storyline drives the whole season. We are introduced, as well, to an amnesia-stricken Kory Anders (Koriand'r/Starfire), marvellously interpreted by Anna Diop, and Garfield "Gar" Logan (Beast Boy), both of whose stories are further developed in later chapters.

This opening episode didn't actually hook me so much, and I wasn't expecting to continue watching, but my daughter advised that I stick with the show as it gets better. She was right.

That first episode aside, *Titans* scores well right across the board – writing, casting, direction, look, mood, humour, action, soundtrack – and offers fans plenty of great, dramatic comic book moments, like a brief and shadowy appearance by Bruce Wayne and later, his Batman persona, the latter albeit in a fantasy sequence.

During his preoccupations with Rachel, Dick's backstory is explored and we meet some of his superhero friends from the heyday of his crime fighting adventures at Batman's side – Donna Troy (Wonder Girl), Hank Hill (Hawk), and Dawn Granger (Dove) – who are all drawn into the Rachel storyline. There's a real sense of a history behind these characters, of a community of uniquely capable people, something sure to please comics fans.

Jason Todd, Dick's replacement as Robin, makes an appearance, too, as do the members of the Doom Patrol, who will be spun off into their own series, to premiere later this year. A second season of *Titans* has already been okayed, incidentally, not a surprise given the enthusiastic response to the show.

The story tantalizingly develops as the season progresses, each episode answering another question surrounding the mystery of Rachel's origins and the nature of her being while moving the characters closer together, nearer to becoming a team. Much has been made of the adult language and themes that are a part of the mix, and whether such elements belong in a comic book adaptation. They do in this adaptation; they complement the piece, in fact, lending it a greater authenticity. Note that this is no simple live-action version of the animated *Teen Titans* you may remember from your childhood.

Titans, then, was highly entertaining, with each episode leaving me wanting more. I eagerly await season two!

DC Comics Bombshells

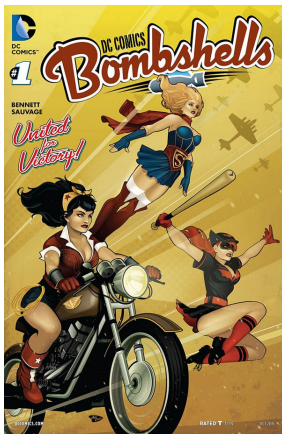


Another DC franchise that I sampled was the World War II-set alternate-history tale *Bombshells*, more specifically, the first six issues of the story's 33-issue print run (2015-2017) as collected in *DC Comics Bombshells*, Volume 1. Portraying some of DC's superheroines, complete with costumes restyled for the 1940s, as enlisting in the war effort was an appealing conceit.

Not a regular reader of superhero comic books, I am insufficiently acquainted with the legion of different characters in DC's stable, or Marvel's, for that matter. I know the long-established major characters well enough, but not so much the second-stringers and more obscure or recent players. And anyway, who can keep up with all the retooling of personnel, retconning of storylines, rejigging of character biographies,

revising of costume designs, and widespread rebooting in general that has taken place over the decades? So, I tend towards one-shots or complete storylines conveniently collected in one or a few volumes.

I had picked up this Bombshells book at a Black Friday sale in November and placed it atop my "To Read" pile. Finding myself, now, with a lot of time on my hands, I decided to crack the spine.



With so many of the nation's men overseas fighting the Axis powers during the Second World War, women were called upon to fill the jobs left vacant by the absence of their brothers, boyfriends, and husbands. As represented by the patriotic image of Rosie the Riveter, an early feminist icon, the ladies donned slacks, rolled up their sleeves, and marched to work in munitions

factories and other vital home-front industries across the land, working as welders, machinists, and so on.

Bombshells writer Marguerite Bennett, whose stated passions include World War II history, was in part inspired by Rosie and her sisters in penning a story that eschews the Batman and Superman we all know in favour of Batwoman and Supergirl. Here, the female superheroes are front and center. Writes Bennett of this reality in her forward, "the superheroines came first" and "no woman was derivative of a male counterpart." Her ladies are well-rounded champions – powerful, bold, smart, beautiful, sassy, sensual, fierce, take-charge individuals, each with her own distinct voice, who have no need of any male approval.

Male approval, however, they may well receive – though perhaps not the kind Bennett might have hoped to engender – for this comic book fiction stems from a series of collectible figurines designed by artist Ant Lucia, whose retro-costume designs for DC's most illustrious superwomen were unquestionably influenced by those of the alluring pin-up girls popular during the war years.

