

# ASKANCE 46



**ASKANCE**  
The Steampunk Issue

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Proof reading on this issue courtesy of our cats Inga, Eyegore, and Froderick. If there are typos anywhere in this issue, these are the responsible parties. Good help is so hard to find these days.

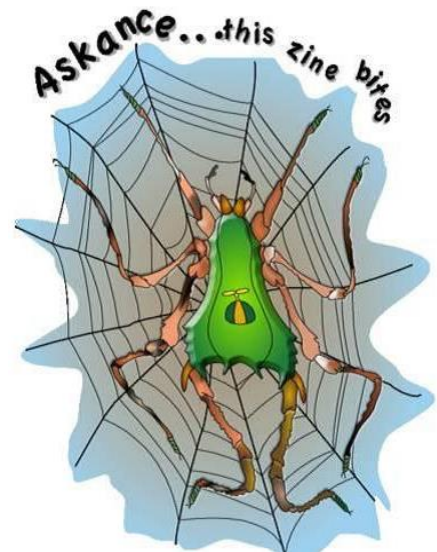
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What you have here in your hands (or on screen) is another Mythical Publication. Copies of this fine, back on a quarterly schedule fanzine can be had for The Usual, which means expressed interest, submission and eventual inclusion of articles and artwork, letters of comment, and cold hard cash in the amount of \$3.00 USD if you want a printed copy mailed to you. Bribes are also accepted. Of course, if you send in locs, articles, and artwork, you just earned a life-time free subscription. Consider yourself lucky, indeed.

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**Art Credits**

Front Cover by Steve Stiles; Sheryl Birkhead – 2; Teddy Harvia – 13, 19; photos by Lloyd Penney – 11, 12, 13; clip art – 14, 24, 27, 37; nicked off the internet – 3, 4, 5, 10, 16, 18, 22, 29, 30, 38

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## Time keeps on slipping, slipping...

Indeed it does. After all, the issue in front of you was supposed to appear in January of 2019, and if I am reading the calendar correctly, it is now mid-July of 2019, so it is A Good Thing that Steve Stiles' cover art for this Steampunk—themed issue did not have a date imprint. That makes it very easy to simply ignore the time element and still produce an issue that definitely needed the chance to germinate and grow. Quite frankly, that works for me. In any event, no apologies are forthcoming from this quarter, so it is time to get on with the show. Or, to be more precise, the fanzine.

## Put a few gears on it and call it Steampunk

Or so goes the song by Sir Reginald Pikelevant, Esq., released back in 2011. In actuality, Steampunk does not require an exorbitant amount of hardware adorning one's clothing, baggage, armaments, or whatever. When Valerie and I devised and began to create our Steampunk outfits, we kept the hardware add-ons to a minimum, instead opting for more of a cohesive costume. Hers is a Sphinx tamer named Philomena Tiberias Barnum – yes, P.T. Barnum – while mine is a more genteel intellectual sort who goes by the moniker of Professor Comes Jennimore Fooper – one C.J. Fooper, for short – a schoolmaster at the Highland School of Degenerate Literates. Half the fun of creating your own Steampunk character is devising the back-story, and boy, have we had a blast doing ours.



Overall, in my mind Steampunk is more about an attitude and a general sense of wondrous adventure, exploring the “what ifs” of a time that might have been that offers a range of experiences from highly romanticized adventure to the bleakness of war, pestilence, and a positively dystopian view of humankind. Steampunk literature thus ranges from energetic, fun adventures for a young adult audience to serious explorations of human foibles and fears.

Already mentioned is the character building and costume creation aspect of the genre, but something that sets Steampunk apart from science fiction fandom is the musical side. Because the literature is a genre mash-up, so is the music. Listen to any of the steampunk channels on Pandora and you can hear the influences of classic rock, folk, jazz, country, Dixieland, techno, metal, progressive, and punk rock in the recordings of artists like Steampunk Giraffe, Professor Elemental, Darwin Prophet, and dozens more. In the first article of this issue I will do my best to expand on these initial musings to put readers into the Steampunk milieu. I surveyed a handful of popular Steampunk authors and pulled their responses into an article about writing this particular type of story. Then I gathered together contributions from some



other folks who enjoy the genre, and even include a young adult steampunk story I wrote a few years ago. As for the other people involved this time around, here they are:

## Who is in this issue

### Bill Fischer

I am extremely happy to welcome Bill back into these pages with a new Figby cartoon strip. Last issue I mentioned that Bill was recuperating from a heart attack, and his computer was recovering as well, so when he emailed me recently about doing Figby again, I was thrilled. Wish him well, folks, and let's see what our favorite little lab assistant is up to these days.



### Teddy Harvia

He really doesn't need an introduction, but this Hugo award winning fan artist – who is also planning on helping out for next year's Corflu here in College Station, Texas (which I am chairing, by the way) – sent in a batch of illustrations that are perfect little comic strips. Each features Harvia's distinctive style and his well-known sense of humor. Next issue (in three months, I definitely hope!) should see the return of "Chat: the Fourth Fhannish Ghod." I am looking forward to that already.

### Lloyd Penney

As this issue is hitting the electronic newsstand known as efanazines.com, Lloyd and his wife Yvonne have recently returned from a jaunt to England, enjoyed their trip for assorted reasons, one of which was meeting with Steampunk-interested friends of theirs, besides seeing all sort of sights around London and England. In their daytime lives, Yvonne is retired, which Lloyd would love to be, but they traipse around their corner of Canada plying their Steampunk wares at various festivals and conventions, and that is the subject of Lloyd's article herein.

### Taral Wayne

Besides being a prolific writer of fan articles and artwork, not to mention producing numerous fanzines, Taral enjoys writing fiction. His contribution to this issue fits very neatly as a short pastiche of a famous Victorian era detective, and as anybody who has ever hung around fandom, they know I love a painful pun. The ones that hurt are usually the best.

A special welcome goes to the Steampunk authors whose responses to the questionnaire made the first article possible: **Gail Carriger**, **Paul di Filippo**, **Jonathan Fesmire**, and **Rie Sheridan Rose**. Sadly, Cherie Priest is under a deadline crunch and other affairs, so she could not contribute. Still, I thank Cherie for responding as "interested, but sorry I cannot."



# ALL STEAMED UP: AN INTRODUCTION



When I stop and try to remember the first “steampunk” novel I ever read, I guess that would have to be *The Anubis Gate* (1983) by Tim Powers, which I read about a decade after it was published. Or it might have been Michael Moorcock’s *The Warlord of the Air*, published back in 1971, and it has been years since I read that book. Then again, I was a big fan of *The Wild Wild West* television show, which aired from 1967-1969, and then *The Adventures of Brisco County, Jr.*, which aired for only one season (1993-1994), but was also a lot of fun. Add into the mix that I have always enjoyed H. G. Wells’ novel *The Time Machine* (1895) and the various works of Jules Verne were all set in the steam-powered era. Ergo, it could be concluded that the seed for my being a Steampunk fan was firmly implanted. Frankly, I did not even know at that time the term actually existed; according to popular tradition in this field, author K. W. Jeter coined the term in the late 1980s. Who knew? Heck, I have even written an article about Mark Twain being a Steampunk author during the age of steam, which appeared in Thomas Sadler’s fanzine *The Reluctant Famulus #102* a number of years ago. (FYI: that article is now being revised for publication in the literary journal *Mark Twain Studies*, which I want to have done before I get too involved with fall semester this year.)

My real interest in this sub-genre of the overall science fiction field began not quite a full decade ago when I read Cherie Priest’s *Boneshaker* (2009), the first of her Clockwork Universe books. I immediately began looking for other similar Steampunk-styled novels not only online, but also in our local Half-Price Bookstore, which is where I discovered the novels of Scott Westerfield and James Blaylock. Shortly after Gail Carriger’s Parasol Protectorate series began with *Soulless* (2009), those books really got Valerie and I hooked on Steampunk. When DeepSouthCon 49 was paired with FenCon VIII up in Dallas in 2011 (its convention nickname was “Southern Steam”), we brought the entire book series (up to that point) with us for Miss Gail to autograph. That weekend was also the debut of our Steampunk costumes. We had a blast, and quite frankly, FenCon VIII/DSC 49 is on my all time favorite conventions list.

