

ALEXIAD

(ΑΛΞΙΑΣ)

\$2.00

I looked over the list of 100 influential books and blinked. Surely I did not see those two titles. I looked again and yes, I had indeed seen *Twilight* and *Fifty Shades of Grey* on the list of influential books. I shook my head. The reason for including them was number of copies sold. I did not understand why there were no Louis L'Amour books on the list. In my opinion, his *Last of the Breed* is a very good book.

Twilight and *Fifty Shades of Grey* are nothing but fad books and atrocious fad books at that. I would rather sit and stare into space than spend time with either.

— Lisa

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The 94th Running of the Hambletonian (1st leg of the Trotting Triple Crown) was **August 3, 2019** at Meadowlands Racetrack in East Rutherford, New Jersey. Forbidden Trade won.

The 65th Running of the Yonkers Trot (2nd leg of the Trotting Triple Crown) is **August 31, 2019** at Yonkers Raceway in Yonkers, New York.

The 126th Running of the Kentucky Futurity (3rd leg of the Trotting Triple Crown) is **October 6, 2019** at the Red Mile in Lexington, Kentucky.

The 65th Running of the Cane Pace (1st leg of the Pacing Triple Crown) was **August 3, 2019** at Meadowlands Racetrack in East Rutherford, New Jersey. Captain Crunch won.

The 64th Running of the Messenger Stakes (2nd leg of the Pacing Triple Crown) is **August 31, 2019** at Yonkers Raceway in Yonkers, New York.

The 74th Running of the Little Brown Jug (3rd leg of the Pacing Triple Crown) is **September 19, 2019** at the Delaware County Fair in Delaware, Ohio.

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Deadline is **October 1, 2019**

Reviewer's Notes

One of the problems with being against conspiracy theories is that such theories are "compleat". Which is to say, that any evidence against the theory is forged, anyone who points out the impossibility of the theory is a shill, and the theory-believers are skeptics who see through the official lies.

So what? The worst that has happened is that Buzz Aldrin punched out a man on the streets of Nashville. It doesn't affect anyone.

No, it poisons the public debate. It leads to compleat counter narratives; the encouragement of the belief that everything is a lie. And so we get things like anti-vaxxers (to bring up something I've mentioned before); they believe that all the evidence is forged, all the spokesmen are shills. The theory shuts out the world, and so not only children but even adults suffer from *preventable* diseases such as measles. Or polio. One of our recipients could speak to that.

When the Internet was first stirring, the hopeful spoke of a world where truth would prevail, because everyone would have every access to all the information. I recall an article in *Analog* where the author said that lies could not stand, because the liars would have to provide hypertext to other sources, which would out the lies.

Instead the hypertext leads only to confirmation, and the web draws up into little bubbles of agreement. Until they run into disagreement, when things turn violent.

Now that old age and debility are creeping up on me, I am being offered help. I get tens of calls a day from vendors wanting me to buy their Medicare extension insurance. *I have it and it is paid for.* This does not stop them. It's as bad as extended auto warranties (and I get those offered too).

— Joe

RANDOM JOTTINGS

by Joe



Buy my books. (All available on Amazon.com for quite reasonable prices, except the Hugo-nominated *Heinlein's Children*, which can be bought from NESFA for a reasonable price.)

https://www.amazon.com/-/e/B01BMIC4MU?ref=pe_1724030_132998070

— Advt.

Also available for Kindle from NESFA Press is *The Immortal Storm: A History of Science Fiction Fandom* (1954), Sam Moskowitz's tale of the origins and tumultuous youth of fandom (albeit by one who was involved in some of the nastier controversies). Price \$5.95.

<https://www.nesfa.org/book/the-immortal-storm/>

As you know, Bob, I am less than convinced of the continued utility of the Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund. Nevertheless, the supra-administrators, running the web page, are deserving of merit and admiration for their making available many significant works of science fiction history and criticism.

I've mentioned their publication of Francis Towner Laney's *Ah! Sweet Idiocy!* (1948). Now, among the many other works available there is a single file containing the entire run of Charles Platt's bitter description of the failings of the SF he knew, *The Patchin Review* (1981-1985). There you will see many things such as the genesis of *The Last Deadloss Visions*; Norman Spinrad's lament for the lack of a real feminist science fiction; John Shirley's and Harlan Ellison's disagreement; all too cutting book reviews; and other striking and libellous comments.

<https://taff.org.uk/ebooks.php>

Our heartfelt congratulations to **Christopher J. Garcia**, Editor Guest of Honor, and **Steve & Sue Francis**, Fan Guests of Honor, at the 2020 NASFiC in Columbus. The con will be **August 20-23, 2020**.

Old news: events in the Weddell Sea, including bad weather, forced an end to the search for the wreck of the *Endurance*. In February of the Wedell Sea Expedition 2019 launched an AUV (Autonomous Underwater Vehicle; presumably not named *Boaty McBoatface*) from their ship, the South African icebreaker the *SA Agulhas II*, to search at the position of the sinking. After thirty hours, the AUV was being recovered when the communications broke down.

The principal aim of the expedition, however, was the investigation of the A68 iceberg, the 5800 square kilometer berg that broke off from the Larsen Ice Shelf on July 12, 2017. The berg is presently drifting north and is off the tip of the Antarctic Peninsula. Sea currents are predicted to carry it in the direction of South Georgia.

A Modest Proposal: With all the minor pros with blogs getting themselves nominated for the Best Fan Writer Hugo, perhaps it's time to revive the sixties proposal to change the name of the awards for fan categories to "Pong". Somehow having John Scalzi plaster "**Pong Award Winner!**" across his covers wouldn't have the same impression.

I mean, consider the people who are competing against James Nicoll. When I asked if any of our readers had ever heard of any of them, no one answered.

MONARCHICAL NEWS

- Q. What does Queen Elizabeth have in common with her new Prime Minister?
A. They are both descended from George II.

Now here's BoJo's:

George II - Frederick Louis Prince of Wales
- Augusta of Wales - Auguste Caroline of Brunswick - Paul Heinrich of Württemberg - Caroline Adelaide von Rottemberg - Hubert von Pfeffel - Marie Louise von Pfeffel - Yvonne Williams - Osman Kemal/Wilfred Johnson - Stanley Johnson - Alexander Boris de Pfeffel Johnson

(Not that this is anything new. She was also related to Churchill, Eden, Home, Blair, and Cameron.)

Prince Bismarck has died. That is, **Ferdinand and Fürst von Bismarck**, great-grandson of the Chancellor. The title and headship of the family passed to his oldest son Carl-Eduard Fürst von Bismarck.

For all those fans of Scott Westerfield's *Leviathan*, *Behemoth*, and *Goliath*: **Georg Friedrich Maximilian Jaroslav Petrus Canisius Markus Hubertus, Duke of Hohenberg**, grandson of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and Countess Sophie, Duchess of Hohenberg, died **July 25, 2019**. Born **April 28, 1929**, he served as an ambassador of the Austrian Republic (where, because of the ban on titles, he was

referred to as Georg Hohenberg), and became head of the family upon the death of his older brother on August 16, 1977 (and therefore in Westerfield's world Emperor and King). He was succeeded in the title by his oldest son Prince Nikolaus.

A FAMILY RESEMBLANCE

Commentary by Joseph T Major on **DEAD BY SUNSET:**

Perfect Husband, Perfect Killer?

by Ann Rule (1995) and

A CHECKLIST FOR MURDER:

The True Story of Robert John Peernock
by Anthony Flacco (1995, 2015)

"There is a strong family resemblance about misdeeds, and if you have all the details of a thousand at your finger ends, it is odd if you can't unravel the thousand and first."

— A. Conan Doyle, *A Study In Scarlet*

On September 21, 1986, a Toyota van was found straddling Sunset Highway (US Route 26) in Beaverton, Oregon. In it was Cheryl Keeton, beaten to death. Fortunately, no one had hit the van, which was blocking the fast lane of the road; if someone had, the van would have likely burst into flames, leaving Cheryl unrecognizably burned.

On July 22, 1987, a wrecked Cadillac was found by Old San Fernando Road in Sun Valley, California. In it were Claire Peernock and her daughter Natasha. Both had been badly beaten; Claire was dead and Natasha badly injured. But there was a striking rod with a burning wick wrapped around it on the undercarriage of the car; if the car had hit something directly the rod would have punctured the gas tank and the two women would have been dead and unrecognizably burned.

Cheryl Keeton was a well-to-do lawyer in Seattle when she got married. Her husband had been passionately attentive, he had charmed her, and soon they were husband and wife. They moved to Houston for one of his deals, but the city didn't agree with her. So she took their two boys and moved back to Seattle, where she soon found work again. As so often and sadly happens, joy becomes strife, and Cheryl was filing for divorce when her life ended.

Claire Laurence Peernock's marriage had begun well enough; her husband had been passionately attentive, he had charmed her, and soon they were husband and wife. They had two daughters. As so often and sadly happens, joy becomes strife, and Claire was filing for divorce when her life ended.

So much for similarities. What was involved?

Cheryl Keeton was married to a go-getting entrepreneur named Bradly Keith Cunningham. Brad, as he was known, was enthusiastically pushing himself into fortune. He had traded off his ancestral connections to get into college, then got a job and left early, and went on

wheeling and dealing. The deal that went wrong was the one in Houston, where he managed to start a big development just before oil prices crashed. But he rebounded and got a job in a bank, attracting deals.

Brad had always loved the high life, and while Cheryl had to be careful with her finances, he spent her money exuberantly on cars and other such tokens of opulence. There was, however, a darkness about all this.

He had been married three times before he married Cheryl, and the first and third marriages had followed a familiar pattern; he had been loving, attentive, passionate, and kind during the courtship, but once he was married, he became emotionally distant and abusive. (The second marriage was on a quick rebound from the first.) At the time of Cheryl's death, he was going through the preliminaries of courtship with yet another woman.

It seemed, though, that Brad had learned from his father that women were untrustworthy and to be abused. Family life shapes a personality so.

Robert John Peernock, Claire's husband and Natasha's father, would seem to be a model for the American Dream. With only a grade-school education, he had made himself a first-class technical expert in information systems, computer technology, and pyrotechnics. But then his life took a turn.

He had observed that there was corruption in the California Department of Water Resources, and when he blew the whistle, he was punished. This began a string of whistleblower lawsuits, which further instilled in him the belief that there was a vast conspiracy in the management to rob the California taxpayer. Being as quick-minded and observant as he was, he got an understanding of the relevant law and filed many of his lawsuits as his own lawyer.

His searching for proofs of a conspiracy became obsessive. Claire was leaving him because life with him was unbearable. He was becoming abusive and hostile, when he was not obsessing about his struggle against the conspiracy so immense.

After Cheryl's death, Brad went on as before. He married the woman he had been seeing and proceeded to set himself up on her income (she was a doctor) while pursuing his lawsuit. Eventually she could no longer bear the burden and filed for divorce.

Brad was already dating the children's nanny. Once he was free he married her and then began an even more unusual method of living off his spouse; he tried to get her to become a stripper.

All the while, the investigation into Cheryl's death languished. The authorities suspected Brad but had no evidence tying him to the assault; no bloodstained clothes or weapon, or any other forensic evidence, only a not-unreasonable period of time without anyone seeing him.

After Claire's death, Robert made some quick moves. He got his hands on all the cash he could, went to Las Vegas, and had a good time while getting and recovering from plastic surgery. Once he could do so, he went back to California to collect back rent on his rental properties.

But the police were watching his injured daughter, his latest girlfriend, and his house. Peernock was arrested on September 4, 1987, for the murder and assault.

In 1990 Cheryl's business associates, tired of the waiting, filed a wrongful-death suit against Brad. He wriggled out of having to give a deposition by various means, and when the trial started in May of 1991 he didn't bother to show up. The jury found him liable for \$81.7 million, and several of them thought he should be indicted for murder.

Meanwhile, Brad and his latest wife moved around, even including going to Canada. Finally, he went back to Washington — and in March of 1993, he was indicted by a grand jury for Cheryl's murder and arrested.

The court system moved quickly and by December of 1987 Peernock was having his initial hearing — somewhat complicated by his trying to hire someone to kill his injured daughter and his late wife's lawyer. The lawyer was having to deal with huge legal papers from Peernock's lawyers — until he fired them, for being in on the conspiracy against him.

This continued for a while. Peernock had to be removed from one hearing for ranting about the conspiracy. He kept on filing to have his funds released so he could pay for lawyers. Meanwhile, his injured daughter's life was troubled. And he kept on firing lawyers for being conspirators against him — he went through six of them.

The case finally went to trial in the summer of 1991. Aside from the parade of defense lawyers, there had been two judges and two prosecutors. The last prosecutor was reviewing the evidence and found something. It was a heavily abbreviated list of things Peernock had written up, but it seemed to be a list of things that had been involved in Claire Peernock's murder. Careless.

Brad went through various maneuvers, trying to get out on bail (which got turned down since he was an advertisement for flight to avoid prosecution), firing lawyers, and telling lies to his three sons. The case finally got to trial only eight months late, in August of 1994. Then things started getting difficult.

Peernock's trial began with him trying to fire his sixth lawyer, for (what else?) being bribed by the conspirators to throw the case. The prosecution presented a very tough case, with such incriminating matters as the marks on the striker bar from beneath the car being from the vise in Peernock's house, and then there was the list of things to do. His injured daughter

testified and Peernock's lawyer could not make an impression on her.

Then the defence got its turn. Peernock's lawyer called two witnesses, then was forced to do something decidedly disadvantageous to the case — put the defendant on the stand.

He didn't do too badly until the cross-examination began. The prosecutor had been given an opening and he jumped for it, letting Peernock go into a horrifying performance. He claimed all the prosecution witnesses were lying, that he had been abused by the police, and then he launched into his explanation of the conspiracy. Finally, after an explosive rant where Peernock screamed that his lawyer was working for the court, not him, the judge ended his testimony and the defense case. (In fact, while Peernock's lawyer was defending him, he was having to deal with his own defense against a charge of legal malpractice — brought by Peernock.)

The jury took six hours to convict him of everything. The sentencing hearing was even worse, with the judge finally getting tired of Peernock's disruptions and having him gagged with duct tape. Having taken the prescribed engineering solution for having something that is moving and not supposed to be moving, he proceeded to sentence Peernock to twenty-two years and four months for soliciting the murder of his daughter and his late wife's lawyer, life for actually attempting to kill his daughter, and life for killing his wife. Consecutively. (Cue Richard Pryor: "How in the f— do you do triple life!? I mean, I mean, if he die, and come back — he got to go the penitentiary!")



Brad Cunningham was his own defense lawyer. You know how that goes. He had filed lawsuits against the previous judge and the jail, too. When he objected during the prosecution's opening statement, the trial started going downhill. His defense seemed to be that he was a very important businessman who got blamed for everything and his late wife had been promiscuous. That crassness and his incompetence in managing his own defense made the prosecution's case easy. Oh yes, and they had DNA evidence.