Princess Diana of Themiscyra says as much, perhaps naively, to Steve Trevor in one chapter of the comic, commenting that the new "armour" given her – a period take on Wonder Woman's familiar tight-fitting, low-cut, star-spangled red-white-and-blue get-up – is fashioned after the kind worn by the "Goddesses" painted on the noses of the "steel chariots your warriors fly."

But Bennett's women are quick to dismiss any unwanted, leering attention; Diana again, quoting an old Amazonian saying: "Pigs make as much noise as men."

The story opens in Gotham City, 1940. The Waynes and their young son, Bruce, are strolling towards a movie theatre when a thug steps out of an adjoining alley and pulls a gun on them. The narration is executed in the over-the-top style of an old newsreel, describing a tale of "daring, dauntlessness, and dangerous dames!" Suddenly, a "masked madam" leaps from the shadows above and dispatches the would-be assailant with a baseball bat!

She is the crime-fighting vigilante Batwoman, so named because she dresses in the black and red uniform of the Gotham Knights women's baseball team, and wields as her weapon a bat!

As a consequence of her intervention on this evening, in this chronicle, the Batman with which we are familiar never comes to be. No need of him, in any case; Batwoman's got it covered!

Behind her mask, she is Kate Kane, an adventurer in her younger days who fought in the Spanish Civil War. In addition to playing baseball, she currently runs Kane Enterprises, her father's company, which she successfully steered through the Great Depression, and is romantically involved with police detective Maggie Sawyer. Kate will shortly be recruited for the Bombshells war effort by Commander Amanda Waller and sent to Berlin as a spy.

Eventually the above-mentioned Diana will sign on, too, as will Russian teenager Kortni Duginovna and her adoptive sister, Kara Starikov, respectively Stargirl and Supergirl – in this continuity, that orphaned Kryptonian was an infant girl and landed not in America, but Russia!

Kortni and Kara dream of defending their beloved Motherland flying with the Night Witches, an all-female Soviet squadron of bomber pilots (there actually was such an outfit in World War II, given the nickname *Nachthexen*, or "Night Witches," by the Germans). But when Kara's superpowers are revealed, the military decides to utilize the girls as super-weapons and propaganda vehicles. The sisters resist, however, when ordered to wipe out a gulag filled with Soviet prisoners, and finally defect when their parents are threatened.

Other actors include Diana's best friend, Mera, the Aquawoman; the magician Zatanna, who we meet in Berlin, reluctantly working as a cabaret singer; Countessa Selina Digatti, an Italian noblewoman and master thief also known as "The Catwoman"; Harleen "Harley Quinn" Quinzel, a London-based psychiatric doctor with a few issues of her own; and Pamela "Poison Ivy" Ysley, who operates in occupied France as a smuggler for Catwoman. Reinterpreted for this unique world, such diverse DC names as Hal Jordan, Lex Luthor, Helena "The Huntress" Bertinelli, John Constantine, Big Barda, and Swamp Thing make guest appearances and cameos.

There's an extra layer of fun for the reader in recognizing the clever ways in which all of these Bombshells characters both differ from and mirror their doppelgangers in the mainstream DC universe.

Ant Lucia transposed his statuettes into outstanding pin-up cover art for the series, with Marguerite Sauvage and Laura Braga among the numerous interior artists who lent their talents to the project, as well. Clean, simple lines typify the gloriously expressive portrait and figure drawing, and energetic posing of the lead characters, while the use of colour, whether sunny or dark, vibrant or muted, assigns a certain aesthetic to each.

The opening issues collected here introduce the principal protagonists and enticingly establish the scenario. With more intrigues promised in future installments, I'll definitely be hitting Amazon or my local comic book shop in search of the remaining volumes.

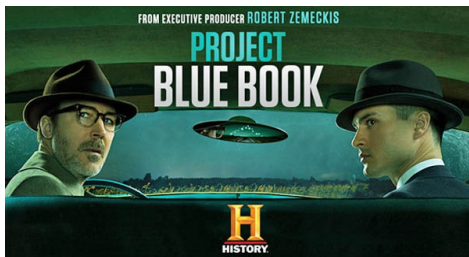
Project Blue Book



I've always enjoyed a good flying saucer movie or TV show, UFOs being a favourite sci-fi construct of mine, made all the more exhilarating by the possibility, however slim, that they may

prove to be real. Wouldn't it be cool if it turned out that there actually is something extraterrestrial behind all those mysterious lights in the sky! It was guaranteed, then, that I'd check out the History Channel's new series dramatizing the U.S. Air Force's official probe into flying saucers.