All this leads up to this issue of *Askance* featuring articles, fiction, and reviews of things Steampunky. Accumulating the material took longer than expected, but the result is well worth the effort. Lloyd Penney graciously contributed his write-up being a Steampunk vendor and sent pictures of same, and Taral Wayne had a short fiction piece that very nicely fits in with the theme. At the end of last year I emailed a bunch of Steampunk authors to see if they’d be interested in answering a short list of questions for this issue, and received a lot of good responses. My thanks to Gail Carriger, Paul Di Filippo, Jonathan Fesmire, and Rie Sheridan Rose for contributing. Sadly, Cherie Priest had to bow out due to deadlines. Like I said, it has been fun to assemble this issue, and I hope my readers enjoy it, too.



## WRITING STEAMPUNK:

*author perspectives from*  
Gail Carriger, Paul di Filippo,  
Jonathan Fesmire, and Rie  
Sheridan Rose.

It is inevitable that readers attempt to become writers. Such has long been a dream of mine. I remember typing up my own versions of the Hardy Boys mysteries - I think I wrote three of these abbreviated mysteries total, calling them the Roter Boys, or something like that –using sheets of carbon paper to make two or

three copies of the original story. I even remember inserting the paper sidewise (what is now called landscape format) so I could type two columns, folded them in half, and *voilà!*, the end result was a mini-book. Right proud of these initial efforts, I was, but being realistic, those are probably best forgotten. Even so, young readers give writing a go when the desire hits.

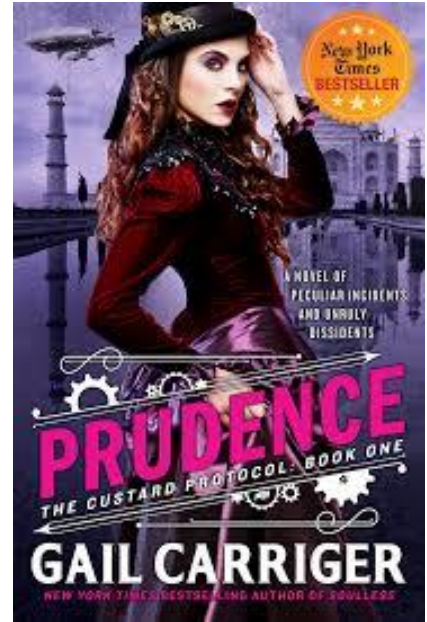
At about the same time my dad got me reading Hardy Boys mysteries (he was a mystery buff and owned a few hundred paperback and hardcover mystery books), he and mom got me a couple Tom Swift, Jr. books and Rick Brandt Science Mysteries. Obviously, those were my initial introduction to science fiction, and the die had been cast. Naturally I then tried writing science fiction stories.

This little preamble helps set up the reason why I sent a five-question survey to some Steampunk authors earlier this year, and their responses form the basis of this article. Using my interest in writing fiction – and yes, I have dabbled in Steampunk fiction as well (see “Sun Thunder” in this issue) – I based the questions on the writing aspect of this genre. Here they are:

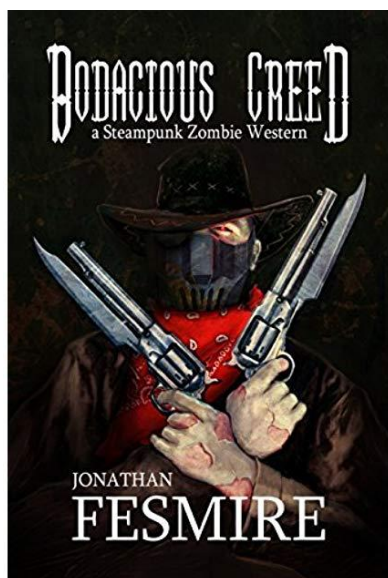
- 1) What attracted you to the Steampunk genre?
- 2) What are the challenges that writing Steampunk fiction presents that are different from other genres (fantasy, science fiction, mystery, etc.)?
- 3) Steampunk literature has been described as a mash-up genre, combining history, science fiction, fantasy, romance, adventure, mystery, and supernatural elements. Do you think that is a strength or a weakness of the Steampunk genre?
- 4) Like other genres, Steampunk includes fashion, music, artwork, and literature, but do you believe Steampunk is a passing fad or is it here to stay?

- 5) Other than your own work, which books and writers in the genre do you recommend as essential reading or good starter sources?

Speaking for myself, I really like the fact that Steampunk literature is a mash-up genre, and when done well it is a lot of fun to read. For that matter, authors naturally can take a serious or comic approach to a story, and so long as the story is told well, that is perfectly fine for many readers. Take a look at the incredible popularity of Gail Carriger's Parasol Protectorate series of books. Rie Sheridan Rose even picked up on this aspect of Steampunk's appeal in her answer to the first question of Steampunk's attraction: "When I was first starting The Conn-Mann Chronicles, Steampunk was all the rage. I loved the gadgets, and I have been Victorian by inclination most of my life, so it seemed the perfect place for me. One thing I noticed was that--apart from Gail Carriger--most of it was dark in nature. I wanted to show the lighter side of the genre. The rollicking adventure side." I agree with Rie's assessment that much of the early forays into Steampunk literature were on the dark side, and much like science fiction, mysteries, or any other genre, a writer can tell a story with a humorous voice. Many of Mark Twain's stories, for example, are filled with sly wit and pointed sarcasm about the human condition. Steampunk can do that, too.



So how did other writers get into Steampunk? Paul di Filippo said that "In college, I had a double major of English and History, so I was always fascinated by the past. The record of civilization seemed to me a trove of bizarre and fabulous stories. But I never considered writing naturalistic historical fiction. In retrospect, writers like Avram Davidson provided a template for blending fantastika with history. But when folks like Tim Powers and KW Jeter began manifesting this hybrid form in more contemporary (i.e., 1980s) ways, I was instantly taken with its alluring potential." For Gail Carriger, it was that "The Victorian Gothic literature movement saw the birth of science fiction. The current steampunk literary movement is a weird kind of full circle, taking sci-fi back to its roots, and I love that." And even Jonathan Fesmire felt this allure as well: "Like many, the first thing that attracted me to Steampunk has got to be the aesthetic: goggles, top hats, and retro-tech weapons included. While Victorian England seems to be most associated with Steampunk, one can write stories that take place anywhere in the world during the Victorian era, with that retro-futuristic technology, and that's all Steampunk." So we could conclude that Steampunk reinvigorated readers with that old-fashioned gosh-wow sensawunda we had as teenagers first discovering science fiction and fantasy.



As with any kind of writing, an author has to do research to make their stories hang together logically and cohesively. I learned this a long time through my own efforts at telling a story. You have to think everything through. Therefore, the second question addresses the challenges that writers of Steampunk face that might be different from other genres. Paul di Filippo said that "The amount of research necessary to write good steampunk is daunting. One feels the commitment to get the past right, to depict its otherness, even if one is then set to detour it laterally. But on the other hand, the research is



often inspirational, insofar as it discloses things so weird they could not be invented, which the writer can then employ. Also, if one wants to use historical figures in the steampunk fiction, the burden is to choose just the right one. I am so tired of stories that rely on the most famous personages of history. I do not want to read another tale involving, say, Mark Twain as protagonist, even though I adore Twain. Overdone! I like to pick "minor" figures who offer more novelty, such as when I chose the Italian poet Carducci to star in my tale "Monarch of the Feast." Rie Sheridan Rose makes a very good point about establishing verisimilitude in your story: "Getting the science at least plausible (except for the bits of magic I seem to throw in here and there...) Since we are dealing with a real time period in the past, you can't change it willy-nilly without some sort of explanation. Though I'd rather tell a good story than a strictly accurate one, and always preface things with 'a 1870's New York (or Ireland) that never exactly was...'"