The jury was out for a little over five hours, and found Brad guilty. He was sentenced to life in prison, with parole possible after twenty-two years. (On appeal it became life without parole; big success there.) He took the sentence calmly.

Perhaps not surprisingly, both these men have maintained their innocence. Brad Cunningham wrote a book denouncing Ann Rule's lies about him, Robert Peernock has a website, filled with his allegations about a conspiracy.

Peernock has a pension that apparently can't be confiscated. It is \$800 a month, which will buy a *lot* of cigarettes. He can hire investigators; one, for example, got a list of all the home addresses and telephone numbers of the jury members. And he has to pay for that website somehow. He had been sent to a maximum-security prison but soon managed to get transferred to a less restrictive one.

What sorts of people are these? Brad Cunningham comes across as a narcissist; using women to get things he wants with no concern for their fate. Robert Peernock is a type that has painfully become more common of late, the conspiracy theorist that acts out his beliefs. Does either of them think himself truly guilty? Certainly not Peernock.

As far as is known, they had no contact with each other, yet they chose to murder their spouses in the same method with the same cover-up ploy. Cunningham further set things up so that some innocent person might be injured or killed, dying in the car that hit the Toyota van, which is in its own way worse.

"Thank God . . . we got . . . penitentiaries!"

— Richard Pryor

DARK TOWER

Commentary by Joseph T Major on
CHILDE MORGAN
by Katherine Kurtz (2008)

I didn't notice until after I finished this book that it was the middle one of a trilogy (between *In the King's Service* (2003) and *The King's Deryni* (2014)). I shouldn't have been surprised.

The trilogy is set between the revolution in the Camber books (*Camber of Culdi*, *Saint Camber*, *Camber the Heretic* (1976-1981)) and the Kelson Haldane books (*Deryni Rising*, *Deryni Checkmate*, *High Deryni* (1970-1973)) and deal with a king who is a descendant of the unwilling king of the Camber books, to be served by a young man who is presumably an ancestor of Duke Alaric Morgan of the Kelson books.

But for about the first third of the book, everything seems to be about Countess This and Lord That setting up their noble households. I found myself waiting for Bertie Wooster to show up, fall in a river, and have to engineer one of his misfiring schemes, while Jeeves sits back and tut-tuts. (Or Clovis Sangreal, making sarcastic if not snide comments.)

Then there is a flash of action, as a patrol discovers a village where a travelling preacher whipped up the locals to burn a family alive for the sin, heresy, and crime of being Deryni (and they didn't even weigh them against a

duck). In other words, the kings *still* haven't been able to wipe out anti-Deryni activity. Are we to believe that no heir of the Haldanes has ever said, "Will no one rid me of these turbulent priests?" But she's stuck, since earlier-written but later set books established this feeling.

Beyond that, the politics that so annoyed Ursula K. Le Guin ("From Elfland to Poughkeepsie" (June 1973) and wasn't she surprised when the Pinis started doing their graphic novels *ElfQuest* from their home in Poughkeepsie) are all *council* politics; meetings among the royal council, and the council of the Conspiracy of the Illuminati — er, that is, the Camberian Council, the sooper sekrit Deryni deep state. Unless I've missed something, there's no elected parliament or whatsoever anywhere in the kingdom. Nobody ever says anything like, "Supreme executive power derives from a mandate from the masses," either.

While Kurtz has the standard countries (see *The Tough Guide to Fantasyland* (1996, 2006) for that geography), they are vividly portrayed and have their own backgrounds.

I started having bad feelings about Kurtz after having read *Lammas Night* (1983) where the hero manages to manipulate a psychologically vulnerable man into a grandiose suicide, after having callously abandoned Privates Pooley and O'Callaghan of the Royal Norfolks to the possibility (fortunately for them not taken up) of the tender mercies of the SS (which was why I had a different resolution in *my* novel).

DESTINATION MOON

Commentary by Joseph T Major on
"The Rocket of 1955"
(*Stirring Science Stories*, April 1941)
by "Cecil Corwin" (Cyril Kornbluth)

Book TV recently showed a presentation by Edward Hudgins, author of *Space: The Free-Market Frontier* (Cato Institution, 2003). Hudgins was enthusiastic about the promising entrepreneurial era of space. One thing he cited was *Destination Moon* (1950), telling of Heinlein's portrayal of an entrepreneur who worked out a way to go to the Moon. Heinlein had written a story based (loosely) on the screenplay ("Destination Moon"; *Three Times Infinity* (1959); NHOL G.086) and it was linked to his first juvenile, *Rocket Ship Galileo* (1947; NHOL G.048) and the Future History story "The Man Who Sold the Moon" (1950; NHOL G.079)

But there had been a predecessor. In 1941 *Stirring Science Stories* (edited by Donald A. Wollheim) ran a very short story about two entrepreneurs who worked out a way to go to Mars. In many ways their plan very much resembles Harriman's, or that of Cargraves, Thayer, and Barnes of *Destination Moon*; they raised money from a variety of sources, built a nuclear rocket, and launched it. But it exploded literally almost on the pad, killing the pilot.

However, there was a little problem that Heinlein's people never quite stooped to; the "Mars rocket" was a fraud. The launch system

was not as advertised and when the pilot was put in the capsule he had a somewhat negative reaction to discovering that there was no control panel.

Perhaps not surprisingly, it all came out and the two con men (we have to call them that) are lynched. Their exit strategy was inadequately planned. By them, that is, others had one that was final and conclusive: "Here they come, with an insulting thick rope."

Hudgins was praising Elon Musk FRS and Jeff Bezos, for their dedication and efforts. Musk's SpaceX has made supply runs to the International Space Station, for example. This is quite a change from previous efforts. Consider Robert Truax's Volksrocket, which was in development for years, but never launched. Or Lutz Kayser's OTRAG, which was in development for years, but never launched (and worse yet, got involved with Zaire and Libya, two less than advantageous launching sites from a political perspective.)

Hudgins dismissed NASA efforts, claiming that the organization was bureaucracy-heavy, which is to a point. But with NASA the more serious problem had been "the best is the enemy of the good"; first the DC-X and then the VentureStar reusable spacecraft were put into development, got prototypes built, and then were canceled because there had been problems in development and something newer and better and cooler had come along.

Now as said Musk's company SpaceX has so far been successful, launching payloads to the International Space Station, Tesla electric cars into solar orbit, and the like. But Tesla has suffered from an end to subsidies for electric-powered automobiles.

An entrepreneur strapped for cash might go to extraordinary lengths to get funds that would not have to be repaid . . .

AND NOW THEY ARE FOUND

Review by Joseph T Major of
TRIUMPHANT:
The Genesis Fleet
by "Jack Campbell" [John G. Hemry]
(2019; Ace;
ISBN 978-1101988404; \$27.00;
Penguin Random House (Kindle); \$13.99)

The plans are coming to fruition. Aid is coming to the Glenlyon navy, and the Glenlyon Marines are prepared. But will help come in time?

Or other things, as when Commodore Geary has to negotiate with his new auxiliaries about who will be in command of the combined fleet.

This isn't Hornblower in spaceships; one significant factor is cyberwarfare, or spoofing the other guy's systems. "The Ultimate Weapon" is becoming more possible.

That is, unless they can work out the problems involved. The efforts of André Norton — that is, the emissary who used the pseudonym "Alice Mary Norton", her original name —

may bear fruit, but it may be poison fruit.

It's well to note that the politicians who got them into this predicament are simply cost-cutters who don't see any point in spending too much money on a fleet. There aren't the weak-minded social-welfare worker sorts popular in the works of another writer, the sort of people who in "Little Orphan Annie" existed only to cry "Yui!" before Punjab cut their heads off with his scimitar. (I knew a guy who thought the Asp was better; if Daddy Warbucks wanted someone disposed of, the Asp would go off into a room with him and *he would never be seen again.*)

Hemry has built a story where many factors are present and significant. Politics, technology, and human nature all play a significant role in the plot, and the result is . . . well, about what could be expected, given the way things work in the world.

It strikes me that Hemry is universe-building; telling many stories set in various eras of his history. H. Beam Piper *wanted* to do this with his TerroHuman Future History, write one book for each century. Publishers' whims and the problems of his lifestyle made that impossible. Some writers have more secure lives and perspectives.

JUST YOU WAIT, MR HITLER

Review by Joseph T Major of
FIGHT THEM ON THE BEACHES:
Short Stories of Operation Sea Lion
edited by Katherine Foy
(2019; Sea Lion Press (Kindle); \$5.05)

Tales of Britain Subdued By an Implacable Enemy have been penned for about a century and a half. It's no longer *The Reign of George VI, 1900-1925* (1763), the tale of a triumphant monarch in a future world of gunpowder war.

Rather, it's *The Battle of Dorking: Reminiscences of a Volunteer* (1871), tales of the conquest of the land. Chesney's successors are such as Len Deighton (*SS-GB* (1978)), Robert Harris (*Fatherland* (1992)), and in the field, Jo Walton (the "Small Change" series (2007-2009)).

And Operation Sea Lion scenarios are commonplace in alternate history fiction. Yet, which may be surprising to some, they are derided. Why?

"**Fight Them on the Beaches**" by Nigel Waite. This is a story that merely sets up the background, informing the hypothetically uninformed reader.

"**Empty Chairs at Empty Tables**" by Adam Selby-Martin. A desperate RAF pilot puts into operation a suggestion from Higher Authority. Major Lofton Henderson USMC would have understood.

"**Tee im Schwarzwald**" by James Hall. An interviewer gets a German commander's opinion on what went wrong, formed on the field of battle.

"**Totalen Krieg**" by Paul Hynes. This does not quite refer to the Great Mistake II —

This Time It's Personal, but to a fictional German invasion of WWI; not quite *The Battle of Dorking* but the reminiscences of a different sort of volunteer, one not quite as well regarded.

"**The Last Service**" by Tom Black, With a redder tinge to the other side, and a different answer to the depression. Though Sir Oswald Mosley, Bt. is more a bugaboo than a workable prime minister.

"**The Big Bang**" by Ryan Fleming. A brief and dire story of an occupation.

"**Nothing Half as Melancholy**" by Angelo Barthélemy. A story told by implication more than direct exposition, where a French café proprietor sees the reaction to the result.

"**Die Seelöwe-Kontroverse**" by Tom Anderson. Rather sloppy on the details (e.g., having the *Bismarck* take part in the invasion) but a striking portrayal of the aftermath of defeat.

"**Bloom Once More**" by Alex Richards. A reminder of the actions of a new dark age, made more sinister by a perverted science.

"**The Collector's High**" by Lena Worwood. An eccentric aftermath of an invasion, where a incredibly minor figure imagines how he would rule the land, writes it up, and has it not so much suppressed as ignored.

"**The Most Competitive Sea Lion — In the World**" by Andy Cooke. Or "let's try all the absurd schemes and see how they work". But rather one-sided.

"**Operation Sea Lion — The Unmentionable Sea Mammal**" by Andy Cooke. This is an updating and revision of the essay by Alison Brooks and David Flin which described in thorough and excruciating detail why Operation Sealion *would not work*. Cooke lists all the major "yeah, but" proposals and shows why they are unworkable and absurd.

Not that anyone who wants to write a best seller about how the elites all collaborated but Angrygirl Unlikelname and her diverse and intersectional circle of marginalized friends undertook a desperate struggle to terminate this angsty state of affairs will care.

Fight Them on the Beaches is a necessary anodyne to such; so naturally it will be ignored. Just as its predecessor, "If Hitler Had Invaded England" by "C. S. Forester" [Cecil Louis Troughton Smith] (1960) is ignored, being dismissed as an Englandwank by Gavriel Rosenfeld in *The World Hitler Never Made* (2005; reviewed in *Alexiad* V. 5 #1)

UNE VILLE FLOTTANTE

Review by Joseph T Major of
THE GREAT EASTERN
by Howard A. Rodman
(2019; Melville House
ISBN 978-1612197852; \$27.99;
2019; Penguin Random House (Kindle);
\$14.99)

The *Voyage extraordinaire* for 1871 was *Une ville flottante*, wherein M. Verne sent a woman across the Atlantic with her hateful husband and her secret love on board the mighty

Great Eastern. In the interests of research, M. Verne took passage upon the great ship, making a thorough study of her manner of construction.

In the spirit of Philip José Farmer, Robert A. Heinlein, and Alan Moore, Rodman has put together two characters who have been rudely wrenched out of their contexts, along with one man whose life has been oddly prolonged, to fight a strange and terrifying combat on the stormy seas of the North Atlantic.

It seems that Prince Dakkar of Bundlekund has decided to take out his revenge upon the English for not permitting him to oppress *his* people *his* way by cutting telegraph lines. Using advanced technology, he has built a powerful underwater vessel called the *Neptune*, and sets out to get back at his foes.

Meanwhile, a fanatic whaling captain who denies he went down with his ship, a man you could easily pick out of a lineup (as Richard Armour put it), hobbles off on his natural and artificial legs to take command of an escort for the great cable-laying ship the *Great Eastern*.

And having had his death faked for him, Isambard Kingdom Brunel finds himself enlisted in Dakkar's freedom fighting campaign, while the prince, with a Homeric attitude, goes by the *nom de guerre* of "Nobody" — er, "Nemo".

Brunel finds himself enlisted in Nemo's refit and renaming of his boat (to, of course, *Nautilus*), while Ahab, speaking of himself in the second person, works out a scheme by which he can become captain of the *Great Eastern*, until at least they get back in touch with the authorities, who will have some questions about piracy and murder.

And so the two unique vessels run towards their confrontation, their monomaniac masters and commanders, liberated from their histories, determined to make their mark on the world, if not each other.

The book suffers from frequent shifts between point-of-view characters, and sometimes Ahab's manner of speaking is off-putting. The final conflict is dramatic, and will be attractive to fans of steampunk.

JAIRMANY CALLING

Review by Joseph T Major of
AGENT M:
The Lives and Spies of MI5's Maxwell Knight
by Henry Hemming
(2017; PublicAffairs:
ISBN 978-1613096844; \$28.00;
2017; Hachett Book Group (Kindle); \$18.99)

'Nay, Éomer, you do not fully understand the mind of Master Worm-tongue,' said Gandalf, turning his piercing glance upon him. 'He is bold and cunning. Even now he plays a game and wins a throw. Hours of my precious time he has wasted already. Down, snake!' he said suddenly in a terrible voice. 'Down on your belly!

How long is it since Saruman bought you? What was the promised price? When all the men were dead, you were to pick your share of the treasure, and take the woman you desire? . . . See, Théoden, here is a snake! With safety you cannot take it with you, nor can you leave it behind. To slay it would be just. But it was not always as it now is. Once it was a man, and did you service in its fashion. Give him a horse and let him go at once, wherever he chooses. By his choice you shall judge him.'

— J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Two Towers*

In her *The Meaning of Treason* (1949), Rebecca West discusses the peculiar career of William Joyce, known and disparaged as "Lord Haw-Haw". She fancies him imagining himself being given office in a collaborationist government, with a fancy office, a big car, and other such appurtenances. But she never wonders who told him to get out of Blighty two days before he was going to be rounded up as a potential collaborator.