Project Blue Book is the story of Dr. J. Allen Hynek's involvement in the titular Air Force inquiry. An astrophysicist and university professor, he is recruited by the Air Force to provide scientific insight into their examination of accumulating reports of UFOs in the early 1950s. Starring as Hynek is Aiden Gillen, best known for his turn as Petyr "Littlefinger" Baelish in *Game of Thrones*.



This is a period drama that mixes fact and fiction. Hynek was a real person who served as a scientific advisor not only on the Air Force's preeminent Blue Book investigation of UFOs (1952-1969), but on its two immediate predecessors, the lesser-known Project Grudge (1949-1952) and Project Sign (1947-1949).

Skeptical and dismissive at first, Hynek's thinking gradually turned around, and post-Blue Book, he continued his study of UFOs, founded the Center for UFO Studies (CUFOS), and authored several books on the subject. It was Hynek who developed the familiar "Close Encounter" classification system, and strongly advocated for the serious scientific analysis of UFO cases, the explanation for all of which, he upheld, could not necessarily be attributed to the extraterrestrial hypothesis.

Like the real Dr. Hynek, our fictionalized Dr. Hynek, here, also doubts, at the outset, that people are actually seeing spaceships and alien beings. In the course of his investigations, he comes up with plausible, down-to-earth explanations for sightings and strange occurrences, but uncovers, as well, nagging inconsistencies that don't quite add up. In the interests of thoroughness, he wants to further scrutinize the cases until an answer can be found that adequately explains these discrepancies. He is discouraged, however, from pursuing matters further. His job, delineated for him by his Air Force handler, is to find rational explanations for the fantastical things people have witnessed, therefore demystifying the phenomenon for the public. A few episodes in, he begins to consider that the Air Force may actually know more about UFOs than they are letting on, and that they are actively engaged in a cover-up of the truth.

Here we enter X-Files territory, and indeed, there appear to be shadowy forces at work higher up in the ranks of the military, perhaps some sort of Majestic 12-like deep-state operation. Cryptic "Men in Hats" have furtively inserted themselves into proceedings, watching from a distance, and seemingly spying on Hynek's family. Even rocket scientist Wernher von Braun has been worked into this overarching storyline! A subplot involves a woman's ostensibly random encounter with, and befriending of Hynek's wife, which proves to be no coincidence. Is she a clandestine government operative somehow associated with these Men in Hats? Or is she an enemy agent? And who are the Men in Hats, and what are they up to? Presumably, we'll find out later in

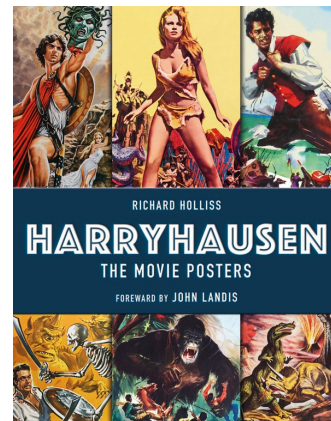
the run.

A statement at the beginning of each episode informs us that the "cases depicted are based on real events." The first instalment, entitled "The Fuller Dogfight," is derived from a 1948 incident well-known within UFOlogy circles dubbed the Gorman Dogfight, in which a North Dakota Air National Guard pilot claims to have engaged in a brief dogfight with a brightly glowing UFO in the night skies over Fargo. Like a similar and short-lived show called Project: U.F.O. (1978-1979), this new series draws upon, as a catalyst for its serialized narrative, actual documented UFO encounters, changing some of the details and taking dramatic license to embellish others.

This is a technically well-made series boasting solid production values, but after viewing only four episodes, I found the machinations at risk of becoming a little too derivative and formulaic. Other shows have tackled this kind of stuff before – notably, The X-Files – and done a better job of it than I've seen so far with *Project Blue Book*. The characters, here, lack dimension, appeal, some beguiling spark that has an audience caring about what happens to them as the story evolves. This series needs to be more than simply a weekly procedural behind which a UFO conspiracy is slowly exposed.

Harryhausen: The Movie Posters

I eagerly pounce on anything I can find having to do with the work of master stop-motion animator and special effects maestro Ray Harryhausen. His influence on the field of SF/F film is unmatched and an inspiration to so many of the genre filmmakers who followed in his footsteps. Before we had banks of computers and armies of CGI artists rendering the weird and wonderful out-of-this-world visuals of today's cinema of the fantastic, such images were created the old fashioned way, with detailed miniatures and painted backdrops and ingenious camera trickery.