Not surprisingly, Gail Carriger and Jonathan Fesmire echoed what Paul and Rie noted. For Miss Gail, "Well it needs a ton of historical research. There is a lot of England-centric steampunk out there. I believe people are interested in seeing steampunk throughout the Empire, as well as some that deals with the more disenfranchised elements of British society. There is a delicate balance to steampunk. Writers must research the language of the day. However, getting too flowery can make a story inaccessible to the modern reader. It is hard to make everyone happy. There are always going to be readers who want hard science-orientated steampunk and others who can't wade through all that technobabble. I like to say I write steampunk-light – a gateway drug, if you will. I also feel you can't go



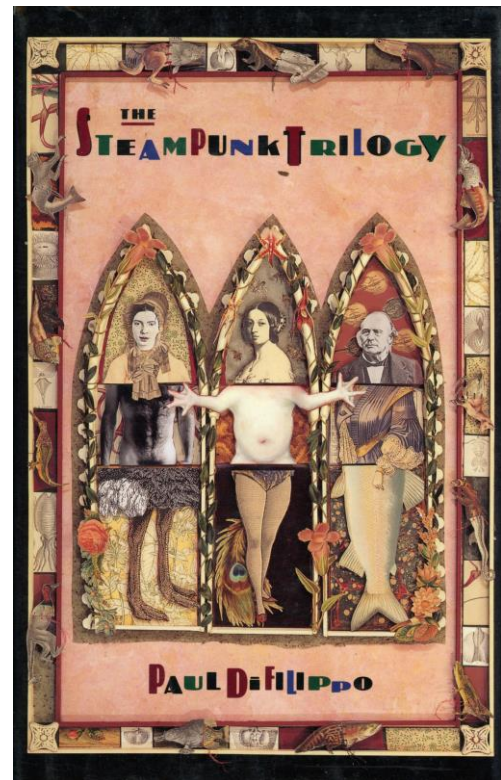
wrong with comedy, that's always lacking, even in the broader genres of SF/F, romance, horror, and mystery." Jonathan Fesmire echoes her comments by stating, "I'd say that Steampunk has a blend of challenges inherent in other genres. If you're writing an alternate history Steampunk story, you need to research actual history to help ground your story. You can deviate as much as you like, but it's important to have an idea of what life was like in whatever setting you're adapting. That means there's a good deal of world building involved. Every Steampunk writer is going to have his or her own ideas on how the technology works and exactly what sorts of gadgets exist." Fesmire's final comment promotes the key element that separates each writer's work: the different perspectives they bring to their stories is what creates the distinctive voices in what I believe is a fun literary genre for both reader and writer.

Since this is such a mash-up genre, I was wondering if Steampunk might have a short shelf life. To a person, each writer felt that Steampunk would exist for as long as there were readers. Then again, blending science fiction, alternate history, fantasy, supernatural and horror elements, all contribute to creating a vibrant and flexible genre. "Perhaps we need to categorize genres differently, too," Jonathan Fesmire opined. "Science fiction and fantasy relate to how a world works. Does it have advanced technology, magic, or both? Romance, adventure, and mystery have to do with events, human relationships, and man's relationship with the world. All three of those things can easily be part of a single story, and in many cases probably should be. So what we're really saying is that Steampunk can have technology and/or magic, and that any sort of human interest story can work as a Steampunk story. That sounds like a strength to me." Gail Carriger felt that all this depends on the individual writer. Diversity is strength, according to Rie Sheridan Rose: "Having used bits



of most of those in my own writing, I think it is a strength. Personally, I don't think there is ANY genre that doesn't have elements of others within it. Steampunk is just more honest about it. Though the reality is, you should use whatever elements make the story you want to tell come to life." And then Paul di Filippo concluded that he thinks that "hybrid forms--as organisms or as literary constructs--exhibit more vigor and power than monoculture overbred strains." Thus, the final conclusion as to Steampunk's longevity is practically assured due to its assimilation of assorted genres.

Along that line of thinking, Paul di Filippo mentioned that "A simple Googling of the word gets 160,000,000 hits! The scene seems as vibrant as ever, and I think it is now a permanent part of both fantastika and the culture at large." Rie Sheridan Rose adds that she thinks "the fascination with the time period has been around for over a hundred years. As long as people are interested in Victoriana there is a place for Steampunk. It may fade from the spotlight a bit, but I don't think it is going away any time soon. I HOPE not. I have at least three more books in mind for the series." While Jonathan Fesmire opted out on predicting how long Steampunk might exist - I'm really bad at predicting this sort of thing," he did admit that "For me, it's mostly about writing good stories that, hopefully, will be enjoyed for decades or even centuries to come." Gail Carriger's thoughts on this question are a very good summation of everyone's contribution: "Actually I believe that Steampunk is unique in that it isn't entirely literary – it has ties to the green movement, the maker community, historical reenactment societies, and the fashion world. Should it crest in popularity within all of these different areas at the same time, steampunk might well rise to the forefront of world counterculture. But I don't think that is likely to occur. Right now, I believe it has immense escapist appeal. With real life in chaos, steampunk offers up an alternative lifestyle of sedate civilized behavior. Do I see that lasting? Probably not, but then no one attributed urban fantasy with much staying power either, so I continue to hope."



As for the final question – which stories or writers do you recommend for readers who are new to Steampunk? – the answers are interesting, and unsurprising. Most of them go back to the early works, but also reveal the wide variety of styles and topics that Steampunk can ramble through:

#### **Gail Carriger:**

Well I started with [League of Extraordinary Gentleman](#). But I wouldn't want to set myself up as a voice of authority. I'm sure the Steampunk Scholar <http://steampunkscholar.blogspot.com/> or the Airship Ambassador <http://www.airshipambassador.com/> could help you better.

#### **Jonathan Fesmire:**

I highly recommend *The Dark Tower* by Stephen King, the entire series. It has a blend of genres, but there are definitely western and some steampunk elements. That series is what turned me on to

western science fiction in the first place. Michelle Lowe's "Legacy" series takes place a bit earlier than the Victorian era, but has lots of steampunk and fantasy elements and is a lot of fun.

**Paul di Filippo:**

I mentioned Powers and Jeter. Of course, add James Blaylock to that list. Pynchon's *MASON & DIXON* is a great book from outside genre confines. Stephenson's *BAROQUE CYCLE* of course. A writer who, I fear, is becoming unjustifiably forgotten since his death is Charles Sheffield, and his stories featuring Erasmus Darwin, grandfather of Charles, are great. Caroline Stevermer's work, while maybe not pure steampunk, offers much allied pleasure as well.

**Rie Sheridan Rose:**

As I say, The Parasol Protectorate series by Gail Carriger was my main introduction to the genre. I also loved Gail Dayton's Blood Magic trilogy. *A Midsummer Night's Steampunk* by Scott Tarbet is amazing. And Alyson Grauer's *On the Island of Sound and Wonder*. I've not read as widely as I should have...but a lot of what I've read are things you might not know about.

All in all, these four purveyors of Steampunk agree that this particular literary genre is very enjoyable to write despite the effort needed to research and produce a well-written story or novel. This is true for any novel, of course, but the fans of all four of these writers definitely enjoy their efforts, that's for sure. I only wish that Cherie Priest was able to contribute to this survey, but she was busy working on meeting the deadline of a new book. Can't wait to read that one! Maybe if she had a typewriter like the one pictured below it could be finished in a trice. Then again, I don't think any writer worth their weight in salt and peter would want to sully this keyboard. It's too shiny, and we like shiny!



# BECOMING A STEAMPUNK VENDOR

## Lloyd Penney

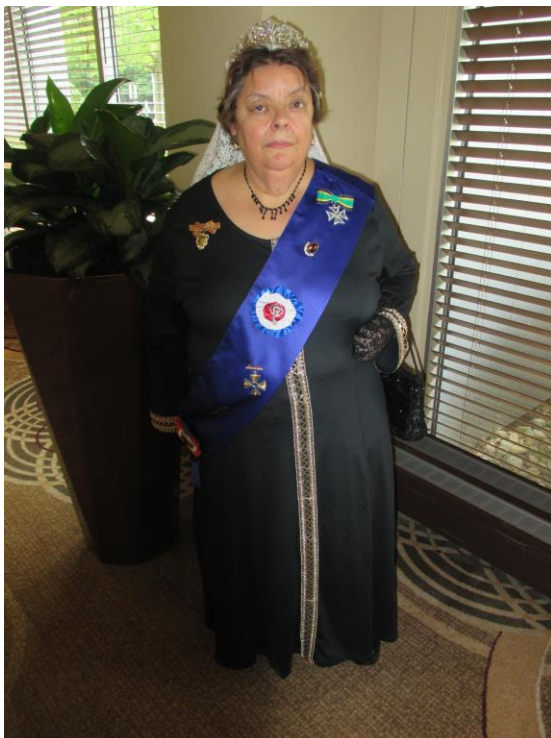
Over the past seven or so years, Yvonne and I have become, to our surprise and delight, successful vendors of steampunk jewelry through our little business, Penney's Steampunk General Store. We belong to a number of steampunk groups online, and we search online for other steampunk shows we might vend at, or see if there are craft shows that might give us some good sales. It's been great fun, it's allowed us to make many new friends and acquaintances, who are steampunk fans and other vendors, and it's allowed us to be creative, and sell our wares. Besides the jewelry, we also sell costume pieces that Yvonne makes, plus her famous Hawaiian-style shirts. (Hey, that's why we call ourselves a General Store...we can sell a little bit of everything, whatever comes our way.)