Was it the thriller novelist and wildlife expert Maxwell Knight, OBE? Or was it the secretive and all-seeing spy chief M?

In this deeply-researched biography of a man who learned better, then learned about others, Hemming has opened up some startling revelations about the low dishonest careers of some adherents of the two totalitarian movements.

Charles Henry Maxwell Knight was a midshipman in the Royal Naval Reserve at the end of the World War. Somewhat at a loss for what to do, he met Sir George Makgill, Bt, who got him to join the British Fascisti in 1924. But Sir George (incidentally, his heir is now the Viscount of Oxfuird) was doing so at the behest of Vernon Kell, director of the Security Service, MI5.

The Circus (so called because of its location) was for the moment more focused on the Bolsheviks. As Knight found when he was promoted from informer to agent-runner. All the same he maintained ties to his old fascist friends, including one William Joyce.

His personal life was eccentric. What else were you expecting? He kept pets. At one Byronic point he had a pet bear. (The poet had been up to Oxford and was aggrieved that he could not keep dogs in college; but they didn't say anything about bears! [The current President of the Byron Society is Lord Byron — not the poet posthumously, but his heir.]

He ran his agents out of his own flat, amid the menagerie. At first he did it alone, and he never had more than two assistants. As if defying security, he also wrote spy thrillers!

Knight showed what sort of agent runner he was when he provided the head of the Communist Party of Great Britain with a secretary. She proceeded to uncover information that the Soviet Union was getting classi-

fied design papers from the Woolwich Arsenal. (It's not Operation SOLO, but it's up there.)

Then the war broke out again. Knight had another interest on the side, a fellow who was keeping documents. He wasn't going to write a book, but he was going to spill the beans. The problem was that Tyler Kent was an intimate of some prominent British Fascists, like Archibald Ramsay, M.P. (U; Peebles and South Midlothian). The documents he had included Most Secret telegrams between President Roosevelt and First Lord of the Admiralty Churchill. This was a security leak so bad that even Joseph P. Kennedy Sr. couldn't permit it.

After the war, Knight began to wind down his activities. He began to transition, from being M (he had chosen the initial because the first Chief of the Secret Intelligence Service, Mansfield Smith-Cumming, had used the initial "C", as did all his successors; a guy in Naval Intelligence had heard about this) to being the avuncular Maxwell Knight, your kindly wildlife expert on the BBC. Though they did wonder why he kept on coming in for broadcasts in a long black official car.

Finally, he retired. He had had an interesting personal life (beside the pets), having been married three times. Some of the marriages had been very odd, such as his first wife who ran a pub in the country while hubby counterspied. He died in 1968, beloved by children who had heard his wildlife lectures on the wireless.

But one of the most dire discoveries he had made was against the Communists. His agents had discovered and identified Melita Norwood, the atom-bomb spy at the heart of the British effort — yet *nothing* was done about it!

Just as no one ever found out who made that telephone call to William Joyce, telling him to get out of the country, urgently. Was it Max, helping an old friend?

The depths of the British security effort are gradually and erratically being plumbed. This work will help the curious reader find out about it, and other matters. After a long period of observation, Knight concluded that Communism and Naziism were essentially the same doctrine. (So did Rebecca West, by the way; she refers to William Joyce as a "Nazi-Fascist" and Allan Nunn May, the atom-bomb spy, as a "Communist-Fascist".) A lot of people with much less experience and much more prejudice won't agree.

(One of the reviewers and assistants with the text was Nigel West. Good on yer, Rupert!)

BreyerFest 2019

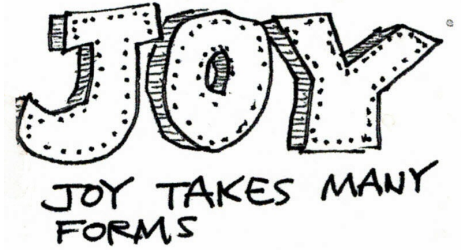
Con Report by Lisa Major

Joe was gracious enough to take me to the annual model horse festival in Lexington at the Horse Park. I walked around for a bit but did not see any model I wanted enough to put money on the credit card for. It did not help, either, that new models are now being made in China. After dinner we went to the hotel where the real bargains are to be found. I made several purchases of very reasonably priced models, most

of which were made not by Breyer but a company called Hartland. The seller told me that the Hartland factory was in Chicago or close to it. My favorite of these is one like the one I played with when I visited my grandfather. I already had one like it but I find these hard to resist when I find them for a good price.

The Joy of High Tech

by Rodford Edmiston



Being the occasionally interesting ramblings of a major-league technophile.

Skylarking

In 1916 (1915, according to some sources) Edward Elmer Smith and Lee Hawkins Garby — who helped with the romantic portions and with her husband was the model for the Cranes — completed about a third of the original version of *The Skylark of Space*. The precise reasons for stopping have not been recorded, but likely had to do with both the Great War and the demands placed on the work Smith — not yet a Doctor — was doing for his job and his degree. In 1917 he received his doctorate in chemistry, focusing on food engineering.

So, by 1919 Doc Smith had his degree and good job and also an expanding family. All this — especially the 1918 birth of Roderick, the first child of Doc and his wife (Jeanne Craig MacDougall, whose sister Clarissa MacLean MacDougall was the source of the name for the Lensman character) — meant staying at home more. He resumed work on the story, finishing it in the Spring of 1920. After multiple rejections — some with encouraging responses — he sold the tale to *Amazing Stories*. It appeared as a three-part serial, beginning in the August, 1928 issue. The story was an immediate hit, and even got the cover for that first month. However, that was also the issue the magazine published *Armageddon 2419 A.D.*, which led to the Buck Rogers comic strip, serials and so forth. Many historians therefore claim the cover image is of Anthony "Buck" Rogers and crew.

Doc likely began writing *Skylark Three* (which is named after the third Skylark, counting the rebuild in the first story at the second ship, and is not the third story in the series, to the endless confusion of generations of readers)

even before the first Skylark story sold. He stated that he planned to end the series there — which is probably why he seemed to kill off Marc DuQuesne in the second book — but was later persuaded to continue it.

The original, magazine serial version of *The Skylark of Space* has been in public domain for a while. You can download it from Project Gutenberg. I believe at least the second novel is also in public domain. They are obviously dated, but are well worth the perusal for students of SF.

Reading the first version of the original story, you realize why Doc Smith wanted to re-write it for the novel printing. His style had grown by then, and the original version — which often contains descriptions and characterizations which reveal its age — had some uncomfortable features. However, for some reason he left out a number of important details in the re-write. Reading the original provides answers to several questions about technical details and some story elements.

Note that Doc was well aware of the scientific nonsensicalities in the Skylark stories, which was one reason he wanted to end the series. Among other problems, there just isn't enough energy in matter to push a ship very close to the speed of light. Ignoring relativity (which we could excuse Doc Smith for doing, since Einsteinian mechanics were brand new when he first wrote the story) and staying with purely Newtonian mechanics, about a third of the ship's starting mass is used getting to 0.9 C even with total conversion and reactionless thrust. That's far more than it takes in the books. Using relativistic equations, you need 130% of the ship's mass equivalent in energy to get moving that fast. Without some sort of external energy source or perhaps a staged design, a spacecraft simply cannot carry enough energy — even with total conversion — to reach significantly relativistic speeds. (This is one reason such designs as the Bussard Ramjet are popular for speculations about sublight interstellar travel, since they take their fuel/reaction mass from the space they traverse.)

Therefore, copper propulsion is not an interstellar drive, at least not for humans for anything but the closest stars. Using some sort of staged process this could be used to send probes to other stars at very close to light speed. However, for such short distances as exist inside the Solar System this technology works great.

Then there are the accelerations described. One of the more interesting of the technical details from the original version of the first story is that one notch of thrust consistently produces about half a g. This is true in both the smaller ship DuQuesne flies and the *Skylark*, itself. The *Skylark* has a double drive with each capable of providing thirty notches. That's thirty g total. Yet Seaton remains conscious at 16 g, and the whole crew survives something like seventy-two hours at maximum throttle, which is nearly twice that.

In spite of “special chairs” and suits and breathing pure oxygen at plus pressure, that's not really possible... unless there's something else going on. (Let's not dwell on Doc's problem with confusing speed and acceleration.)

Unless the thrust is actually a gravity-like warping of space ahead of the ship. Something like the Alcubierre space warp drive.

Let's take a look at what Seaton says about the effects he discovers:

“First: That it is a practically irresistible *pull* along the axis of the treated wire or bar. It is apparently focused at infinity, as near-by objects are not affected.

“Second: I have studied two of the border-line regions of current we discussed. I have found that in one the power is liberated as a similar attractive force but is focused upon the first object in line with the axis of the bar. As long as the current is applied it remains focused upon that object, no matter what comes between. In the second border-line condition the power is liberated as a terrific repulsion.

“Third: That the copper is completely transformed into available energy, there being no heat whatever liberated.”

So, we have two versions of a pure attractive force — one of which may actually be warping space in the direction it is pointed so that the ship literally falls in that direction — and a pure repulsive force (which appears to act radially). The story implies that the copper conversion technology also can be a source of whatever form of energy is wanted. This is all accomplished through a direct conversion of matter at very close (as noted in later stories, it's not perfect) to 100% efficiency. Any competent engineer could revolutionize the world with any one of these.

As a space drive, the copper bar would open up the solar system, as mentioned above. At closest approach, Mars is a little over a day away at a constant one gravity of acceleration, turning over halfway to decelerate to a relative stop. Naturally, you also have to take into account the velocity difference of the two planets, besides just covering the distance. The maximum difference between the orbital velocities of Earth and Mars is less than 8,000 m/s. At one g that's just a bit over thirteen minutes. Depending on the exact geometry of the situation, you would almost certainly add less time than that, simply by adjusting your direction of acceleration and the turnover point.

Likewise, at closest approach Jupiter is just about five days away at one g.

In the second novel we learn that there is a way to apply the accelerative force uniformly to the entire contents of the ship. Many people have theorized this effect is inherent to the copper drive. That in the basic form Seaton developed, this effect was only partially active.

So even with the original drive it's possible to use higher accelerations without the occupants feeling the full effect. That *really* opens things up.

The trip to Mars described above takes 19.6 hours at two g, contrasting with the 29.1 at one. The higher acceleration means a higher copper consumption, though. The way the math works out the increase in energy required is roughly proportional to the increase in acceleration (though for long trips such high accelerations cause relativistic effects to become significant, increasing copper consumption). So this trip uses about twice as much copper.

Let's really bump things up, to forty g. The near Mars trip time drops to 4.6 hours. However, this high acceleration uses roughly *forty times* as much copper as the one g trip. Keep in mind, though, the concentration of energy in matter. For a ten tonne spacecraft (hey, we're talking about Doc Smith, here; that's small) the one g Mars trip uses just one thirtyone grams of copper. The two g trip takes fifty-six. The forty g trip takes a bit less than one and a quarter kilograms of copper.

The second effect Seaton describes appears to work in a manner similar to quantum entanglement. This is a subatomic effect where two particles can be associated in a way which persists and is instantaneous no matter how far the particles are separated. This is an impressive application of real science, especially when you realize quantum entanglement wasn't formally described until 1935 in a paper by Albert Einstein, Boris Podolsky and Nathan Rosen, as well as in several papers by Erwin Schrödinger later that year. (Mention this long-verified faster-than-light effect to most physicists and they'll shuffle their feet and mutter things like “apparent but not real” and “can't send information.” Actually, there's a lot in quantum mechanics which produces that odd effect.)

Using the attractive effect to move things at a distance has a vast array of uses. Couple that with the compass application, and you have something which could be applied in myriad ways. It can track items and individuals. Measure distances to astronomical objects. (There's no clue from the stories as to whether the act of locking on to something is an instantaneous quantum effect or is limited to the speed of light. Even if the latter, we could lock onto the nearer stars with a little patience and persistent tracking.)

Where the attractive effect is obviously purely linear, the repulsive effect — as mentioned above — appears to be radial. I believe it is only described in detail as being applied through the copper strips or plates on the exterior of a spherical craft. The screens mentioned in later books are something different, more like interference between generated electromagnetic fields.

The basic repulsive effect still allows for some interesting uses. First, of course, is protection. This could shield a spacecraft from particulate radiation, including otherwise hard

to stop neutrons. However, there's also the frictionless aspect. Imagine evacuated transport tubes, filled with spherical vehicles with copper repellers on the outside to keep them centered and apart from each other. No friction, no air drag. No collisions, either.

Doc keeps describing the effect of the X-plusive bullets in ways which seem to indicate that it doesn't involve the emission of any radiation, including heat. (He mentions flame at least once, but that could be shock-induced combustion or simple incandescent heat from friction.) This leads me to believe they work by using the repulsive effect. Just drive a small sphere of treated copper to disruption and you get a sharp, hard shock, showing outwards, like the wave of an explosion. The interesting descriptions of the "nothing" created in the center of these blasts implies that it's all repulsion.

Finally, we have energy generation. The fantastic thing here is not just the amount, but the concentration. With the conductors to handle it, you could have a multi-megawatt power plant in a footlocker. This is not outrageous, since nuclear reactors for ramjets and rockets have generated half a gigawatt of heat energy in objects the size of large desks. The trick is converting that heat into something useable.

Keep in mind that you can presumably generate any energy with this. Electricity. Heat. UV. In *Skylark Three* the crew meet people who have had copper energy for a while, and who have hand weapons which utilize the direct liberation effect to create destructive beams. (This could actually meet my goal of having a flashlight with a perceptible recoil! :-)

The attractive effect actually seems to be the most flexible. There are plenty of extrapolations about what might be possible with this effect. An atomic force microscope uses a very fine conductive needle to map the positions of individual atoms. It can even pick up atoms and move them around. A few years back one was used to spell IBM in letters only a few atoms high.

Imagine if you could do that with fine needles of activated copper. Now, imagine three arrays of thousands of such needles, arranged in a half cube, with piezoelectric actuators minutely steering the needles, picking up and placing individual atoms. Building things.

There might even be a way to record the "set" of an attractor, rather than keeping the power on all the time. Among other functions, you could generalize and use this to find and pull whatever material you wanted. Just tune your attractor to gold, and fly a close grid pattern over international waters.

Better yet, tune it to X and sweep the planet — maybe the entire Solar System — to make sure you keep your monopoly. I mean, you don't really want this stuff in unsupervised hands, right?