Harryhausen was, for some three decades and beyond, far and away Hollywood's foremost master of stop-motion animation. This is the movie magic in which three-dimensional articulated models of mythological creatures, prehistoric dinosaurs, and futuristic spaceships and flying saucers are manipulated, one fractional movement at a time, in a meticulous procedure that gives on film the illusion of movement, of life.

Inspired as a boy by the original *King Kong* (1933), and the works of Kong-visual effects supervisor and stop-motion pioneer Willis O'Brien, his eventual mentor, Harryhausen quickly improved on his knowledge of the craft, honed his skills, and came to surpass his teacher. His body of work is made all the more impressive for his having designed the special effects, fabricated the models and miniature sets, and executed the stop-motion work largely on his own for pretty much his entire career!

But Harryhausen's career and technique have been covered extensively in a number of previously published books. This hefty coffee-table tome focuses on the movie posters commissioned to promote his films, both domestically and in foreign markets.

Gorgeously reproduced, here, on high-quality stock are those many posters, along with a few examples of other print-materials used to publicize Harryhausen's films. Prefacing each chapter's many pages showcasing the attendant promotional artwork, the details of each movie's production and marketing are briefly outlined in an introductory text.

The reader learns, for instance, a number of things about an early hit, *The Beast From 20,000 Fathoms* (1953). The film got its title from a short story, published in the Saturday Evening Post, by science fiction writer Ray Bradbury, a good friend of Harryhausen's – the production was originally to have been called *The Monster From Under the Sea*. To compete with such innovations of the day as widescreen and 3-D projection, Warner Bros. decided to tint sequences of the black-and-white flick and release it in "glorious" sepia-tone! *The Beast From 20,000 Fathoms* is widely considered to be the first of the atomic-age giant monster movies and Japanese director Ishir Honda cites it as inspiration for his *Godzilla*.

Additionally, stop-motion animation was considered too expensive by most of the big movie studios at the time, but Harryhausen was able to convince producers that he could deliver the special effects for this film within budget, set at a mere \$15,000, a paltry sum, even in the early 1950s. For some of the scenes of the titular horror – dubbed the Rhedosaurus – stomping through the canyon-like streets of New York City, Harryhausen saved money by setting up his model on the animation stand and simply placing directly behind it photographic enlargements of several downtown buildings, rather than employing expensive rear-projection film plates as a backdrop.

Finally, an image of the rampaging Rhedosaurus was

reproduced and pasted onto a ten-foot-tall stand-up foyer display equipped with a hidden motor that made the monster's eye move and its tongue flick in and out. This advertising tool was pitched to theatre owners as "the first and only animated front-of-house accessory ever created by a motion picture company." The Associated British Cinema's marketing plan, meanwhile, included a publicity float constructed on a flatbed truck that would drive through city streets trumpeting the film.

Such information is proffered about each film.

In perusing this book, we note that promotional art differed, sometimes markedly, from country to country. For *20 Million Miles to Earth* (1957), e.g., the U.S. banners tease with but a partial view of the movie's Venusian lizard, the Ymir, while British versions showed the behemoth in all of his terrifying majesty. An Italian poster chose to spotlight, instead, the spectacular opening of the film, a rocketship's splash-landing in the Mediterranean Sea upon returning from space, an embryonic Ymir stowed aboard. Another Italian poster, this one for *The 7th Voyage of Sinbad* (1958), shows that film's mythical dragon, cyclops, and roc looming over lead characters Sinbad and Princess Parisa, while a German marquee concentrates on a highlight of the movie, Sinbad's sword fight with a skeleton warrior. The iconic cyclops is featured quite prominently on Japanese placards. Not surprisingly, in most markets, the image of sexy Raquel Welch wearing her famous cave-girl bikini dominated advertisements for *One Million Years, B.C.* (1966)! For *Clash of the Titans* (1981), Harryhausen's final film, MGM launched an elaborate poster campaign that included an eye-catching one-sheet illustrated by celebrated fantasy artists Greg and Tim Hildebrandt. The movie was supported, too, by book and comics tie-ins, and was Harryhausen's only to hatch a series of action figures as part of its publicity strategy.

This one is definitely a must for any Harryhausen fan or admirer of science fiction and fantasy motion picture poster art.