Where did all of this start? We've both been connected to SF fandom for more than 40 years now, but what got us to where we are now? We never expected to go down this way, but we are happy with

where we are. Some of you know that we were on convention committees in the Toronto area for 30 years, and of those years, I spent about 12 running dealers' rooms. I learned a lot by running those rooms, but what seemed most important was for the dealers to have small items to sell. I am not sure if it still applies today, but the people who came to the conventions then had a limited income and a limited amount of discretionary money to spend, especially if they took a room at the con hotel. They were worried about making sure they had something to eat (yay, con suite), and if they could pay off their rooms, or have enough money to gas up the car, or pay for transit home. They still wanted to buy something for themselves in the dealers' room before they left, a little something to enjoy, not too big, and not too expensive, a suitable souvenir of the convention. I tried to tell our vendors that; most listened, and they were successful.

When we made the hard decision to resign from convention committees (we've been gone about 8 years now), we realized we'd need something to fill the gap. We





attended our local convention in Toronto, Ad Astra, as just plain members, and saw a presentation from the fledgling Toronto Steampunk Society, and saw a way to get back into one of our earlier interests, costuming. (We competed in a number of Worldcon masquerades in the early 80s. Anyone remember the Royal Canadian Mounted Starfleet?) We attempted costumes, and they were admired, so we carried on. I wondered what I could do to participate more, and we did see online that a lot of steampunk people created jewelry. Yvonne bought me a set of jewelry-making tools (on sale, half-price!), we bought old jewelry at second-hand stores, and costume jewelry at antique shows, and I started taking them apart and creating something new from the resulting bits. These days, that's called upcycling, I think. Then came sources of charms for earrings and necklaces, earring hooks, jump rings, lobster claws...all the findings needed to make more items. (Thank you, Arton Beads and Michaels in Toronto! As friends say, a great source of crafters' crack...)

We needed an outlet for our new merchandise, but we also needed to lighten our SF collection. Some books, lots of toys and collectors' glasses, the usual tat you pick up along the way. I'd run enough dealers' rooms, so we thought we could my experience to be dealers ourselves. We reduced our stock by selling to some local collectors' stores in Toronto, but with what we had left, we bought a table or two from the other local convention at the time, Toronto Trek, and we sold a lot. With the last two years of vending at that con, we added in our steampunk jewelry and the shirts Yvonne had been making for many years before, and we cleaned up, and had a lot less to take home.

Success! But what else did we need? We needed...more places to sell our goods, more equipment (chairs, tables, a gazebo tent for outdoor shows, other display items), and always, more stuff to make our merchandise out of. Our friends answered our questions, and we expanded our operations. We took tables at local SF conventions in Toronto and area, but discovered that we quickly exhausted our market. We have also tried craft shows, with various results. We also saw that there was a quickly expanding series of steampunk-related events rising up in central and southern Ontario, and we became a part of that network, sometimes vending, sometimes just attending, but always getting the word out. We have discovered that we are about as busy as we were being on the convention committees, as we were usually researching places we could advertise the con. A lot of that was pre-Internet, so paper flyers were very important. All of the activities we take part in, all the places we go, all the tables and insurance we buy so we can vend...Penney's Steampunk General Store has paid for it all. As soon as it doesn't...



Well, I guess we'd fold it up. Nothing lasts forever, and while there are many professional vendors out there who have been around for decades, selling their wares at huge pro-run cons, we have always done this for fun, but at some point the fun (and the money) might run out. We are thinking of it, for we are getting older, but we now have a full schedule of places to go to for tables in 2019, and I think we will do very well indeed. We are assisting with the staging of some of these shows now, and we always help out with publicity and advertising. When shall we say it's enough? Too tired? Not interested anymore? Too broke? Too decrepit? Any of that could happen. In all of our years in fandom, we have always

have more fun when we were busy, when we were a part of things. We've never been passive consumers.

Our old friend Mike Glicksohn, rest his soul, gave us Glicksohn's Maxim...IF<sup>3</sup>. If Fandom Isn't Fun, It's Futile. We have always gone where the creativity and fun was, but we also made a point of examining our activities from time to time, and seeing if we needed to make some changes. Going from con committee to steampunk vendor was a real left turn, but it was what we've needed. It feels great to sell a pieces of jewelry to someone who enjoys it, and wears it again and again, the same way it felt good to run or help to run a successful convention. Our fandom has always been fun, never futile, and steampunk is still fresh enough that it is that different kind of fun we needed.



# The Grime is Afoot; or The Bedaubed Brogans

## Taral Wayne

Watson had seen Holmes solve many cases more difficult than the one that presently occupied the famed detective's vast deductive powers, but – as usual – the faithful amanuensis was mystified. They had traveled by the night train all the way from Baker Street to the microscopic speck in the Bradshaw that was Pigglesby-Folly-on-the-Gooseberry, only for Holmes to arrive at his solution to the crime after only a few moments of deduction!



The appreciative audience of the small village – the local constable, the village doctor and the assorted colourful rustics who had gathered to gawk – all but applauded as the great detective made his bow, and the body was taken away.

“I frankly don’t see how you do it, Holmes,” Watson protested. “I saw nothing to indicate that the traveling drummer was guilty, until you confronted him with an accusation.”

“That is because you see, but you do not *observe*, Watson!”

It took the ever-loyal but befuddled doctor a moment before he fully apprehended the *bon mot* devised for him ... and, even then, he wasn’t sure whether it was intentional. Holmes was brilliant, but Watson was not known for his subtlety of perception.

“Look around you, my dear Watson. Surely you observed everything that *I* saw, and yet the scene seems as devoid of meaning to you as the dottle at the end of your pipe. Look around, and describe all that you see!”

Watson looked about, and at first glance saw nothing that he was able to remark on ... but then, he gradually grew aware of details in the surrounding scene of the crime. Apart from where the body had lain, there were the marks of a struggle on the ground. A number of commonplace objects had spilled from the victim’s trouser pockets, with no obvious attempt to gather them up. There was nothing of apparent interest along the lane but a split-rail fence, the hedgerow on the other side and a picturesque thatched farmhouse a stone’s throw away.

The doctor described all that he saw.

“Look closer, Watson! Surely you saw more deeply into this matter than *that!*”

Watson tried again, this time striving to give greater thought to the *meaning* to what he saw, not merely to give names to it. He remembered a pocket comb with an inlaid tortoiseshell body that had two teeth broken off from one end. Did that mean anything, or was it broken in a struggle with the assailant? Did it mean anything that the victim had only a shilling and eleven “*p*” in his pocket? Probably not. Watson



observed that there were slight traces in the road that a bicycle had used the lane at some point, but the rider had kept a safe distance from foot traffic. The victim had worn a pair of prudent brogues, signifying that he intended a walk. A small knife used to trim cigars had fallen from his vest pocket, but he was without lucifers. Did *that* mean anything? His breast pocket handkerchief was on the ground. His spectacles had needed a cleaning. His derby hat had fallen upside down ... this was maddening! What possible meaning could there be in *any* of that?

"I'm sorry, Holmes. But I have wracked my brains, but I cannot see how any of this led you to believe that the salesman was the guilty party. It might have been anyone else – that farmer whose cottage is down the lane, the stuttering village constable, that waspish woman with the cast in her eye ... any of them might have been the miscreant!"