Doc Smith may have invented space opera

with *The Skylark of Space*, though that is argued. What is not argued is that he wrote one of the first SF stories to realistically deal with the problems of weightlessness, space suits and interstellar distances, the latter including the emptiness between stars. He described the idea of a massive "dark star" only a few years after Einstein thought of it. Something which today we'd call a black hole, though the one in the book had no accretion disk. In that first story the travelers encountered this something like five thousand light years from Earth. He speculated on the chemistry of life, the horrors of addiction and the rapaciousness of unrestrained big business. He — as someone who lived through the horrors of the Great War, though as a civilian — described total warfare based on "race." He speculated on radio controlled flying bombs and electromagnetically driven projectiles as weapons, the energy stored in electrical charges suddenly released and used for explosive effect (think of LiOn batteries shorting, only the energy is released much more quickly) organisms of pure intelligence, and on and on. (The story is actually crowded with Big Concepts.) He even included martial arts (referred to as jujitsu) on the part of Crane's servant, Shiro. He may not have been the first published writer for any of those, but he made them feel real and put his own, unique stamp on those concepts and more, all in that one story.

Now, here's some fun speculation. What if it turns out that the first part of *The Skylark of Space* was based on actual events, which Doc Smith heard about second- or third-hand, and then extrapolated on for a work of fiction? The original explorers — due to a flaw in their spacecraft design — never returned from their first test flight. The families, overcome by grief, sealed off the lab and left it. Then, a century later (about now) after everyone who knew about the experiments was long dead and the details were long forgotten, the property was sold. The new owner began inventorying their acquisition, and someone realized just what they had in that old lab.

Mars by 2020, anyone? :-) Let's all go Skylarking!

Windy City Pulp and Paper 2019

Con Report by Leigh Kimmel

Windy City Pulp and Paper is a small book collecting convention dedicated to the classic pulps of the 20's, 30's and 40's. This year it was held over the weekend of April 12-14, 2019 at the Westin Yorktown Lombard, the same hotel that hosts Windycon.

When I first saw publicity materials for it, I thought it would be a convention for bibliophiles. However, the first several years I tried to get into its dealers' room, either its dates conflicted with another convention we were doing, or it had filled up by the time another convention the same weekend finally told us we were on their waitlist instead of getting into their dealers' room. So when it finally had dates that didn't conflict with anything else we might want

to do, I paid for my tables and memberships as soon as I had the money available.

Because it was small and unknown, and had only limited Thursday load-in hours late in the evening, we decided to hold down our expenses by not driving up on Wednesday. Instead we got up early on Thursday morning and headed north. This was something of a gamble, since bad enough traffic would mean we'd arrive so late we'd have no time to check into our hotel before we needed to be at the main hotel to start loading in.

Fortunately, traffic was good, even in the Jane Byrne Interchange, and we made good time to the hotel. We were supposed to have had a handicap accessible room, but as a result of some kind of accident that had rendered a number of rooms uninhabitable without extensive repairs, they didn't have one available. So they put us in a mini-suite to compensate, but while we did have more space, we didn't have certain features such as the raised toilet seat which would've made our stay a lot easier.

Once we'd gotten our belongings into the hotel, we had supper before heading over to the main hotel to unload. When we first got started loading in, the unseasonably warm weather made it a pleasant task. But soon the skies darkened to the west, and with each load it became clearer that it was only a matter of time before the storms would hit. I tried to carry in as fast as I could, but once the rain started pouring, the hotel staff closed the roll-up door. At that point, all I could do was rearrange our load so it would be stable, and try to arrange the merchandise we had managed to get into the dealers' room.

With nothing more to be done, we headed back to our hotel to finish eating supper. Then I did a little writing before we turned in for the night.

On Friday we got up early to get the hotel's complimentary breakfast before we headed over to the main hotel to finish loading in and setting up. This time the staff wouldn't open the roll-up door, whether because of the colder weather or because of some administrative constraint, so I had to wrestle every load through the regular doors, which added a fair amount of time to the process. As a result, we weren't completely ready when the doors opened for the general membership.

Once we did get organized, we started making sales, but they were much smaller than I'd hoped for. It soon became obvious that I'd made a fundamental misapprehension about the convention — instead of being for bibliophiles, it was for collectors in a fairly narrow niche, and our books really didn't fall into it. By the end of the day, we couldn't have taken in more than thirty or forty dollars.

When the doors closed, we headed back to our hotel to take it easy for the night. We had supper, and I soaked my aching feet in hot water before turning in for the night.

On Saturday we headed down to the hotel's complimentary breakfast, feeling much less happy about our situation. Then we headed

over to the main hotel to get our tables uncovered and try to salvage the situation as best we could. I did get a little time to walk around the hall and look at some of the other dealers' offerings before the doors opened. There were some books I remembered from my childhood that I really would've loved to acquire, but given our precarious financial situation, it wasn't possible.

Sales remained stubbornly slow all day long, and it was clear this convention was not a good fit for us. We weren't the only ones — the guy by the wall packed all his merchandise and just plain left, apparently deciding he didn't want to spend the money for another hotel night.

When the dealers' room closed, we checked out the con suite. However, they just had a few minimal snacks and no meaningful socializing going on, so there was no reason to hang out any further. We chatted a little just to be social, then headed back to our hotel room for a real supper. Then we relaxed and wound down before turning in for the night.

On Sunday we woke up to an unseasonably late snowstorm hamstering away. We ate a quick breakfast, then packed up our belongings to get them out to the van so we could get checked out. As always with Chicago conventions, we wanted to be down to Merrillville by evening and avoid the Monday morning rush hour crunch. However, the lousy sales meant that our hotel cost would have to stay on the credit card, putting us in a bind for the following month's convention.

Then we drove through the heavy snow to the main hotel. At least once we got inside, we could hang up our snow-covered coats and get the tables uncovered. I did a little more looking around, but I was feeling pretty miserable about the whole affair.

We made a few sales, but we had to start packing the books on the shelving unit and in the spinner rack about an hour before closing time. That may have discouraged buyers, but we needed to get loaded out as quickly as possible if we were going to get to Merrillville at anything resembling a reasonable hour.

At least the snow had stopped by the time we started loading out. However, we still had a mess of wet, slushy snow on the sidewalk beside the hotel, which made the process of loading out thoroughly nasty. I took the first loads out by myself, but later several con staff members pitched in and handed books up to me, which speeded up the process. Still, I ended up with my shoes and socks sopping wet, which made for a miserable drive down to Merrillville and our hotel for the night.

I carried in the essentials and parked the van, and then stripped off my socks and shoes. I was very glad I'd packed several extra pairs of socks, because it felt absolutely great to be able to put on a clean, dry pair and then my slippers. We had supper and relaxed with our feet elevated until time for bed.

On Monday we got up and had the hotel's complimentary breakfast. Then we carried our

belongings back out to the hotel and hit the road south. We got home in good time, but on the way down to the free community meal in Greenwood, we got two awful pieces of news — first, that Gene Wolfe had died, and second, that the roof of Notre Dame de Paris was burning. It was a sad ending for a very disappointing convention.

InConJunction XXXIX

Con Report by Leigh Kimmel

InConJunction is the Circle City's longest-running science fiction convention, and has kept its old-school charm while doing its best to keep up with the times. It still has a con suite where you can find munchies to keep you going between activities, and where you can hang out with other fen. It's a place where the guests of honor are not celebrities behind velvet ropes, but other lovers of science fiction and fantasy who have become notable in some endeavor, whether it be writing, art, cosplaying, music or just being a Big Name Fan.

It's also a home-town convention for us, which was welcome after the lengthy drive and disappointing sales of Wisconsin Comic Con. It meant we could go home each night and sleep in our own bed, and have a little fun time with our cat.

This year it was held over the weekend of July 5-7, 2019 at the Indianapolis Marriott East, with dealer setup the day before. On Thursday right after lunch my husband and I headed over to the hotel so we could get the van in a good spot to load in. Another family member was going to come over in the car and help with load-in and setup, but he'd come down with some kind of illness and we all agreed that it would be best if he didn't become Patient Zero of a nasty con crud outbreak.

Load-in was complicated by the heat and humidity, which just sapped my energy. Worse, I was having trouble with keeping the cart under control as I took it down the ramp to the roll-up door into the exhibition hall. So although I had one of the big carts from the hotel, I had to limit the amount of mass I could load on it. It wasn't so bad when I was carrying things like squishies, but when I was hauling t-shirts or books, I ended up with about half the load I could've taken on a shallower slope, simply because I didn't want to risk the cart getting away from me and crashing into someone's vehicle or otherwise causing harm.

As a result, it took forever to get everything into the dealers' room. I still had almost all our hardcover books in there when it was time to close for the night. At least we didn't have to quick rearrange them to have a stable load to drive home, since our third family member was able to drive the car over and pick us up.

When we got back home, we had supper. Then I took care of some things before we turned in for the night.

On Friday we had to get up super-early to get back to the hotel and finish setting up, since our third family member was still feeling ill and

not up to coming. My first order of business was to haul in the final loads of books and the big gridwall units. By this time my husband had all the minigrid structures set up, although the zip ties had done a real number on his nails. So I went to work putting t-shirts in their hutches while he put figurines and other items in the other ones. We didn't quite get finished by the time the doors opened, but we came reasonably close.

Sales were slow, but it is a small convention, so we had to adjust our expectations accordingly. We did have some time to slip over to the con suite and grab some munchies. However, we didn't want to indulge too much, especially on the sweets.

After the dealers' room closed for the evening, we went to the con suite to hang out for a while. Then we headed home to have supper. Since there were no parties (other than Barfleet, which is too drunk for our tastes), we just took it easy until time to turn in for the night. I did accomplish a little work, so the day wasn't lost altogether.

On Saturday we got up and headed over to the hotel. To save time, we just ate the con suite's breakfast, then headed over to the dealers' room to get things open for the day. I finally got a little chance to walk the dealers' room, although a lot of people hadn't gotten their tables uncovered before I needed to get back to our own.

Sales did pick up, and I started feeling better about our finances. However, I was still painfully aware that we had a long way to go to recover from the previous weekend's disaster. A small con like this one might help out, but it wouldn't put us back where we needed to be, especially when we really needed to do some serious restocking for the three big conventions in August.

After the dealers' room closed for the evening, we went to the con suite to do a little munching. Then we went out to the Royal Manticorian Navy table in the atrium and hung out with our friends there. They weren't throwing a party, so we ended up taking off after a while. We needed to eat a real supper at home, and there was some stuff we needed to get done. I spent some time writing out a new story idea that had come from listening to people joking about a very public gaffe by a public figure misreading a teleprompter.

On Sunday we got up and headed back to the hotel. This time our other family member was able to come, at least long enough to drop us off in the car so we had the possibility of his helping us load out if he felt up to it in the evening. He did join us briefly in the con suite for breakfast, then headed back home to avoid spreading too many germs. So he finally did get a little something out of his membership after all.

We got our tables opened for business and I did a little walking around the dealers' room before we actually opened. Sales were slow at first, but we did have a few nice large ones before I had to start packing stuff. Our third

family member came near the end of the day and helped us get everything packed and the structures broken down.

Once the dealers' room closed and they opened the big roll-up door, I started hauling stuff out as fast as I could within the constraints of being able to push the cart up the ramp. I did have to stop briefly while the Fiberglass Freaks crew pushed out the Batmobile, but even then I was trying to get some last few items packed and ready to go away.

We were able to get everything loaded in good time, thanks to another vendor who is apparently local and who decided to stay and help us get out. Because she's also a vendor, she understood a lot of important things about handling other people's merchandise, and even was able to see some possibilities that I didn't for how to pack stuff. So we got a good, tight load, although it wasn't as critical as it would be for a long drive.

Then my husband and I dropped by the con suite for a little of the dead dog party. However, we couldn't stay long, because we needed to get home for a real supper and then I needed to get the van up to the storage unit to change our merchandise over in preparation for the anime convention we'd be leaving for on Tuesday.

NASFiC

Con Report by Rodford Edmiston

NASFiC was fun but tiring. I had to keep in mind that we were at an altitude nearly 4000' higher than Frankfort. :-)) I met the woman in charge of membership, whom I had been corresponding with for a couple of months before the con. We started chatting by e-mail because she and her husband moved to Frankfort a few months ago and she noted my physical address! We're hoping to have the two of them join whoever shows up from LexFA for our annual Economic Suicide Mission to Poor Richard's the second Sunday of August.

The area was very scenic — I took a lot more landscape photos than I posted to Flickr — the hotel I was in was physically joined with the convention center and the other hotels were conveniently close. There were several eating places within about a five minute walking distance, with more and a Target about ten minutes away. The facilities were spacious, except for the dealer's room, which was crowded.

This was four conventions combined, and I forgot to get the total membership. It seemed well-attended. I managed to get to a couple of panels, and a few parties but mostly took it easy and spent time chatting with friends old and new.

The pictures are at:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/116299515@N07/albums/72157709761755531>

FISH OUT OF WATER

Review by Taral Wayne of
AQUAMAN
<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1477834/>
(2018)

I watched *Aquaman* last night. They are certainly trying hard at DC, but I had to give this long, two-hour-and-fifteen-minute film a C-minus rating. At times, it was both riveting and entertaining, usually those moments when the action was grounded in something real. But far too much of the time was spent in Atlantis, where nothing seemed real or had consequences that you worried about. War against the human race? What of it? In the first moments of the "war" entire coastal cities were inundated — thousands or even millions were killed — and it is mentioned as if it were a particularly large, highway accident.

Similarly, the underwater war between the two factions of Atlantians must have led to the deaths of thousands or tens of thousands, and yet the casualties were all in masks, and mattered as little as so many marionettes. No one of any importance was affected one iota. At the end, the chief baddie cries when he discovers that his mother is still alive, and all is forgiven. A bit of time in a cell ... but unlike Herman Goering or Saddam Hussein, no hangman's knot or cyanide for him, more's the pity. For that matter, what was the Justice League doing during all this? Were Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman having a poker night while the undersea world attacked the surface world?

And why does this advanced, civilized nation do nothing to address its grievances for thousands of years, when only a few warnings to the surface dwellers would have solved the problems of ocean pollution from the start? But do the Atlantians do that? No ... they wait until there is no alternative but a genocidal war against the humans. Couldn't anyone have said, "If we help, we can have this entire mess cleaned up with our super Atlantian science!" Of course, no one thought of that.

Finally, I cannot easily accept that the science of Atlantis is so advanced that the can pretty much wipe coastal cities off the human map at will, and yet they have a political system that is less complicated than most urban street gangs, and demonstrates all the same unimaginative clichés of any half-assed fantasy movie. I wonder if is the creeping Asian influence on Hollywood film making? The director is James Wan, who was born in Malaysia and moved to Australia when he was seven. Certainly, there are too many similarities between *Aquaman* and an episode of *Dragon Ball Z*. I wonder, in fact, if all superhero films aren't trending in that direction?

I will say this for the actor who played Aquaman, however. He could not have been a better choice if he had been a Marvel Universe discovery. DC has what it takes to put the right actor in the right role, now and then. He almost made this two-and-a-quarter hour movie bearable ... though not quite.

All things considered, the movie was all

flash and spectacle, but it didn't hold water.