MonSFFA's November to January

Keith Braithwaite

November

MonSFFA's final meeting of the year, on November 17, was



given over to the club's annual fund-raising Sci-Fi Book Sale, 2018's edition having been dubbed *The Super Sci-Fi Book Sale Breathes Anew!*

Patrons benefited from astounding bargains on a wide variety of SF/F hardcovers and paperbacks, toting home grocery bags-full of books after perusing the many sales tables displaying the club's considerable stock!

This sale proved one of our most successful ever, adding a sizable sack of lucre to the club's coffers: \$800!

We thank the many volunteers who helped set up and take down the sale, and those club members and friends who very

kindly donated books to the cause.

All funds raised are to be directed to MonSFFA's operating budget.

Editor's note: Sylvain St-Pierre kept careful notes, enabling us to determine where we most profited. You can download the spreadsheet from our website

<http://www.monsffa.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/BookSales.pdf>

The success of this book sale will help us enormously in coping with the raise in room rental costs.

More photos of our volunteers sorting and setting out the books can be viewed on our website:

<http://www.monsffa.ca/?p=7733>



December

A devastating fire having shuttered our usual Irish Embassy Christmas-Party locale last year, some two dozen club members and guests gathered a few blocks east at the downtown Baton Rouge Steakhouse & Bar on de la Montagne for MonSFFA's 2018 Christmas get-together. The date was Saturday, December 8 and this was a lunchtime rather than our traditional evening holiday celebration.

Folk enjoyed a fine meal and seasonal cheer in the glow of the club's portable, fully-illuminated and decorated Christmas tree, under which were arrayed a variety of gift items/raffle prizes, beautifully wrapped for the occasion by club VP **Keith Braithwaite**, who unfortunately was absent the festivities due to a broken foot sustained just a week earlier! President **Cathy Palmer-Lister** had visited Keith at home the day before to pick up the gifts and tree for our party and reported on his condition to the gathered MonSFFen, who toasted their VP and expressed wishes for his speedy recovery.

The traditional Volunteer-Members' Rewards Raffle was drawn, gifting a representative few club members with token thank-you gifts for having helped to organize and run the club's activities throughout the calendar year. A special prize was awarded **Leslie Perryon** for having renewed his membership early in 2018! Treasurer **Sylvain St-Pierre** oversaw the club's



annual Christmas Raffle, which raised \$116 for the club —

congratulations to all the winners and our thanks to all those who donated gifts/raffle prizes to the cause! A nod, as well, to **Josée Bellemare**, who coordinated our Rewards Raffle, and another to Cathy, who made all the arrangements with the restaurant.

A merry, festive time was had by all!

The theme for the party was “glitter”—so we came wearing our most glittery duds. If you look closely, you will see a Christmas tree under all the presents!

January



MonSFFA kicked off 2019 with a January 19 gathering, at which we held our annual elections of the club's Executive Committee members (last year's Executive was returned to office for another term—congratulations to **Cathy Palmer-Lister**, president; **Keith Braithwaite**, vice-president; and **Sylvain St-Pierre**, treasurer).

We moved, then, directly to an enjoyable diversion somewhat familiar to anyone who has played the parlour bluffing game Balderdash. We're tentatively calling it Sci-Fi Balderdash, but it's truthfully only very *slightly* kind of like Balderdash, but not really! It's just that we haven't come up with a name for it yet!

Players were handed a game sheet upon which each was to write a two- or three-sentence invented synopsis based solely on the title—given to everyone by game-master **Danny Sichel**—of an *actual* published science fiction or fantasy story. The submissions were then collected and read aloud in random order, along with an additional summary, *the real one!* Players each hazarded a guess as to which was the genuine article. Points were awarded for correct guesses, and to any player whose outline managed to fool others into believing that it was the real synopsis.

We managed a dozen rounds of the game—a fun way to start the year!

After the mid-meeting break, we got down to the business of planning our 2019 meeting and events programming. We finalized the selection of our preferred dates, welcomed suggestions for presentations/panels and workshops, kicked all of

these ideas around, melded some notions with others, slotted some into the schedule grid, discussed possible group projects and field trips, and eventually got things down to what we believe will be a most interesting, entertaining, and fun calendar of activities!

We also began to assign presenters and panellists to programming items and by the end of the afternoon, we had much of the year planned, with only a few vacant slots left to be filled. The folk who went out for dinner together post-meeting honed the agenda further over a hearty meal and drinks.