"Far from the case! In fact, it could not have been anyone other than the guilty party, who was almost an embarrassment to me that he was so easily identified. Did you not notice how well-used this lane is? The chalky soil hereabout is quite distinctive, and it can be seen on every pair of shoes that I have noticed since we arrived. Each was similarly disfigured by a layer of grayish mud. All but for two pair, Watson! One pair was worn by the victim, whose boots also showed a layer of chalky mud, but beneath it as well, a layer of red clay not found in this immediate area. The other pair was worn by a man who had literally followed in the footsteps of his victim, and who also had a stratum of red mud hardened on *his* boots. Only the traveling salesman's shoes *also* bore such distinctive layers of mud ... and this left me in no doubt as to who had done the murder!"

Although Watson may have been a trifle more slow than his brilliant companion, he could be depended on to come upon the same conclusions with a little encouragement ... but he was nevertheless chagrined that Holmes felt it necessary to add:

"It's sedimentary, my dear Watson..."

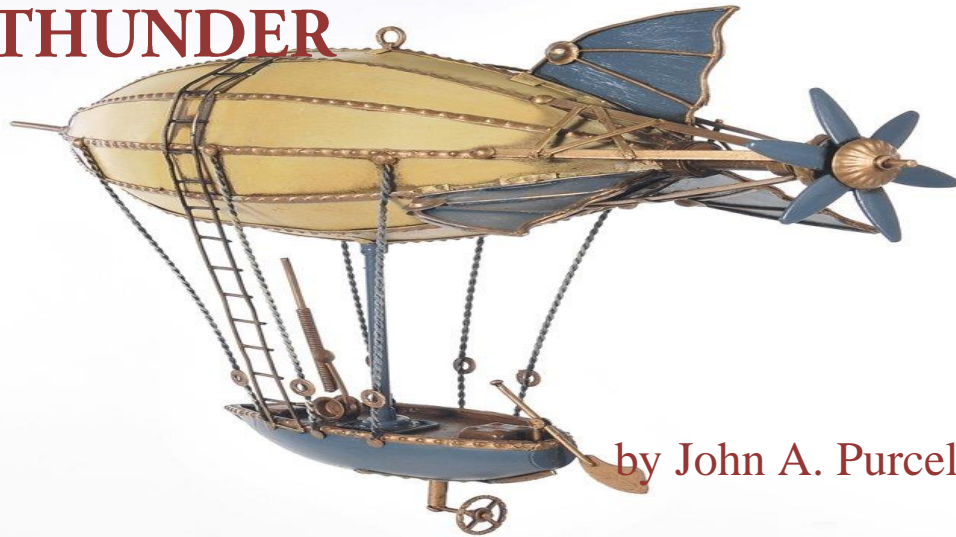
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If you think I shy away from bad puns, you are sorely wrong. In fact, I have become quite adept in a comic genre known as "dad jokes." For example:

While packing for a seminar at which he was presenting a paper on Greek tragedies, a famous University literature professor noticed there was a tear in the elbow of his best suitcoat. Horrified, he went to a tailor in town he personally knew who did excellent work. Getting to the shop, the professor showed the tear to the tailor, who said with a wink, "Euripides?"

Without missing a beat, the professor responded, "Eumendides?"

# SUN THUNDER



by John A. Purcell

"Why, Penelope, dear, I just don't understand how you cannot be excited right now. Just look! Why, we must be at least one hundred feet up in the air!"

Penelope Seabright looked at her mother with as much exasperation as she could muster. Every Sunday afternoon - well, at least on every nice Sunday afternoon - her parents would take a two to three hour jaunt on their personal air-yacht, the *Sun Thunder*, which really was exciting at first, but the novelty wore off after a month's worth of flights. She sighed, gazed down at the cobblestoned streets of East Dallas. Ladies and gentlemen out for walks with their children gawped up at them, pointing and yelling. Penny could hear their voices, but not their words. A hundred feet up? Nope. Close, she thought, but not quite.

Her father, Colonel William Seabright, retired CSA, pulled hard on a rope, tacking the balloon to the right against the wind. "Just like at sea," he exulted. "A glorious day with the wind in your hair and a beautiful woman at your side." He beamed at his wife, who smiled demurely back, hiding her rose-tinged cheeks behind a blue and white hand fan that matched her shawl. Penelope rolled her eyes, stared out at the flatness that was Texas. "My Lord," she prayed under her breath. "Please make these next three hours go faster."

That didn't happen. If anything, time slowed down in proportion to her boredom. Her father's incessant chatter only served to keep her awake, unlike her mother, who seemed to hang on his every word. Exasperation seemed the only thing to keep her mind occupied.

Of course, she could always strike up a conversation with D.B. He may be the *Sun Thunder's* pilot and mechanic, but at least he told interesting stories. At present he was crouched before valves and pressure gauges on the contraptions that kept the air yacht aloft. It always sounded like magical gobbledygook when he explained how the ship operated, but it was the man's passion that fascinated her. It didn't hurt that Henry David Bertram Howell was a handsome man of 32 - so *old* compared to her mere 19 years - with piercing sky-blue eyes that practically shone like gemstones when he talked about his work. That helped. A lot, she admitted.

She silently walked over to stand behind his right shoulder. "So how far up are we, D.B.?" she asked just loud enough for him to hear but not her parents.

The mechanic smiled at her. "For that, I need stand up, Miss Penelope." And stand up he did, stretching his arms over his head, making him look even taller than his already impressive six foot, two-inch muscular frame. His large hands grasped the edge of the gondola as he peered over the side, said, "I reckon about 90 feet. Won't be long before we're at optimum height so's to catch the proper

windstream to take us out east a-ways, as usual."

"Yeah, as usual." Penelope sighed again, louder this time, which made him look at her askance. She recognized that look - he gave it to her a lot, mostly when she got huffy at her parents, or school, or life in general - and turned her head. Still, she followed him over to the rail. *Not too close*, she told herself. "They always take the same route on these afternoon 'jaunts.' 'Ooh, so lovely!'" She imitated her mother's voice precisely. "'Why, look, William! Isn't that the Trinity River? Ooh, it's so tiny from up here!'"

"Now, Miss Penelope, you know how much your mother loves these Sunday flights," he chided her. "And they're really not that bad. After all, you're not stuck inside reading a book or doing ciphering or sewing. All those lady-like things you're supposed to be doing."

She shivered at the thought. She hated those 'lady-like things' with a passion, especially sewing and knitting, which her mother constantly did no matter where they were. "True," she conceded and sighed again, not as loudly this time, glanced back to make sure her parents did not see her talking to their mechanic/pilot. They weren't. Instead, they were deeply engrossed, hand in hand, standing at the starboard rail, waving at passersby on the shrinking streets of East Dallas below them. "I suppose I can survive three hours with the birds."

"That's the spirit." He smiled at her again, making her knees weaken. *Oh, why does that happen? He's so old! Jarrett would have my hide if he ever saw me making googly-eyes at a, a...mechanic, of all people. How menial!*

"Scuse me a moment, Miss Penelope." The man stepped back to the bellows system. His alert eyes swept over everything. He reached up, tugged on a heavy cord that opened a canvas valve in the balloon's canopy. Air hissed out as he held the valve open for twenty seconds, slowed the airship's ascent as it reached an altitude of 300 feet - which the pilot dutifully announced loud enough for all to hear - and scudded ahead of a brisk west wind. Penelope looked in that direction, saw a distant line of gray clouds peppered with a scattering of little black dots.

"Well, have you ever seen clouds that looked like that, Mister Howell?" He lifted his head and followed her gaze. "What could cause that condition? Dirt or debris in the air? I've read that tornadoes lift all sorts of things way up into the atmosphere where they're carried by the winds across many states, but I've never actually seen objects that didn't belong in the air before."

"That could be," he replied, then his eyes narrowed, widened with surprise. "Now that's mighty peculiar, miss. Do those spots look like they're growing to you, too?"

Hard as it seemed to believe, they were. And rapidly, too. "Birds? Hawks or eagles, maybe?" she suggested.

"They'd have to be really big birds, I'll tell you that. I don't see any wings, do you?"

"Not at all. And they don't weave about like birds would, either."