MARY POPPINS POPS BACK

Review by Taral Wayne of
MARY POPPINS RETURNS
<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt5028340/>
(2018)

Every now and then, someone tries to top a classic. Most often, the attempt is an embarrassment. For all the earnest effort, you cannot better what is already as good as it can be, no matter how much money is spent, how dazzling the special effects may be or that the cinematography surpasses anything ever filmed before. What you end up with is a re-play.

In general, I heard good things about *Mary Poppins Returns*. The trailers looked promising, and I looked forward to an extended vision of the universe of P.L. Travers. The reviews, however, were not so favorable as one would like. I saw the film with mixed expectations, so I ought not to have been disappointed ... and yet I was. Mildly, anyway. It was not only that the return of the beloved Mary Poppins to Cherry Tree Lane was without surprises, but that it was very close to the *same* story — simply retold with newer, less compelling actors.

It begins with the Banks children, grown up as adults. Michael is married, has three children of his own and keeps the original Banks home ... meticulously recreated by Disney's "imagineers." Captain Storm still keeps time by firing his cannon from the rooftop ... though by now the Ancient Mariner must be ninety if he's a day. The chimneysweep, Bert, is long retired, and his apprentice lamplighter is his spitting image. Sister Jane is a suffragette in her mother's footsteps.

But that is the whole point! There is nothing *new* here! Mary enters the Banks' household while admiring herself in the mirror, just as she did twenty years earlier! A bowl is chipped in the nursery, providing the rationale for a long animated musical number, just as in the original film. Mary Poppins leads the three Banks children on a visit to one of her eccentric relatives, only this time Uncle Albert doesn't float to the ceiling when he laughs — instead, Cousin Topsy's home turns upside down

on Tuesdays. Above all, the centerpiece of the film, is a very long song and dance number that is built around the army of lamplighters who appear at night to light the gas lamps of London. With all that energetic dancing and singing in the streets at night, it's a wonder that the good citizens get any sleep!

The Banks children can hardly go wrong in their role, and the grown-up Michael Banks is a likable enough chap. But that is about as much as you can say about the cast. As "Bert," Dick Van Dyke is impossible to imitate. His understudy and replacement, the lamplighter Jack, woefully lacks that charisma of "Berk." He is too nearly Alan Sandler, with a *different* bad accent. Even Mary is not entirely herself, for that matter. She seems a little less playful, and one wonders if magical nannies eventually grow tired of looking after other people's problems.

The real disappointment, however, was the soundtrack for *Mary Poppins Returns*. There is not a number in the original 1964 film that didn't leave people humming for days, months and even years to come. Yet I defy anyone to recall a word of the new music for *Mary Poppins Returns*. There is not a single hit tune, nothing as remarkably outrageous as *Supercalifra-gilisticexpialidocious*, not anything that can shake a soul like *Feed the Birds*.

Despite some disappointments, it doesn't immediately become obvious that the film is derivative, nor did it fail to entertain me from beginning to end ... although the dance of the lamplighters did push me past the bounds of boredom more than a bit. What was so disappointing about this revisit of *Mary Poppins*, however, is that – far from being magical – it was merely familiar. This was a film that, like the original, might have pushed the boundaries of what we knew was possible when your nanny can do nearly *anything*! It was as if we were given magical balloons at the end of the movie, and expected to fly! But with this one, we never really flew ... we merely sank to the earth like a discarded plastic bag.

MISSED GOALS

Review by Taral Wayne of

EARLY MAN

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4701724/>
(2018)

Generally, I've really enjoyed every Aardman film I've watched – starting with *Wallace and Gromit*, then continuing with *Chicken Run*, *Flushed Away*, *Arthur Christmas*, *Pirates*, and the *Shaun the Sheep Movie*. When I saw that *Early Man* had appeared on the shelves of Walmart, I bought a copy as soon as I could. I rushed home, filled the popcorn popper and started to melt some butter for a pleasant evening of stop-motion animation!

Aaargh ... it was a disaster from start to finish. Not being a fan of soccer, maybe I just didn't *get it*, but it seemed to me that this was less a movie than the wishful thinking of

British soccer fans. I began to feel something had gone amiss in the first seconds of the film, when dinosaurs were cheerfully conflated with early humans. It was an easy error to fix ... replacing dinosaurs with equally huge mastodons and giant sloths would have done fine, and not perpetuated a thoughtless gaffe. But before I had time to bridle over a 65-million-year anachronism, we see the dinosaurs wiped from the planet by an asteroid strike. Then after a moment's thought, it occurs to the viewer that it couldn't have been the *same* asteroid strike surely that would have wiped out humanity as well. Yet the dinos are gone, while humanity appears to have survived somehow, and settled into the lush and verdant crater left behind ... where, apparently, they have never had it so good.

Also, the cavemen inadvertently invent soccer by kicking the leftover, football-sized remnant of the meteorite. At this point, I was hoping this was only the overture before something much more interesting begins. However, all that happens is that early British cavemen seem to have promptly *forgotten* all about soccer and have reverted to hunting for bunnies. (Apparently ducks are too tough, being about 12 feet tall.)

The story skips ahead for an unknown number of years, in which little seems to have happened. The prehistoric British tribe still lives in the lush and verdant crater in which they settled thousands (or millions) of years ago, having accomplished more or less nothing in the interim. The sense of deep historical time is not the least cuckoo thing about this movie. However, the idyllic life of the cavemen is suddenly upset by the unexpected appearance of "Bronze Age Man." The invaders round up the cavemen and drive them from their home so that the "bronze" can be mined.

Where did "Bronze Age Man" come from, I wondered? Why were we given no notice of them until this late moment? How did Bronze Age Man live among the desolation that seemed to extend everywhere except the crater valley? As though all this was not surprising enough, it appears that soccer is alive and well in this mysterious Bronze Age civilization. It is, in fact, "sacred game."

To shorten an already tiresome story, the displaced British cavemen challenge the reigning soccer superstars. If they win, they get their valley back – and presumably live happily ever after. If not – they go to the mines to work their lives away in misery. Would this sound like a good bet to any sensible person? It didn't sound like a good bet to me.

There are the standard plot devices to use up the middle of the picture, in which the British team realizes that they are completely hopeless, and the only chance they have to escape the mines is to wander away into the desolation, and live on very large cockroaches. At the last minute, though, appears the plucky young Bronze Age woman who befriends the hero. She has always wanted to be a soccer star herself, but she was not allowed to play for

some reason – so she teaches the British team to play. Apparently it will be no problem if a girl plays with mere cavemen.

As well, there is a Queen, who could have permitted this at any time.

Of course, you know that the Brits don't end up in the mines, even though no-one who wasn't bonkers would have expected it.

So the challenging team wins *their first game!* It is probably worth repeating that. Thousands of years before, the cavemen had completely forgotten anything about kicking meteorites around, and have never even imagined the possibility of playing soccer. But after a short practice period – and a cunning realization that the Bronze Team are all prima donnas who cannot play well together – the British team *wins!* Hoo-ray! *Jolly good!*

Yes, we might as well stop pretending that this has *anything* at all to do with cavemen. The movie is little more than a wet dream for British soccer fans. Did it give you any clue that *all* the Bronze Age people have strong accents reminiscent of Germany, France and Italy?

I've probably said more than I ought to in a movie review, but on the whole this was a film that you probably have better things to do than watch. I will give the film a single star for passable stop-motion animation – and for the possibility that I am biased about the whole idea of a movie about soccer. Local "football" fans may have found this the inspiration that British football fans have longed for over the last several thousands (or millions) of years. Likewise, I have tried to put myself in the place of a fan of baseball or ice hockey, and then judge whether the same plot would have made any difference worth noticing. Let us say that a tribe of primitive Leafs fans has challenged the reigning stars of the ice, and rescued the Stanley Cup from cynicism and commercial exploitation. Would it have rescued this dismal plot?

Sorry to say, it would not have. This film missed the goal by a mile.

DRAGON AWARD NOMINEES

Courtesy of Dragon*Con and *File 770*

Best Science Fiction Novel

A Memory Called Empire by Arkady Martine

A Star-Wheeled Sky by Brad R. Torgersen

Europe at Dawn by Dave Hutchinson

Record of a Spaceborn Few by Becky Chambers

Red Moon by Kim Stanley Robinson

Tiamat's Wrath by James S.A. Corey

Best Fantasy Novel (Including Paranormal)

Deep Roots by Ruthanna Emrys

Foundryside by Robert Jackson Bennett

House of Assassins by Larry Correia

Lies Sleeping by Ben Aaronovitch

Spinning Silver by Naomi Novik

The Raven Tower by Ann Leckie

Best Young Adult / Middle Grade Novel

Archenemies by Marissa Meyer
Armageddon Girls by Aaron Michael Ritchey
Bloodwitch by Susan Dennard
Imposters by Scott Westerfeld
Sawkill Girls by Claire Legrand
The King's Regret by Philip Ligon
The Pioneer by Bridget Tyler

Best Military Science Fiction or Fantasy Novel

A Pale Dawn by Chris Kennedy, Mark Wandrey
Order of the Centurion by Jason Anspach, Nick Cole
Marine by Joshua Dalzelle
Sons of the Lion by Jason Cordova
The Light Brigade by Kameron Hurley
Uncompromising Honor by David Weber

Best Alternate History Novel

Black Chamber by S.M. Stirling
Machines Like Me by Ian McEwan
The Calculating Stars by Mary Robinette Kowal
The Iron Codex by David Mack
The World Asunder by Kacey Ezell
Unholy Land by Lavie Tidhar

Best Media Tie-In Novel

Big Damn Hero by James Lovegrove, Nancy Holder
Darkness on the Edge of Town by Adam Christopher
Master & Apprentice by Claudia Gray
The Replicant War by Chris Kennedy
The Way to the Stars by Una McCormack
Thrawn: Alliances by Timothy Zahn

Best Horror Novel

Cardinal Black by Robert McCammon
Little Darlings by Melanie Golding
Riddance by Shelley Jackson
We Sold Our Souls by Grady Hendrix
Zombie Airman by David Guenther
100 Fathoms Below by Steven L. Kent, Nicholas Kaufmann

Best Comic Book

Batman by Tom King, Tony S. Daniel
Black Hammer by Jeff Lemire, Dean Ormston, Dave Stewart
Mister Miracle by Tom King, Tony Daniel
Peter Parker: The Spectacular Spider-Man by Chip Zdarsky, Adam Kubert
Saga by Brian K. Vaughan, Fiona Staples
The Batman Who Laughs by Scott Sny-

der, Mark Simpson

Best Graphic Novel

Berlin by Jason Lutes
Hey, Kiddo by Jarret J. Krosoczka
I Am Young by M. Dean
Monstress Vol. 3 by Marjorie Liu, Sana Takeda
On a Sunbeam by Tillie Walden
X-Men: Grand Design – Second Genesis by Ed Piskor

Best Science Fiction or Fantasy TV Series

Game of Thrones, HBO
Good Omens, Amazon Prime
Lucifer, Netflix
The Orville, Fox
The Umbrella Academy, Netflix
Star Trek: Discovery, CBS All Access

Best Science Fiction or Fantasy Movie

Alita: Battle Angel by Robert Rodriguez
Aquaman by James Wan
Avengers: Endgame by Anthony Russo, Joe Russo
Captain Marvel by Anna Boden, Ryan Fleck
Spider-Man: Far From Home by Jon Watts
Spider-Man: Into the Spider-verse by Bob Persichetti, Peter Ramsey, Rodney Rothman

Best Science Fiction or Fantasy PC / Console Game

Apex Legends by Electronic Arts
Assassin's Creed: Odyssey by Ubisoft
Life is Strange 2 by Dontnod Entertainment
Red Dead Redemption 2 by Rockstar Games
Outer Wilds by Mobius Digital
World of Warcraft: Battle for Azeroth by Blizzard

Best Science Fiction or Fantasy Mobile Game

Cyber Hunter by NetEase
Elder Scrolls: Blades by Bethesda Softworks
Grimvalor by Direlight
Harry Potter: Wizards Unite by Niantic, WB Games San Francisco
Reigns: Game of Thrones by Nerial
Sega Heroes: Puzzle RPG Quest by SEGA

Best Science Fiction or Fantasy Board Game

Architects of the West Kingdom by Garphill Games
Betrayal Legacy by Avalon Hill Games
Cryptid by Osprey Games
Everdell by Starling Games (II)
Nemesis by Awaken Realms
Root by Leder Games

Best Science Fiction or Fantasy Miniatures / Collectible Card / Role-Playing Game

Call of Cthulhu: Masks of Nyarlathotep Slipcase Set by Chaosium Inc.
Fallout: Wasteland Warfare by Modiphius Entertainment
Keyforge: Call of the Archons by Fantasy Flight Games
Magic: The Gathering Ravnica Allegiance by Wizards of the Coast
Magic: The Gathering War of the Spark by Wizards of the Coast
Warhammer 40,000: Kill Team by Games Workshop

WORLDCON BIDS

2021
 Washington, D.C.
<http://dcin2021.org/>

2022
 Chicago
<https://chicagoworldconbid.org/>

2023
 Chengdu
 Nice, France
<http://worldconinfrance.org/en/>

New Orleans

2024
 Glasgow
<http://www.ukin2024.org/>

2025
 Seattle
 Perth, Australia

WORLDCON

2020
 ConNZealand
 Wellington, New Zealand
 July 29-August 2, 2020
<http://ConNZealand.nz/>

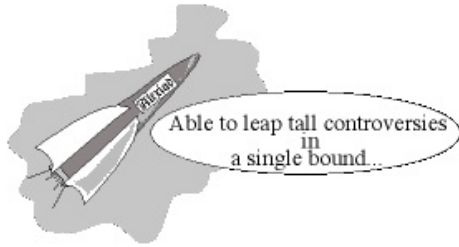
NASFiC

2020
 Columbus, Ohio
 August 20-23, 2020
<http://columbus2020nasfic.org>



Be the first one on your block to have dual props!

Letters, we get letters



From: **Taral Wayne**
taral@bell.net

July 4, 2019

While making stray remarks to Joe, I covered a lot of sore subjects that have been on my mind lately. I didn't bring them up in any particular order or for any premeditated purpose. Also, I was appalled enough by bad my temper to edit myself heavily. Apparently, however, Joe thought this would make amusing reading in the letter column . . . enough so that I think I had better approach this loc more warily.

I am beginning to lose patience with fanzine fandom. There hardly seems a time, anymore, when the editors don't ignore my wishes, or just plain mess up my contributions. I don't want to exaggerate, nor wish to cast blame. But it has been happening often enough that it seriously infringes on the satisfaction that I enjoy from this hobby. You don't want to know some of the unintuitive stuff I've put up with, that has all but ruined some contributions.

I hope that running the other three movie reviews in this helped. I like your reviews and we need more movie reviews to balance the book reviews.