Among the presentations/panels our members can look forward to in the coming months are an appreciation of two of the greatest SF/F anthology series ever broadcast on TV, the original *Twilight Zone* and *Outer Limits*; a very cool 3-D slideshow on the exploration of Mars—the special glasses will be supplied—and discussion of the technological challenges faced by man regarding the colonization of this solar system, as well as the ethics of such a venture; a primer and demonstration, for hobbyists, of home 3-D printer systems; and this summer, a retrospective of the historic Apollo 11 moonshot that we have scheduled to coincide exactly with the 50th anniversary of the monumental event! All of this and more is in the pipeline for MonSFFen in 2019!

We thank **Danny Sichel** for running our game this afternoon, as well as everyone who pitched in to work on our 2019 programming/events schedule. We acknowledge, too, those club members who helped to plan and run this meeting, and clean up afterwards.

Did you find the MonSFFA Rocket? (The one in the logo doesn't count.)

Advice from Dr. XwahUU, the Galaxy's Best Advice Psychologist *

Dear Dr. XwahUU,

I am the son of an author who was something of a one-hit wonder. An obscure but strangely powerful company has allowed some kid named Stefan to make the book into a game. Do I have rights to royalties? Another problem is that the kid seems to be trapped in some sort of time loop, so different versions of the game keep coming out and some are terrible. Is there anything I can do about the stress this is causing?

Sincerely,
Junior

Dear Junior,

You sound like you might be in need of an attorney, not strictly a therapist. With the time loop question, jurisdiction may get sticky. As for the stress, have you considered meditation or pursuing a spiritual life? I understand Pax is taking new followers.

Dear Dr. XwahUU,

I work on a spaceship. In my workplace, I have fallen for a gelatinous being. Are workplace romances between species ever a good idea? Also, he seems to have commitment issues.

With regards,
Dr. F.

Dear Dr. F.,

From a strictly romantic perspective, you shouldn't have a problem—most aliens in the workplace today are strangely two-dimensional (being, for example, flirty guys with some physical attributes that make them simply the subject of fun rather than actual colleagues in their own right). Your romance will no doubt be simply a plot point for the workplace, but hey, there are worse things.

Dear Dr. XwahUU,

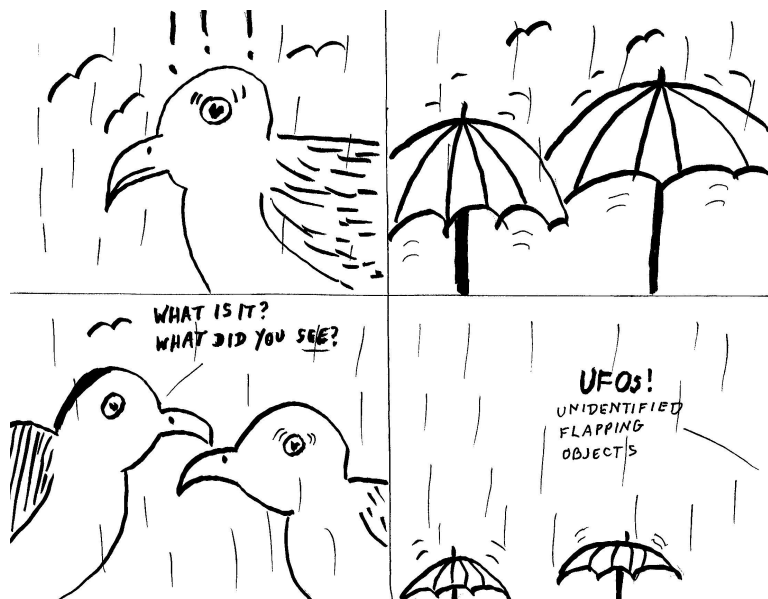
What advice could you offer to someone who has been trying to be seen as "masculine" and has pitched his voice lower and lower, until it's a growl? It's getting kind of silly over the years. Asking for a friend.

D. Winchester

Dear D.,

Are you in the monster-hunting business, by any chance? I ask because it seems to afflict many in that genre (see: Batman). On a more serious note, please feel free to join us in the twenty-first century anytime. It's a wonderful place where the dead stay dead, women are just as capable as men at kicking butt, and gender norms aren't so strict you can't be yourself.

**Please note Dr. XwahUU is only licensed to practice in Cosmos Redshift 7. All opinions shared are for entertainment purposes and should not be used in lieu of seeking advice from a local professional.*



Inspired by a conversation with Danny Sichel at the 2018 MonSFFA barbecue



(In case you missed it, and didn't get the joke.)