As they watched this strange phenomenon develop, the black dots grew from a set of indistinct blotches against the clouds into six separate objects with two distinct shapes: a larger, tear-drop shape over a smaller dark form that looked as if was hanging from the other. Even stranger, very unlike birds, these shapes were flying not in a typical echelon pattern, but were staggered in the sky and appeared to be heading straight for the *Sun Thunder*, which by now had passed the edges of Dallas. Below stretched a seemingly endless vista of plains ending at the distant Great Trinity Forest. It was the mechanic who finally spoke what they were both thinking: "Those are not birds." He squinted, eyes then exploding wide in amazed fear. "Merciful heavens! They're piloted air-bikes! And I'm positive they don't mean on paying us a courtesy call. Master Seabright! Take your wife and daughter into the cabin straight away. We need to ready a defense."

William Seabright posed a powerful figure, even now, nearly twenty years after his military career ended as a full colonel in the army of the Confederate States of America. As Seabright stood and turned, even Howell could feel the man's strength. "Eh? What are you talking about, Howell?"



"Out there, sir," the mechanic pointed out to port. "A group of air-bikes is coming our way."

That got Colonel Seabright's attention. He crossed the twelve-foot wide deck in three long strides, and huffed angrily at the sight. "Damned hooligans!" he fumed, fists clenched on the gondola's wooden rail. "Just like in the papers. And not a single weapon on board! What I'd give for a pistol right now."

The mechanic thought fast, then ran over to the airship's machinery, opening a large toolkit with such force that the clang of the metal lid made Penelope jump even though she had been watching the whole time. Howell pulled out two long steel tools, giving a crowbar to the Colonel while brandishing a two-foot long pipe wrench himself. Seabright grunted his appreciation, saying, "Aye, a few whacks with this will put a dent in their plans."

"Provided their plans aren't that organized," observed Howell. He turned to Mrs. Seabright and Penelope, who stood behind them, terrified looks on their faces. "You'd best get inside the cabin, Ma'am, Miss Seabright. The colonel and I will make sure these ruffians won't get a thing, aside from a good whacking." He slapped the wrench into a palm for emphasis.



"I have heard about these 'air gangs,' as the papers call them," Mrs. Seabright said. "They've been known to swoop down out of the sky on shoppers, people strolling through the park, intent on creating all manner of trouble, usually flying off with their victim's valuables dangling from their overcoats. However could a criminal think of such a thing! It's positively maddening."

Her husband nodded, never taking his eyes off the approaching air-gang. "Aye, Lettie Mae, that's the truth." He looked at her, his gray eyes softening. "This time, though, I dare say they've chosen the wrong people to tussle with."

"Going after an airship is a new one for them," Penelope added. "I mean, after all, we *are* much larger than them. I wonder whatever they are thinking of."

The colonel snorted. "Jewelry, money. What else? It's not as if they can pocket anything larger than a silver dollar." Penelope's hands went to her neck, wrapped her fingers around a jade pendant hanging from a necklace of

handcrafted silver links held together by a matching cord.

"Whatever they're after," Howell interrupted, "they will be here very shortly; a few minutes at the most. Ladies, you'd best get inside. If they don't see you, that may work in our favor."

"Wishful thinking, Howell," the colonel said. "They're more than close enough to see we've been watching them. Still. Inside, Leticia, Penny." He gently guided them to the foredeck cabin, closed the door. The sound of a wooden beam sliding into place told the men that the women had soundly bolted the door shut. "Well," he said grimly, "let's give those lads a proper welcome, Howell."

Howell's estimate wasn't far off the mark. When the air bikes were within fifty feet of the airship Seabright and Howell could see the lead three - out of the six total - riders unraveling long ropes with grappling hooks at the end. It was obvious that they planned to board the *Sun Thunder*. The mechanic's keen eyes swept their opponents critically. "I'm not spotting any guns on any of them, Colonel," he said matter-of-factly, "but they might have small handguns and knives in those large pockets." His statement was acknowledged with a grunt.

"Indeed. And the best way to avoid finding out is to make it difficult for them to throw those hooks. Turn the ship to starboard quickly, Mr. Howell!"

"Aye, sir!" Even though nearly twenty years had passed since the end of the War Between the

States, the two men slipped into military mode as easily as putting on a shirt. Howell leaped to the controls, cranking the rudder around to the left, making the *Sun Thunder* veer right. From behind came angry shouts. Colonel Seabright's booming laugh very quickly was answered by a pistol shot. Howell heard the bullet whiz past, barely missing the ascent valve rope. For a moment he thought of trying to outclimb or outrace the sky bikes, then decided against that course since the bikes were obviously faster and more mobile. The best thing to do it seemed was to fight them. *And here I thought my fighting days were over*, he thought bitterly.

Another shot rang out. Howell didn't hear the ping of a bullet ricocheting off something, so that was good. At another brisk command he turned the ship sharply left, hoping to frustrate the air gang with the airship's evasive maneuvering. He marveled at how quickly the *Sun Thunder*, as large as it was, responded to his actions at the helm, but a quick glance over his left shoulder revealed that their pursuers were much closer. "Damn!" Howell cursed out loud, grateful that the women were safely locked in the fore-cabin, and cranked hard right.

"Watch it, Howell!" the Colonel shouted, the warning followed by a heavy thunk against the deck. He turned and watched a grappling hook sliding across the deck, followed its rope back to an air bike stopped in flight, allowing the airship's forward motion to bring the hook up against the aft rail, where it lodged firmly. A rowdy cheer went up from the hooligans as another hook came flying towards the *Sun Thunder*, this one wrapping itself tightly around an aft cross beam holding lines that led up to the 50 foot airbag that kept the ship aloft. If any of these hooks would catch one of those lines, let alone the airbag... Howell shuddered at the thought of what could happen.

The fast pace of this cat-and-mouse chase in the sky resulted in the combatants following a southeasterly course. Howell started thinking about what was below them: a river, some lakes, a forest. A big forest, come to think of it. The trees might cushion their landing, but unfortunately if the ship went down the branches would rip the airbag to shreds. He weighed their options as another grappling hook grabbed hold near the aft cabin, implanting itself in the rail opposite of the first hook. "These lads have a plan of attack all right, sir," he said to Colonel Seabright. "They're reeling us in like a big, wallowing fish."

Seabright's eyes lit up at that. "And a fish with sharp teeth can cut a fishing line! Where's your bloody Bowie knife?"

"Back in my shop, sir, blast it! Of all the days to not bring that along. I never thought I'd need it up here in the middle of a lovely Sunday afternoon!"

The colonel looked at him grimly. "Well, these will have to make do," he said, jamming the crowbar between one of the grappling hooks and the wooden rail, leaned into the bar, attempting to force the hook out, which wriggled but did not dislodge. "This one is sunk in good," he angrily muttered. The bikes were less than twenty feet away, their riders pulling on the ropes to draw themselves in. "Well," he said. "Prepare to be boarded." The Colonel abruptly stood, assuming a menacing pose. "What is it you lot want? There's nothing here that the likes of you hooligans would care about! Leave us be or suffer the consequences!" He accented that last statement with a wave of the crowbar.

One ruffian, a dark-haired teen wearing a black bowler hat adorned with dirty goggles, pulled his air bike to the rail, and clambered none too gracefully aboard the *Sun Thunder*, arranging his overcoat to reveal a shoulder-holstered pistol. He took a step towards Howell and Seabright, tried to look authoritative. It didn't work as just then the sudden weight of the other two air bikes tethering tight to the airship made it suddenly list to the rear, making everyone lose their balance. Howell hoped this shift would make their leader - or so he assumed this lad was - fall down, but the boy grabbed the rail for support and sneered unevenly at the men.

"A lovely show of bravado." The boy's voice was deeper than expected, given his appearance, made him sound older. "Allow me to dictate how this shall go, gentlemen."

Seabright's laugh rang out. "Well, now. Don't you sound all high and mighty." He glared down at the ruffian, the crowbar in his massive right hand. Howell knew that the colonel was hoping the young

man would come within swinging range. That didn't happen. The boy stood still as two others climbed aboard to stand on either side of their leader. All three, Howell noticed, wore essentially the same outfit: goggles attached to either a black or dark gray bowler hat, long gray topcoats with bulging pockets over black trousers, gray shirts, black vests, everything smudged with dirt and grease. Not a single one of them looked old enough to shave. In fact, Howell was certain Miss Seabright was older than every member of this group. The thought made him feel protective of the girl.