As for John Scalzi, I don't want to get that involved in issues that no longer seem to involve the fandom that we created. If John will just give back the Hugo, we can call it square, okay? I have never met him and have no interest in reading his novels, since I hardly seem to read any science fiction at all any more — so I have no axe to grind. It just would have been so nice to have finally won that fan art Hugo I had been tantalized with eleven TIMES! It may not be John's fault specifically, since I don't think he has ever campaigned to be nominated as a fan artist. However, the precedent was set, and it is not difficult to see how my chances were fully and finally ruined by the changes that ensued. John's Hugo would look good on my coffee table.

I wore this badge at the last Worldcon I attended, and likely the last one I'll attend in the future.



You mentioned that you don't write as many locs as before. Not that I ever set any records in the letter-writing department, but I've also slowed down from the number used to write. As little as three years ago, I wrote two to four locs *a month*. I haven't written that many in half this year, so far. With Lloyd Penney writing about 70 to 100 every year, of course, who would notice anyone else writing letters of comment at all? Perhaps we can be forgiven for slacking off? Yet, the slowing-down of fandom must be noticeable by everyone?

One reason I write so few locs is that I haven't a great deal of interest in SF anymore. The mystery to me is how anyone can read science fiction for thirty, forty or fifty years, and still find it as fresh as a daisy, and not just more of the same tired old ideas. Yeah, yeah, nanotech immortality? Big deal. Read that in '86. Entangled telecomms creating strange worldwide d.j... vu. Last week's Fox news. Or maybe I'm just jaded. I try not to make too many judgments where the taste of other fans is concerned. I know for a fact that my writing about old coins bores the pants off some readers, and I don't hold it against them. Not even Grahame Charlock.

I write so much about history (real and alternate) and true crime because there is so little SF being done these days that I find at all interesting. But I expect some readers find what I write boring.

I do plan to return to fan publishing, sometime in the coming months. I have a fair amount of material set aside which I have been aging like a fine old wine, waiting for the right time. On the other hand, I have more Fraggles Rock stories to write, and you will have to bear with me. If you can read SF you can read Fraggles Rock. I have plans to write movie review ideas at the moment, but I've said that before, and made myself into a liar by writing another five or six. I can only explain it on unexpected whims, usually inspired by indignant opinions, but now and then to award some well-earned praise. I do not intend to systematically cover the animation field, although it must seem so at times. I write what pleases me, and nearly

anything but interminable, interchangeable Corflu reports...

Sometimes I'm tempted to fixate on medical issues but try not to repeat myself. Unfortunately, I keep discovering novel ways in which I can malfunction. Lately, long-term edema has resulted in holes that open in my left leg and drip like a leaky faucet, a problem that is very persistent and sometimes messy. At times, I have left wet footprints wherever I walked. I have consulted with my doctor, but progress has been slow due to other factors such as the divided attentions of the sheer number of practitioners who share my contested body! Oddly, apart from the general lack of strength from the Myasthenia gravis, I don't actually *feel* bad. I keep hoping that I'll enter a period of relative stability before the inevitable terminal decline ... in 30 or 40 years.

Not everyone is so lucky. Joe remarked to me earlier that our ranks in fandom have been thinning. Harsh as the realization is, we are all getting older. What is stranger is that many fans that I know from furry fandom appear to be showing their mortality even more severely than those I know from SF fandom. Most furies I knew from the 1980s and 90s are 10 to 30 years younger than I am, AND THEY ARE DROPPING LIKE FLIES! I can list about well over a dozen who I knew who have died over the last handful of years, of everything from diabetes-induced heart attacks, to brain cancer. I also know two who are serving hard time for sex-related charges, and another who was accused and convicted but the sentence was suspended. In fact, some of my art was used as evidence to help convict him! I wonder if I shouldn't pick my company more carefully.

If only the specialists wouldn't see me as the next payment on their Lexus. I think sleep specialists get too much in the way of gifts and premiums from CPAP makers.

Tomorrow I will be at the coin show unless the rain that is predicted is overwhelming.

It seems the gods smiled on me the rain was over by morning and it was a beautiful day when I left home for the show.

The June coin show has come and gone. For once, I had no shopping list, and what I bought would depend on what I found at the show without knowing what I might find. I got there early for once, and had plenty of time to pick through my favourite dealer's stock. Curiously, I didn't find much. Oh, there were a number of decent bronzes and a silver or two, but nothing that really set my heart afire ... nothing that I didn't have something rather similar already. I put those aside for holding, and decided to try another dealer down the room. I had been wanting to find a \$50 and \$100 bill from the Canadian 1937 series, so it seemed like a good time to look. I had good

luck with the hundred ... but apparently the \$50 bill is more scarce. I decided not to pursue the \$50 for now, but to follow yet another lead.

A dealer I had not visited yet had a collection of Confederate money ... quite a lot of it, in fact! I ended up buying four CSA bills on the spot, and now know where to look for more in future! This brought my collection up to seven Confederate notes, and two other notes issued by one of the state banks.

Returning to my regular dealer, Robert, he pointed out that he had some other material I hadn't seen, that hadn't yet been cataloged. This turned out to be the stuff that DREAMS are made of. There was a Norman penny minted by William the Conqueror! I could have had it except that it was already spoken for, drat.

I quickly found a schilling by Philip and Queen Mary. I suspect few people realize that Philip of Spain was effectively co-sovereign of England. However, for the four or five years in which he was married to Mary Tudor of England, he was the Spanish King of England! The terms of the treaty behind the marriage would have made a Spaniard the heir to the English throne, but Mary never conceived and when she died, her throne passed to her younger, half-sister, Elizabeth. If not for that, God wot, England may well have become a Catholic nation, under a Hapsburg ruler. But the terms of the treaty did not make Philip king in the event that Mary predeceased him.

The poetic comment on that was "When hempe is spun, then England's done." The "hempe" being the anagram "Henry, Edward, Mary, Philip, Elizabeth".

—JTM

The *piece de resistance* in the new material was as unexpected as it was a very bold move on my part. There were three very old, gold coins in the lot ... the sort I never see, since they are almost always sold in exclusive auctions. I asked Robert about them, expecting an answer that would price them well up in the \$6,000 to \$7,000 range. To my surprise, the number he quoted was not remotely as high as that. Just HOW high, I asked? He did a few calculations about his costs, compared examples online and gave me a number that led me to swallow hard and say, "I can do that!" Mind you, I will be scraping together everything I can spare for the next three months, along with everything else I had already spent at the show, but I CAN do it. It will be the most expensive coin I have ever bought in the past, or am ever likely to buy in the future, and it was more expensive than anything else of any kind that I have ever bought yet it did not cost even half what I expected, and IT IS MINE! I now own a gold aureus by the emperor Nero, who misruled from roughly 54 to 68 AD. Turning it in my own hands, I think I have experienced an epiphany of sorts.

From: **Joy V. Smith** July 1, 2019
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Pagadan@aol.com
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Thanks for all the reviews and background on everything! *Christopher Robin* (Taral Wayne's review) sounds good. And thanks to Sue Burke for the Hugo story reviews. I haven't read any of them, but I'd like to read at least some them now. Interesting background on Poul Anderson too. (Sorry to hear that about Nicholas Van Rijn. I enjoyed those stories.)

Lisa, When we had a mouse explosion in our house back in the day, we had a house full of cats, but we ended up buying mouse traps. I even tried the glue traps, sorry to confess (they were messing up my books; I was desperate!), but a kitten got caught in one — we had a hard time cleaning him up. We had a lot of cats because we lived on a dead end road, and people dumped them all the time... Yes, we did alter them — but not always in time (once).

I know there are a lot of imitations of stories by assorted authors out there, but even Edgar Rice Burroughs! (I teethed on Tarzan — the others not so much.)

Burroughs fan fiction goes back a ways. Read sometime about "Tarzan: the New Series" (1964-5) by "Barton Werper" [Peter T. Scott and Peg O'Neill Scott]. And I've mentioned "Elmo of the Apes" (after Elmo Lincoln, the first cinematic Tarzan).

— JTM

Re: LOCs: Interesting tidbit from Sue Burke's letter about advertising on truck roofs: "Do you need groceries up there?" Good idea! And thanks to all the contributors and letter writers and artists. (I loved that Doctor Who cartoon!) And I felt so sorry for the Australian voter in Antarctica. So that's a real law. Good story. Another great issue!



From: **Timothy Lane** July 13, 2019
timothylane51@gmail.com

I vaguely recall the Dancer's Image matter, which may be the first Derby I remember. I believe it had to do with what drugs he had received before the race. (I see Lisa later con-

firms this.) This didn't come up in the discussions I saw of this year's derby.

I took a college course in science fiction the first semester it was offered at Purdue, and it included Lewis's space trilogy. My favorite of them was *That Hideous Strength*. I later read most of the Narnia books (though we had the first in class when I was a kid; I remembered a few bits from it, such as the inclusion of orkneys among the creatures the White Witch had in her army) as well as *The Screwtape Letters*.

I've probably read all the Poul Anderson stories Burke discusses, and specifically remember at least three of them. He insisted that the barbarian Krankheit (I think that's the spelling) had nothing to do with news anchor Walter. I still remember the grim last sentence of "My Object All Sublime".

The really grim one, I think, is "Journeys End" (*F&SF*, February 1957).

I only read one Dr. Seuss book as a child, when someone had a copy of *The Cat in the Hat Comes Back* in class. I did become a fan of *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, though (to my regret) I've never managed to memorize the full Grinch song. Elizabeth once got me a cloth figure of the Grinch in a Christmas cap (and smiling, so it was obviously after his transformation).

I don't recall ever reading anything by A. A. Milne, but I did the tail end of one of the movies. Grant McCormick and I went to see *The Sword in the Stone*, which was the second half of a feature with a Winnie the Pooh movie, and came in around half-way. The ending sequence was a birthday party for Eeyore.

Regarding watching horse races, I check youtube for Ask Lovecraft 3 times a week, and have occasionally watched other items, such as videos of the 1973 Preakness and Belmont. Secretariat's huge lead in the latter was no doubt helped by Sham's physical problems — in essence, you had Secretariat, then Sham, then the other horses. But Secretariat also had great staying power. The longer the race, the better he did compared to the other horses. He was probably the greatest thoroughbred ever, and probably the greatest racehorse at least since Dan Patch, who was famous enough to be referenced as such in *The Music Man*.

George W. Price's point about anti-Semitism is well taken, and in fact I've seen it come up in blog posts. I suspect that the origin of the term reflects the fact that in most of Europe, the only Semites were Jewish (and never mind the Khazar theory of Ashkenazic ancestry). During World War II, the Nazis occasionally got annoyed with the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem and reminded him that he was a Semite too.

When the British began closing down the slave trade, the King of the Dahomey (a major slave-trading tribe) complained about it, pointing out if he didn't sell prisoners of war as slaves he would have to kill them.

Actually, humans may not have eradicated any intelligent species. Were the Neanderthals a separate species? Were they wiped out or assimilated?

Not to mention Denisovans. Though the largest part identifiable; all the rest is three molars, a finger phalanx, and part of a limb.

I vaguely remember some scene in a novel (I think by James Blish) in which a medieval monk reuses some old sheet of paper, thus getting rid of the last copy of a page of Tacitus that is in fact missing. The various arsonists of the Library at have much to answer for.

It was another Futurian: Cyril Kornbluth, *The Syndic* (1953).

— JTM

Joseph's explanation of his problems absorbing iron are surprising. I don't recall ever hearing of this before. Elizabeth had a problem with anemia in late 2016, and for that matter one of her cats when we got together (TwoTone) died from anemia. In the cat's case, she was no longer making erythrocytes. So as the old ones wore down . . .

From: **John Purcell** July 15, 2019
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Good morning, Joe and Lisa. I hope you are doing well and that your summer weather is not as hot and humid as it is here in SouthCentralEastern Texas.

Lisa's opening comments about visiting thrift shops will ring true for many *Alexiad* readers. Once in a great while — roughly two or three times a year — Valerie and I go to these secondhand stores to see what we can find for costumes or arts and crafts projects she is working on. For me, I always scout out the old books and magazines, sometimes men's clothing, and often walk out with a handful of books, maybe an old magazine or two. One time I found a perfectly fine three piece suit in my size that cost a mere \$20! Just like Lisa noted, all of the thrift shops here send proceeds to support the local food shelves and health clinics. Somebody has to since the government won't.

Joe's opening mini-rant about the Fan Hugos is a position I basically agree with. Like him, I have little faith in the Fan Hugo categories for the same reasons. It seems to me that people have figured out that these awards are relatively easy wins due to their low voter turnouts: get enough supporters of your blog or podcast or whatever, and then you can add "Hugo Award winner" to your byline. I still vote in these categories in hopes of swinging back around, but the Visigoths seem to have won the day. Best to delete the

Fan Hugo categories completely, like Milt Stevens proposed. They are essentially worthless these days.

A further problem is that they seem to think that they are the true fans. As the new con-goers are consumers, not participants, so the bloggers do not communicate with other bloggers. I gave Scalzi a copy of *Alexiad* at a convention but it didn't seem to fit his interests.

— JTM

As for the FAAn awards, which I have the dubious honor of handing out at next year's Corflu, there is a spirited discussion of these going on in Nic Farey's fanzine *This Here* for a couple issues. That debate will help Pablo Vazquez (co-chair of Corflu 37) and I decide on what to do with the FAAns next spring. The question is getting more people involved in the process of determining who and what should be nominated, hopefully streamlining the procedure as well. We shall see how that goes.

I hate to say this, being a devout reader of hard-science science fiction, I have yet to read *The Fountains of Paradise*. Not only that, but it's not even in my collection! Excuse me while I go hang my head in shame...

Okay. Done with self-shaming time.

Lots of good book reviews this time around, Joe, and I really enjoyed reading Taral Wayne's two movie reviews. I have no real desire to see *The Grinch* (why spoil the Boris Karloff-voiced animated classic?), but *Christopher Robin* might be worth watching just because its background is fairly well known. Thanks for the reviews, Taral!

Onward to the letters, and your comments — and Lloyd Penney's, too — regarding TAFF and the fan funds in general. A little information about the fan funds might clear up some confusion. Namely, the funds are meant to cover transportation, accommodations and other expenditures directly related to the trip in question; any additional expenses — such as personal shopping, doing touristy things, buying food and drink: that sort of stuff — usually come out of the trip winner's pocket. This is why winners of any fan fund stay with host fans to keep down such expenses. For the most part, the fan funds work.

I remember those infamous TAFF wars of the late 1980s that seeped into the early years of the following decade. While those years had a negative impact on TAFF, it seems to have rebounded nicely over the past few years: the number of people running in either direction, plus the large increase in voters, each year are good signs. I can understand how you and Lloyd feel about it — heck, Lloyd was directly insulted by some fans — when I consider everything that has happened over the years, so perhaps the thing to do is not forget about the negativity and the events causing it, but learn from those experiences and make the fan funds

in general better. Yes, I am an optimistic sort of person, but the past five years of TAFF campaigns have been a lot of fun. Now as for DUFF: there's some serious work that needs to be done to promote that fan fund.