Their leader gave another crooked sneer. "Valuables?" he said. "I am positive that something will turn up. After all, where there's women, there's usually jewelry adorning them."

*Well, that answers two questions at once,* thought Howell: they had seen Mrs. Seabright and her daughter, and what they were after. The men exchanged knowing glances. There was no way they would make this easy.

The Colonel spoke first. "And I am telling you again, there is nothing valuable aboard this ship. Now get off before I throw you off!"

The air gang leader's two cronies edged closer, presenting a unified front. Young or not, they looked like they meant business. The one on the leader's left opened his overcoat, revealing a knife in a finely detailed leather sheath. "What do you think, Toothless?" he said in a low voice. "It's only two of them against the three of us, an' I bet they ain't got anything more than what's in their hands to fight with."

"Shut up, Keene!" spat the boy named Toothless. Looking closely, Howell noticed two upper front teeth were missing and couldn't decide whether or not that made the boy more menacing. It didn't matter: the boy had a gun, and Keene had a knife. Odds were that the one standing to Toothless' right was likewise armed with a knife. All Howell and Seabright had were the crowbar and pipe wrench, which were effective only at close range. That thought distressed him, and felt Seabright's tense. Toothless glanced to his right, said, "Halloran, why don't you go to that door," pointing to the cabin, "and knock politely," then smiled a ghastly smile, with a gap large enough to shove a beef-stick through. "There are ladies inside, remember."

"Right," the boy addressed as Halloran replied, and moved forward while Toothless and Keene kept their eyes on the two men. It was almost laughable, considering, because Halloran knocked three times on the wooden door, and crossed his hands behind his back, fingers nervously twitching, much like a young man waiting for an evening date to come down the stairs.

"William?" Mrs. Seabright's voice was muffled by the door, noticeably shaky with fear. "Unless that's my husband, this door stays closed!"

Halloran looked at his leader, who only shook his head. "Just open the door." The boy grabbed the handle, pulled. The door didn't budge.

"Blast! They must have it bolted from the inside, Toothless."

"So? Make them open it!"

"How?"

"Oh..." Toothless gave a loud exasperated sigh, then, with a speed neither the Colonel nor Howell expected, had his hands at Seabright's throat, who dropped the crowbar in surprise. The youth's eyes were black with rage as he screamed, "Get them to open that door!" spitting the words into Seabright's face. "Now! Or this happens to you!" With one hand he pulled out the pistol, aimed it at the Colonel's face. Even though the gun shook in the youth's hand, Seabright was smart enough to know that a loaded weapon in anybody's hand, no matter how inexperienced, can still be deadly, so he nodded.

"Alright," the Colonel sadly said, gave Howell a rueful look, his gray eyes returning to his attacker. "I'll tell them. But promise me you won't hurt the ladies. Be a proper gentleman about this if there's any ounce of decency still left inside your heart."

Surprisingly, the young man agreed with a nod. "Let it be known that I, Calvin 'Toothless' Kelly,



would never hurt a woman or child. We outlaws *do* have principles."

"I will remember that at your trial, Mr. Kelly," Seabright replied. "As a military man, I can certainly respect principles."

"Provided there is a trial," the boy said, taking his left hand off Seabright's lapel, waving the gun from his captive to the door. "Now go have the ladies come on out. I mean *them* no harm." The emphasis made Howell shiver. In that boy's face he again saw young men – mere boys - with muskets aimed in his direction from across a smoking field in Virginia, the spire of a church sticking above a small town in the distance, haunted him for an infinite moment. Any gun in anyone's hands... Closed ranks in an open field of trampled, smoldering grass... Any gun...

The door bolt sliding out of its niche with a squeak and rattle jolted him back to the present. "It's going to be all right," Howell heard the Colonel telling the ladies. "I won't let anything happen to either of you."

Mrs. Seabright came out first, her face showing fear but trust in her husband, to whom she and clung, followed by Penelope, whose stride displayed no fear; she glared at the boy who pointed a revolver at her father. She positioned herself between her mother and Halloran, standing by the open door. Penelope's defiance gave Howell renewed strength, and hope that this stand-off would end with nobody getting hurt. He stepped once towards the women, but Halloran whipped out a vicious looking knife at the same time Keene did. Halloran's knife pointed at the mother, Keene's at Howell, whose grip tightened on long pipe wrench.

"That's as far as you'll get," Toothless hissed. "I'd drop that wrench, if I were you. Keene there is a fine knife thrower."

Howell looked the knife-wielders over: they stood straight and flat-footed. A poor fighting stance. Even so, at ten feet apart, it was practically point-blank range for someone who knew how to correctly throw a knife. Howell wouldn't have any time to duck. *If I could just get in close enough...*

A look from Colonel Seabright caught Howell's attention. "Now, ladies," Toothless said, "if you would be so kind as to hand over those lovely necklaces and earrings. I have always fancied pearls on my favorite lady." He laughed, the gun now steadier in his right hand, but still pointed at the Colonel, who looked at his wife and daughter, sighed heavily.

"Might as well, Leticia, Penelope. Those can be replaced; you can't." His smile failed. His wife's lips trembled as her slender hands reached up behind her elegant neck to unclasp the string of pearls glowing against her alabaster skin, gave them to her husband, who held them as tenderly as his love for her. The matching pair of earrings soon followed. "Here." He handed them to the youth, who took them hungrily with a grimy left hand. "Penelope?"

The girl's defiant glare should have wounded the boy, who grinned mirthlessly at her. "Oh, fine!" she exclaimed. "I don't wear earrings, you filthy thief, but you can have this!" She ripped the jade pendant off her neck, threw it at the boy's face, the large jewel making a direct hit on his left eye.

"Agh!" he cried, as the heel of his left hand went to the offended orb, instinctively lowered his right hand, the revolver falling off target.

That was the opening Howell needed. He pounced at Toothless, smacking Keene in the head with the wrench in passing, who crumpled to the deck with a groan. The Colonel whirled, grabbed at the gun at the same time Howell tackled Toothless. Halloran stood transfixed, unsure what to do. Penelope, though, knew. Being the closest to Halloran, she kicked his shin with the point of a boot, making that boy screech in pain and hobble out of the path of another vicious kick.

The remaining three members of the gang on their air bikes, sat mouths agape in surprise. "Hey!" one cried out. "They've got Toothless!" Leaderless, they did the first thing that came to mind: they turned their machines around and rapidly ran from the *Sun Thunder*.

But Toothless determinedly gripped his revolver despite the Colonel's large hands twisting the boy's wrist in a direction it wasn't meant to twist. Suddenly the gun fired, the blast echoing through the

sky. Howell let go, crouched, praying that the bullet hadn't hit anyone. He noticed Mrs. Seabright had ducked back inside the cabin, holding the door ajar far enough to watch the battle. Penelope had picked up the crowbar and was awkwardly swinging it at Halloran, who was skipping away as best he could. Howell laughed, saw Keene was out cold, and wondered where that loud hissing noise was coming from. It sounded like it was above and behind him.

"Oh, no!" He looked up, saw a foot-long hole in the airbag, the fabric flapping. The airship began a slight list to starboard, rolling the tangled Seabright and Toothless toward the railing. A yowl from Halloran signified a direct hit from the crowbar. Howell looked, saw Penelope standing over the boy, who was laying up against the cabin with his arms wrapped around his abdomen; the girl rested the crowbar on her shoulder like a rifle. Howell saw that the revolver, knocked loose in the struggle, also slid starboard. He quickly grabbed the gun, ran to the rail, stared down at the Great Trinity Forest growing closer.

"Colonel Seabright!" he called out. "We've got a serious problem. Come here, quickly!"

The Colonel had subdued his young adversary, and holding Toothless in a powerful half-Nelson, dragged the boy over to Howell's side. One look down made all their faces blanch. Seabright released his prisoner because...

"This is not good," the boy said. "Not at all." Just then the airship's starboard tilt became more pronounced, leveled a bit when the three stepped back amidships.

Howell's eyes appraised the tear in the airbag. "The good news is," he said as matter-of-factly as possible, "that hole's not getting any bigger. The bad news is we're still going down."