With that, I believe I am done. Thanks again for the fanzine, and now I must get onto finishing PR #1 for Corflu 37. It is being held in College Station, TX over March 13-15, 2020, and Pablo Miguel Alberto Vazquez are its co-chairs. All information regarding the hotel (the initial contract just arrived in my emails a few minutes ago) and the convention itself are at www.corflu.org. If anybody wishes to contact me directly, they most certainly can. So there.

From: **Robert S. Kennedy** July 20, 2019
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My thanks for Vol. 18 No. 3 (June 2019, Whole Number 105).

In my last letter I forgot to mention the wonderful birthday present from my niece and her husband (Sheilah & Brad). For many years I have had this block of wood that was part of my Navy ship's deck. It was a rough piece of wood that I never seemed to get around to having finished. Sheilah knows the husband of one of her fellow teachers who is an excellent wood worker. She had the block of wood finished, colored lightly, and my ship's name engraved on it. The man found a picture of my ship on the internet and asked if I would like to have it engraved also. Of course I said yes! The finished product is wonderful. Sheilah & Brad refused to let me pay for it and gave it to me as a birthday present. I will forever be grateful.

USS *Worcester* (CL-144);
commissioned in 1948, served in
the Korean War, decommissioned
in 1958, scrapped in 1972.
<http://www.ussworcester.com>

This facility in which I live has numerous activities including trips to various attractions. On June 29 I went to Hagerman (about 100 miles from here) and took a luncheon cruise on the Snake River. Very enjoyable with a number of waterfalls, interesting scenery, and lots of multi-million dollar homes overlooking the river. Also, some Eagles and other raptors.

On July 19 it was to Mountain Home Air Force Base (about 50 miles from here in the same direction as Hagerman). It was an outstanding excursion with an excellent tour of the base. We had a first-rate presentation concerning the history of the base, the current command structure, and innovative procedures they are developing. We got to see planes on the ground as well as taking off, flying, and landing. There was lunch for which we had to pay (no freebies). Also, we got to go up in the Control Tower which was a very unusual

privilege.

Approximately once a month I do Virtual Reality at the library. It's really neat.

Given that today is the 50th Anniversary for the Apollo 11 Moon Landing, I would like to highly recommend a book that I just finished reading. *One Giant Leap: the Impossible Mission That Flew Us to the Moon* by Charles Fishman (Simon & Schuster, 2019). As The Wall Street Journal said: "A Captivating Account...Overflowing with Stories."

I requested a copy from the library.

— LTM

Joe: Good book reviews and I'll try and obtain some of them from the library. I don't have much room here for more books.

Taral Wayne: I enjoyed your reviews of *The Grinch* and *Christopher Robin*.

Timothy Lane: A good number of years ago I was at a talk by a woman concerning DNA as it relates to genealogical research. She told us that she was surprised to learn that her Neanderthal DNA was 3.0%. I expect we will hear more about Denisovan DNA in the future.

Your comment that nearly all of your books were left behind when you moved reminded me that the same thing happened when I moved here. Virtually all my book collection is gone. Sometimes when I think about it I want to cry.

George W. Price: Excellent commentary that almost all Africans brought here to be slaves were already slaves in Africa. Any discussion concerning slavery should include the history of slavery. Virtually all races and ethnic groups were slaves at one time or another. If we could go back far enough many of us may have slave ancestors. Apparently slavery still exists in some parts of the world. One thing that is ignored is that the first slaves in the colonies were White. My books on the subject never made it here when I moved. However, books on the subject can be found on Amazon and maybe libraries.

Boris Johnson is descended from slaves. Anyone wish to guess the details?

Taras Wolansky: Of course the Neanderthals were not just like us. But our common ancestor was apparently close enough that a Neanderthal today could probably pass in public even if looking a bit odd. Neanderthals and Homo sapiens were close enough that sex could occur on a massive scale resulting in anyone having any European ancestors having Neanderthal DNA.

So "The Gnarly Man" (L. Sprague de Camp, *Unknown*, June 1939) is soundly based.

— JTM

You mention that Margaret Truman and Tom Clancy have infiltrated into the mainstream and continue to produce novels after they died. Another author you can add to the list is one of my favorites, Vince Flynn.

From: **George W. Price** July 26, 2019
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June Alexiad:

Before I comment on this issue, let me share the most unusual argument I have ever seen in the fierce debate on Second Amendment gun rights.

An article by Charles C. W. Cooke ("The Truth About the Second Amendment," *National Review*, Aug. 27, 2018) cites Chief Justice Taney's infamous Dred Scott decision in 1857. Taney asserted that one compelling reason that even free blacks should never be citizens was that as citizens they would have to be allowed to carry guns — and that would obviously be intolerable. The relevance to us now is that Taney took as settled law that the Second Amendment guarantees the right of private individuals to both own and carry guns.

That was the oddest of several citations Cooke found to demonstrate that from the Founding until at least the Civil War, the standard interpretation was that the Second Amendment guaranteed the right of individuals — not just militiamen — to "bear arms." I have not looked up Dred Scott to check this, but it sounds plausible.

Almost as odd, Cooke gives several references showing that the Founders also intended the Second Amendment to make sure that private citizens could never be disarmed, just in case "the people" ever needed to rise up against a tyrannical government. I suspect that most progressives who would love to get rid of Mr. Trump would still have trouble allowing us all to have guns just so we could rebel against "that man in the White House."

In his *The Cartoon Guide to the Constitution of the United States* (1987) Eric Lurio states that the Second Amendment is intended to make police forces legal. Aside from that, it's a good book — informative and funny (i.e., his summary of *Marbury vs. Madison*: "Can truly great men act like demented four-year-olds and get away with it?").

In "A Mouse in the House," Lisa recounts two adventures with mice that got trapped in trash cans, and how she got them out of the cans and liberated them outdoors.

My father had a story about a mouse in a boot. Alas, it did not have a happy ending. One

morning he pulled on a riding boot — and felt his toes crush a mouse that had apparently fallen in during the night and could not jump out. Yechh! I never thought to ask if he had to wash out the boot.

Robert S. Kennedy and Sue Burke both mention the "antivaxxers" and the health problems they are causing. I can suggest a compromise that preserves the personal freedom to raise your children according to your own principles, and still discharge your social responsibility to other people:

Let the law be that you don't have to get your child vaccinated — but if your unvaccinated child infects other children, their parents can damned well sue you for everything you've got.

Responding to my remarks on Chicago's politics, Mr. Kennedy asks, "Is the newly elected mayor part of the Machine?"

No, definitely not. Lori Lightfoot was a federal prosecutor — in fact, I believe she helped send up one of our crooked aldermen some years ago. She says she is determined to do away with the seamier customs of Chicago politics. She has made a good start, but it is far too early to say how well she will succeed in what will be a monstrously difficult task. I wish her well, but am not too hopeful.

If she rules as forcefully as I think she will need to, her motto could be "Lightfoot, heavy hand."

One of those quaint Chicago customs is "aldermanic privilege" (or "aldermanic prerogative"). This is the ironbound custom — it has no basis in law — that each of the fifty aldermen has the final say over zoning variances, as well as strong influence over construction permits, in his or her ward.

For a spectacular recent example, Edward Burke, the longest-serving alderman (50 years!), is now under federal indictment. The first of several charges is that he tried to extort a Burger King franchise holder by delaying a driveway construction permit until Burke's law office was hired to handle the Burger King's legal affairs.

It is quite common for Chicago aldermen to have private businesses on the side — most often law firms — that do business with the city. ("Conflict of interest?" Never heard of it — what a strange concept!) Mayor Lightfoot promises that city officials and employees will no longer be allowed to profit from their official positions. We'll see.

To be sure, such abuses are not limited to city aldermen. Michael Madigan, the Speaker of the House of the Illinois legislature, who represents a district in Chicago, has a thriving law business specializing in getting county property taxes reduced. (All campaign contributions gratefully received.)

Then there was Billy Bulger, brother of mobster "Whifey" Bulger, who did that sort of thing in Massachusetts. (See Howie Carr's *The Brothers Bulger* (2006; reviewed in *Alexiad* V. 5 #6).

That aldermen can kill applications for zoning variances in their wards brings to mind the 1972 book *Land Use Without Zoning*, by Bernard Siegan (which I did not read but saw reviewed). Siegan argues that zoning is nearly always unnecessary. He cites Houston as a city which does not have zoning regulations, and nevertheless does not suffer the evils that zoning is supposed to prevent.

Siegan concludes that free-market forces are nearly always enough to prevent placing nasty operations where they will harm or disturb those living nearby. For example, no one is going to build a smelly slaughterhouse in a middle-class residential neighborhood, simply because the land will cost too much. They'll build it out in the boondocks where land is cheap, or maybe they will find a poor neighborhood where the residents will tolerate the stench in return for paying low rents. (And poor people might even be glad of the chance to get better wages working in the slaughterhouse.) When market forces are insufficient, residents can sue the nasty installations for letting pollution spill over onto neighboring properties.

If Siegan is right, we might suspect that the most compelling political reason for zoning is to create opportunities for the politicians to sell variances and exemptions. That is certainly how it has worked in Chicago.

Taras Wolansky discusses H. Beam Piper's suicide, generally attributed to poverty. The story that I saw — I don't recall where — was that he had sent his Lord Kalvan novel to his agent to submit to Campbell for *Analog*. When Piper didn't hear from Campbell in a reasonable time he jumped to the conclusion that the novel had been rejected, and that meant he had lost his writing touch. He then killed himself in despair that he would never again be able to write well.

But in fact Piper's agent had just died, and the manuscript had never reached Campbell. I will add my own guess that Piper probably didn't have a phone to let him easily check with his agent. And anyway, back then long-distance calls were expensive.

Whatever the reason, Piper's suicide was a bitter loss to science fiction.

He had sent the third part of the novel (it was originally published as three separate stories) to Campbell, but the return letter with the suggested revisions was lost when his agent died.

Then the new agent sold the entire book, to come out before the final part, thus ruining (in Piper's opinion, anyhow) the final market he could sell to.

— JTM

From: **Sue Burke** July 31, 2019
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The black tower — that's what George W. Price calls the building I live in, and that's what my husband and I call it, too, for its black exterior cladding. At 55 stories, it's the second-tallest structure outside of downtown. I can see and hear the elevated trains a few blocks away, and I can see the control tower for O'Hare Airport on the horizon more than ten miles away. We spend a lot of time staring out of the windows and are becoming sunset connoisseurs. If I had grown up here, I might well have been a meteorologist.

George also asks if charging \$8 per month would have an effect on the bad behavior on social media. I think the mobs want free speech if it's cost-free: They want to be paid attention to but don't treasure their two cents' worth enough to pay even two cents to say it. Social media would become a ghost town.

Lloyd Penny says his flip phone has outlasted his 3G network, and the new one isn't intuitive. My smart phone is also hardly intuitive, but if I poke at enough stuff on the screen, I can read books with it, so it's not all bad. In my home, however, the printer doesn't work with a 5G network, so it may soon become unusable even though it still works perfectly. "Planned obsolescence" was coined in 1932 as an idea to boost the economy, but it doesn't boost my personal economics.

I enjoyed the articles and cartoons in the issue, particularly Joseph T Major's review of Edgar Rice Burroughs, Inc. Tarzan novels were a favorite when I was a pre-teen even though I knew they were highly unrealistic (among other faults), but they had adventure!

Tarzan seems to be popular for other writers. I mentioned the "Elmo of the Apes" fan fiction and the "New Adventures of Tarzan" by "Barton Werper". There are also the licensed novels by Joe R. Lansdale and Philip José Farmer, along with the more recent ones. And then there's *Tarzan on Mars*.

As for the Hugos, I learn about new writers all the time through it and other awards. The world is full of exciting discoveries, and yes, the categories change by *de jure* or *de facto* processes from time to time, but anything that stops changing is dead. I'm 64 years old, but I don't

feel old, despite wrinkles, gray hair, and osteoarthritis. I still seek adventure.

You're my age!

— JTM

Taras Wolansky said that Gregory Benford was praising my book *Symbiosis*. I'm very grateful, and I've learned my lesson about using an obscure word as a book title. The sequel will be called *Interference*.

He also asks me how I see the 20BooksTo50K short stories that appeared on the Nebula Ballot. I read them, and I see them this way: The stories simply weren't good. They wouldn't have gotten onto the ballot without a coordinated campaign. (Jonathan P. Brazee has confirmed and apologized for the campaign.) 20BooksTo50K may be an apolitical self-help group of writers trying to make a living, but if this is the best work its members can produce, I know why they're not quite upending traditional publishing, and it has nothing to do with political regimentation.

Many, many years ago, at Wiscon, a feminist SF convention, there was a workshop on how women could take over science fiction. The clever scheme consisted of one step, written in big letters on a whiteboard: *Write the best book you can*. We took it to heart and dedicated ourselves to working hard to master the craft of writing, trusting that the rest would follow. That strategy seems to have succeeded.

20BooksTo50K is focused on how to make money, not how to write well. That might be the cause of its members' failure to earn acclaim and awards. In the long run, what matters is quality.

From: **AL du Pisani** July 31, 2019
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We had a nice dinner in celebration of SFFSA's fiftieth anniversary. Talked about our reminiscences, and those who have died, but who are still missed. And could read what we remember, in the anniversary issue of *Probe*. Seen some people who have not been around for a while. Missed others who could not make it. Even had a couple of new faces.

And may have to accept that the club will probably die once one or two core members do. We have not really been getting in any new blood. And we are not getting younger.

That seems to be true for a number of SF clubs here. On a tangential note, would you like to get *The Immortal Storm* and *Ah! Sweet Idiocy!*?

I am in a bit of a mourning mood — Have had to accept that I will not be able to work for as long as I had hoped for. And that I would most probably need to move away from Johan-

nesburg once I stop working. I do not know if this mourning is so that I can grow to accept that people who have been a large part of my life for twenty five years or more, will be left behind.

I went on holiday at the beginning of July – visited the family beach shack down in Hartenbos. Met up with all my close family, and had a time to take a midyear rest.

Something Joe said, and the experience of the beach shack combined in an understanding that we are materially blessed currently. But that in the much poorer past, we had some relationships which carried us. That today a lot of people are willing to ditch the relationships for their own lonesome bubble.

The beach shack has been in my family's possession for 65 years. Added on to it, over the years. Added a kitchen when the communal tap was replaced with an in kitchen tap. Added a garage. Later on fitted electricity and a bathroom, once that was offered. Turned the garage into another bedroom. Replaced the geyser with an electric one.

But the core of the place, World War Two temporary accommodation moved from the nearby airfield, still remains.

I can remember the paraffin fridge in the kitchen. I can barely remember the paraffin lamps, but that may be later memories from the time I spent a lot of holidays traveling with my grandfather, from farm to farm. I can remember the Christmas pageant, where all the boys of the same age group received similar presents. Quite often cap guns. I remember the year I was thirteen, and could no longer get presents, but could be a torch bearer in the procession. Just that one year – the next year it got canceled, and have never really been done again.

That was not the last time I carried a torch in a procession – did it a couple of times more until I was sixteen – never again afterwards. The torch was made from a piece of cane and an oil can. Filled with paraffin and cotton waste. Apparently too dangerous to carry around, these days, but I never heard of any injuries during the times I carried the torches.

These days I am free to flock together and form community with people I will probably never meet face to face. Yet that is not enough for me – I need to meet and be in the presence of live humans, some time, every week. The regret I have that so many people have hardened their attitudes and excluded the people who are different, in the wrong way.

South Africa is still stumbling along. Mainly because of Eskom, our beloved electricity supply monopoly, who is too big to fail, and who is not only failing, but looking to take the country down with it.

In 2008, when the first major power failures happened, Eskom proposed the building of two gargantuan coal fired power stations: Medupi and Kusile. Each power station would consist of six generating units, and masses of electricity would be generated from 2014 onwards.

It is 2019: Of the six units at Medupi, three have been connected to the grid, and a further two are in the process of being linked. At Kusile, one unit have been attached to the grid, and a further two are in the process of being linked. But Kusile has had trouble, so it is not only not generating power currently, but the sixth unit is being cannibalised to try and get the first three units operational. There is even a proposal not to finish the last two units, as it would just be throwing good money away.

Medupi and Kusile have cost a lot more than originally budgeted for, and has delivered less. There was widespread theft and looting and fraud during the entire build process. But it looks as if the death blow was struck relatively early – Eskom got rid of a large amount of white personnel, including the people who drew up the specifications for the power generating units. During the build process, two major simplifications was made to reduce costs: the boiler rooms was made smaller, and the vertical mills to crush the coal were replaced by cheaper horizontal mills. Both of these items was proposed by the contractors, based on their experience with Australian coal. And it looks as if this resulted in boiler rooms that cannot meet their design specification for either of power generation or design life, or maybe both.

Offers of experienced people to assist Eskom out of the mess they are in have been ignored by Eskom management.

Eskom has also more personnel, employed at large salaries, than it needs. I heard today that two thirds of personnel are surplus to requirements. That is something like 31,000 people. The unions however, have been screaming blue murder anytime the prospect of personnel reduction is mentioned – they believe it is the duty of the South African tax payer to ensure that the union members are employed.

Whenever there is the prospect of people mentioning that during Apartheid things did not go wrong in an instance specific example, there is bound to be an Old Liberal telling us how terrible it was under Apartheid, and how much better it is today. So it was, when I read the one Old Liberal saying that even if there is no electricity being delivered, at least it is not being delivered to the 90% of the population linked to the grid, which is so much better than having electricity delivered to the 30% of the population linked to the grid, like during Apartheid.

Not all of Eskom's problems are of their own making – The aforementioned roll out of electricity to more people, whether they could pay for electricity or not, is one of the issue over which they have limited control. There have been court case upon court case which forbids Eskom from disconnecting municipalities which are years in arrears with their payments. There are a bunch of people in Soweto agitating for a flat rate R100 a month bill for unlimited electricity usage.

And Eskom is only the state owned enterprise that is the deepest in trouble, needing urgent attention (Even if there are constituencies forcing the government not to even consider the

most obvious remedies.) South African Airways are in deep trouble, asking for a bailout just about every year. The Post Office is so bad that entire parallel parcel delivery networks have developed, merely to bypass them.

I heard that the first law of holes is: When you discover that you are in a hole, stop digging. I suspect that the Socialist version is: If you discover you are in a hole, it is because you did not use a big enough shovel – everything can be fixed by more of the same, just bigger.

I have Africa in my blood – I have thought about leaving, but feel as if that will kill my soul. And I know that Africa is waiting to kill my body. Not a nice bind to be in.

It sounds like you would be better off, if not happier, in Rivington, North Carolina. Unfortunately, you can't get there from here.

— JTM

I hope for sanity, both here and over there, and in the circles of Fandom. But do not expect it.

I hope that things will get better for all of you.

Al du Pisani speaks of having Africa in his blood. I understand. I am a born and bred Kentuckian. This land is in my blood as much as Africa is in his. Objectively, land is land. I find that I cannot be objective. I have enjoyed visiting other places but only once was I truly sorry to return home. That was Colorado. Part of me will always, I think, remember that dry, rocky, grand land as a second homeland. Funny, that, because Colorado's rocky grandeur is so different from Kentucky's greenness. You would not expect to feel affection for a place so different from your homeland and yet I did. I cannot explain why I felt that way.

— LTM

From: **Taras Wolansky** August 1, 2019
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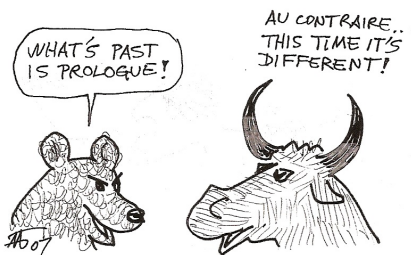
Thank you for the June *Alexiad*.

Due to technical difficulties, I was unable to download the Hugo packet until only a couple of weeks ago. It any case, it's too late to vote for any of these, but here are Hugo Nominees Worth Reading, I kid you not. (N.B.: The novels and novellas can be obtained through interlibrary loan, for those on a budget.)

Novels:

Spinning Silver by Naomi Novik — a Jewish woman money lender gets mixed up with Faerie. The portrait of a businesswoman in late medieval Eastern Europe I found at least as interesting as the high fantasy. Also, the tying-up of personal relationships at the end of the story is rather awkward.

The Calculating Stars by Mary Robinette Kowal — prequel to the novelette “The Lady Astronaut of Mars”, a former Hugo nominee. So much fun you won’t mind it doesn’t actually make sense: in the book’s alternate 1950s, there is no shortage of male pilots (as there had been during the war), so they wouldn’t be training women astronaut pilots.



Novellas:

“Artificial Condition” by Martha Wells — Yay! Murderbot is back, in this sequel to the Nebula and Hugo winning “All Systems Red”.

“Gods, Monsters, and the Lucky Peach” by Kelly Robson — Time-traveling ecological researchers clash with a Sumerian king. Only flaw is that it spends far too much time on irrelevant detail about the time travelers’ future world (I’m guessing, because Robson uses the milieu in other stories).

“The Black God’s Drums” by P. Djèli Clark — Steampunk espionage tale set in the open city of New Orleans as Union and Confederates carry on a Cold War. Very realistic about class and race conflicts within the black community of the city. I was a bit disappointed when I realized the story was fantasy, not SF.

Novelettes:

Several were OK, but I’ve already forgotten what they were about. The only real stinker was the Bolander one about elephants.

Short stories:

“A Witch’s Guide to Escape: A Practical Compendium of Portal Fantasies” by Alix E. Harrow — Beautifully written story about witch librarians and the special books they’re not supposed to lend to anybody. Probably the best of all of the short fiction nominees.

Which is an appropriate time to say a couple of words about Sue Burke’s short story Hugo picks:

Brooke Bolander’s “Three beautiful raptor sisters, [etc.]” was my number 2 pick in a very weak category. That the princess is smart and

the prince is stupid (and neither character is well-written) does not upend conventions but embody them. Also, I can’t say I liked the ending, in which the princess pays back a lifetime of privilege by running off selfishly and letting the people of the kingdom go hang.

I gave *1/2 to T. Kingfisher’s “Rose McGregor, [etc.]” though I no longer remember why. I may have been annoyed by the cliché “strong-willed” woman. In fiction today, is there any other kind?

Joe’s review of the new “Moon Men” book: “It is as if some time-traveler gave [Edgar Rice] Burroughs copies of *The Great Terror* (1968), *Nomenklatura* (1984), *The Harvest of Sorrow* (1986), and *Hungry Ghosts* (1996).”

Barring eyewitnesses from the future, why do you think ERB got communism right? Or should we be asking about the wishful thinking that made so many people get it wrong?

The wishful thinking is more to the point. The horrors of the Russian Civil War were there for those who wanted to see clearly. In *Tarzan Triumphant* (1932) Stalin personally sees off an assassin whose Special Task is to kill Tarzan, just the way that Pavel Sudoplatov was personally seen off by Stalin when he went to Paris to kill Yevhen Konovalts (*Special Tasks*). (ERB never knew that Stalin liked Tarzan movies.)

George W. Price: I was surprised by your figure of “300,000 black Africans ... captured and enslaved by white (European or American) slave raiders”, or 3% of the ten million total.

Based on slave autobiographies I’ve looked at, I would have said it was 0%, that the white slave traders barely got off their ships, much less invaded the interior, and merely waited for the black kings of the Slave Coast to bring the slaves to them.

Sue Burke’s review of *The Best of Poul Anderson*: “I was born in 1955. I grew up in a time when girls could only wear skirts to school — among many other arbitrary, humiliating, harmful rules, such as no competitive sports; women could legally be paid less than men for the same work ...”

Well, in contexts more informal than school, girls could wear skirts or pants as they chose; while boys could not wear skirts under any circumstances. “No competitive sports”: not quite sure what Sue intended here as, by that time, girls were participating in nearly all sports.

In theory, redheads could legally be paid less than blondes for the same work, too. In economic reality, if Group A is paid less for the same work, then capitalists could get rich by hiring away members of Group A, this process continuing until Group A was no longer paid less.

This is why efforts to detect significant sex bias in wages have always failed. Men do get paid more: for working longer hours, for doing

dangerous and unpleasant jobs, for sacrificing family life to the job, for selecting higher paid occupations and specialties. (Women hate to hear this.)

As for the Anderson stories themselves, I’m guessing that some of them appeared in those sci-fi magazines that had buxom women in brass brassieres on the covers.

The past is a different country. It’s likely that the Theodore Sturgeon story about an uptight spinster who is raped and it does her a whole lot of good would not pass muster today.

SF that was sociologically divergent — I’m trying to avoid the parochial expression, “ahead of its time” — is relatively rare. In those early 1940’s A.E. van Vogt stories that, I believe, inspired Star Trek, the Kirk and the Spock-like “Psychology Officer” in charge of a galactic warship with a crew of 30,000 are both women. In Heinlein’s controversial 1959 novel, *Starship Troopers*, the eponymous troopers are guys, but the starships they go into battle on are crewed and piloted by women.

I was witness to an encounter at MidAmeriCon where Heinlein had somehow slipped his escort, and was arguing with two young women about why women wouldn’t be in the Mobile Infantry.

— JTM

“Reading these stories is a return to the nightmare time when I was legally a second-class citizen.” What legal privileges did men have that you didn’t have? The legal privilege of being drafted and sent to Vietnam?

Taral Wayne’s review of *Christopher Robin* (2018): I thought this fantasy film was a misfire. Ewan McGregor was miscast as the title character, and why they made him a middle manager at a luggage factory I have no idea.

On the other hand, 2017’s *Goodbye Christopher Robin*, with Domhnall Gleeson and Margot Robbie, does a good job of telling the true story.

Joe’s commentary on Arthur C. Clarke’s *The Fountains of Paradise*: I have often imagined the melodramatic scene, in which Morgan dies of a heart attack even as the space elevator continues inexorably to carry him, in cinematic terms. No doubt, that’s why that is the only scene in the book that I still remember. Maybe Jo Walton was on to something when she decided to skip it in her Hugo commentaries.

WAHF:

Lloyd Daub, with various items of interest.
Martin Morse Wooster, ditto.
Patrick McCray, with thanks.

GAME OVER

Commentary by Joseph T Major on *PASSAGE* by Connie Willis (2001)

I remember not being all that impressed by this work of the Female Person from Colorado (as Mike Resnick calls her). But after reviewing the reviews on Goodreads, I came to an understanding.

As you know, Bob, *Passage* is the story of Jessica, a researcher of Near Death Experiences, and the many obstacles that make her research impossible. The hospital is a maze where nothing ever works, her subjects fail to cooperate, another researcher corrupts the results, and the cafeteria is never open.

This is exacerbated by Jessica being a typical Willis protagonist; someone unable to assert her will. Thus she spends the book rushing about the hospital, hiding from people she doesn't want to meet (such as Mr. Mandrake, the other researcher mentioned above), and otherwise never getting anything done.

One would think a researcher under such constraints would give up and quit. And that's what a real researcher would at least consider doing. But what if Jessica weren't really real? For example, what if . . .

She is playing a beta version of an AI puzzle game.

This explains everything! The rushing around the hospital is to collect coins or plot coupons or whatever is needed to unlock the next level, and that's also why it's such a maze.

The lack of an open cafeteria, or any restaurants nearby, and how Jessica's co-worker has an infinite amount of food in his pockets, Harpo Marx style, is because the code for places to eat hasn't been written yet so the developer put in a hack.

The reason Mandrake and the three patients — the Navy veteran with his story, the dying little girl who wants to talk disasters, the socialite who volunteers for everything and so is available for nothing — are so repetitive is because they are Non-Player Characters, with a few lines to speak and that's it.

The transitions — first to being able to interview people outside the hospital, all of whom are repetitive and say everything but what Jessica needs to know (i.e., more NPC), and then the dying dream sequence on the *Titanic* — represent the unlocking of new levels, once the player has collected enough loot boxes or whatever.

All it needs is a final scene where Jessica goes up the grand staircase behind Rose and Jack, with the sea rising on her heels, to find a screen with glowing letters in a matching border:

GAME OVER

Enter your initials after your score

. . . and then she wakes up.

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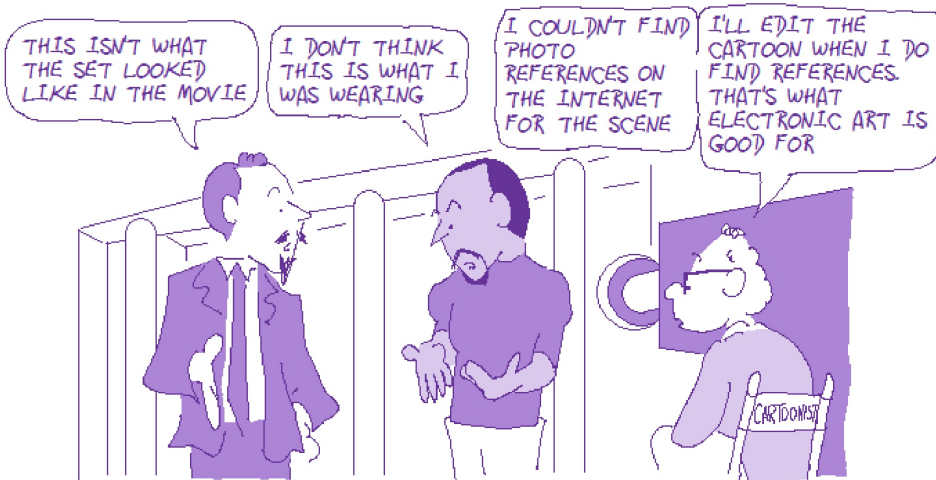
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Art: What we are mainly looking for is small fillos. Your fillo will probably be scanned in and may be reused, unless you object to its reuse.

Contributions: This is not a fictionzine. It is intended to be our fanzine, so be interesting.

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