"But not that fast," Toothless said, "so we might not hit the ground that hard."

"It's not hitting the ground that bothers me," Howell replied, "but those trees. Their branches are this ship's worst enemy."

Cautiously, the Colonel stepped towards the downward tilting rail, peered over and out. Halloran chose that moment to attempt to stand, but Penelope brought the crowbar down with a thud on the deck near the boy's feet. "You stay right there," she commanded. Halloran, seeing the firmness in her face and the crowbar so close to his body, sat back. "Good thinking. That's a good boy." Howell thought it sounded like she was training a dog.

"Say, isn't that the Trinity River below us?" Colonel Seabright's question brought Howell back to the reality of their predicament. "And how far up do you think we are, D.B.? A few hundred feet?"

Howell joined him at the rail, surprised at the Colonel's informality. He looked down, said, "Almost four hundred feet, I'd say, And yes, that is the Trinity," he added, noting the river's width. And depth. "Good gravy, man!" he suddenly cried, stared at Seabright. "You're not thinking of trying to bring this ship down into the river? Look at how it winds! That would take a great deal more delicate piloting than I'm capable of! We could easily hit the trees!"

"No, not there," Seabright said, pointing east. "There."

Off in the distance, perhaps a mile and a half away, was a lake. Howell wracked his memory, Maps of the area showed lakes that fed the Trinity River on its southeasterly course, which the airship was following thanks to a tail wind, to eventually empty into the Gulf of Mexico. The obvious question was, could the ship be maneuvered in that lake's direction?

Apparently Penelope was thinking the same thing. "The rudder wasn't shot," she offered,



adding, “so we can turn as usual.”

“Aye,” Howell said. “It works. My concern is our rate of descent from air loss. If only we could close that hole somehow and buy us some more time. I’d love to add more lift, if we could. That would help.” He looked at the ropes rigged around the airbag like a gigantic spider’s web holding the bag’s shape, some of them lacing next to the offending hole. “If I could only get up there and lace it shut.”

“Let me do it.” Howell, Penelope, and the Colonel turned to stare at Toothless.

“You?” Penelope asked incredulously. “You’re the dunce who put us into this mess!”

“Which makes it all the better that I do this,” Toothless said. “Give me a chance. Let me climb up there. I’m easily a lot lighter than either of you. Get something I can use to tie it back together and I’ll do it.”

“You could just as easily fall off,” observed Mr. Seabright.

“We’re all falling,” Howell noted. “But I have no idea what to use to...”

“My knitting!” exclaimed Mrs. Seabright so loudly that everybody jumped, stared at her. “I brought my knitting bag along for the jaunt, William,” who looked at his wife as if she had lost her mind. “They’re needles. Pointy needles – well, not sharp as a pin, but they do have a bit of a point – and I have yarn and thread and...”

“Brilliant!” Howell cried. “Quickly, Mrs. Seabright, go get your kit!” As she ran into the cabin he returned to the ship’s controls. He turned up the heater, pumping more warm air into the bag, watching its sides bubble out for a change inside of inward. Any time he could buy... *Damn, fool kid*, he thought, shook his head to get his mind back on task. Mrs. Seabright came running back out, a large wicker basket in her hands.

Her husband threw it open, roughly rummaged for a suitably pointed needle, found a roll of hemp twine, and shoved them into Toothless’s hands.

“Here,” he said. “Tie an end to the needle before you go up; try to overlap the ends, puncture, don’t rip...”

“I know what to do,” Toothless cut him off. “I designed and built our air-bikes, so I’m familiar with these principles.” He then looked at Howell, said, “Just keep the bag inflated as much as you can. The inner pressure will make it easier for stitching.” With that, he scampered up the rigging like a monkey. Impressed by the lad’s insight, Howell kept the burners at a moderate flame, while Seabright pulled at a port-side cord to keep the ship level.

“Cross-hatch the seam!” Penelope shouted to Toothless. “It’s a stronger stitch!”

Mrs. Seabright looked at her daughter approvingly. “Why, my dear, you *were* paying attention in your sewing class. There’s hope for you yet.” Penelope rolled her eyes, leaned on the crowbar as if it was a cane and watched Toothless sew the flapping fabric. In a matter of minutes he had it reasonably closed.

“That should do it!” he yelled while climbing down. “It’s still leaking a bit – not a perfect job – but it’s holding.” Toothless placed his feet on the rail, hopped onto the deck, then trotted over next to Howell, where he studied pressure gauges, levers, and pulley ropes that led to various flaps located around the ship. “Damned impressive, sir. Oops! Sorry, miss, mum,” he apologized to the ladies with a slight bow. “Did you design and build this airship, sir?”

Howell, detecting intellectual respect in the boy’s voice, replied, “Why, yes, I did.” He looked the boy in the eye, saw intelligence. *Yes*, he thought, *there’s potential here*. “In fact, I believe you can help us make it to that lake. You man these here,” Howell pointed to the levers and ropes on the right, “and I’ll tell you what do when. Mrs. Seabright, Penelope! Each of you pick a side-rail and let me know our altitude and heading.”

The women assumed positions to starboard and port, Penelope calling out, “I think we’re about a hundred feet from the trees!”

“Good to know!” Howell turned the flame higher. “That’s to give us a bit more altitude, Toothless. I fear we need it.” The boy nodded, turned to look at his gang compatriots: Keene was still

unconscious, sprawled out where he fell, and Halloran's hands were tied behind his back, making him wince in pain every time his position shifted. Not worried about them causing problems, Howell returned to his station, pulling the rudder over to make the airship aim towards the lake, now closer, but not close enough. Again he turned the burner on; the ship rose in response. "Mister Kelly, I need you to pull on that second cord – yes, that one – when I say so." The boy followed the cord up to a valve on the underside of the airbag.

"I get it," he said. "It controls air release for descent."

"On that side, yes. Colonel, same thing for you: second cord. When I say pull, you both open those valves."

Howell stared ahead, holding the rudder steady, pulled or pushed a lever beside the wheel as needed to keep *Sun Thunder* level as it neared the lake. He cut the flame, saying, "Pull!" With a mighty blast of air the ship jerked, dipped to starboard. "Close yours up a bit, boy! It's open too much! Make the valves match in size!" Toothless did so, and seconds later the ship leveled, angling down toward the lake, now only a few hundred feet dead ahead at the end of a large clearing.

"Well, hello!" Mrs. Seabright called and waved to someone below. Her husband stared incredulously at her, making her blush. "Homesteaders, dearest," she replied. "You really should see their faces."

"I can imagine," the Colonel said to himself, then to Howell, "That woman is something else."

"Brace yourselves, everyone!" Howell announced. "Here we go!"

Like a flying whale, the *Sun Thunder* swooped low over the water's edge and hit the surface, spreading a massive wave that splashed back over the deck, drenching everyone. The cold water awakened Keene, who flailed wildly in the water. "Help! I can't swim!" Penelope laughed, quickly grabbed the crowbar again and pointed it at Keene, who meekly quieted down. Howell grinned at the girl.

"Right. Hold those valves open, gentlemen. Let the bag slowly deflate onto the lake, but not completely; a little buoyancy will make bag retrieval much easier."

Colonel Seabright hugged his wife, and they waved at the men, women, and children running towards the lake. "We gave them quite a surprise, didn't we, Lettie Mae?" he said, giving her a resounding kiss. Penelope elaborately rolled her eyes heavenward, caught Howell smiling at her, and his smile grew wider as her face turned red as a sweet apple before she turned away. *Oh, why do I feel like this when he smiles at me?* She scolded herself.

Toothless cleared his throat. "Excuse me, sir," he said, "but what are you and the Master there," he motioned towards the Colonel, "going to do about me and my lads? We really didn't mean to cause all this ruckus, you know."

"Even so, young man," Seabright said, "you attempted theft, attacked personal property, threatened us with your weapons...You and your cronies are in deep, deep trouble with the law."

"But I did help you safely land your ship!" His eyes pleaded for mercy, landed on Howell for some show of support. Grudgingly, Howell nodded.

"True," he agreed. "But that's up to the court to decide. I certainly can't promise you anything, that's for sure."

The boy looked approvingly over the *Sun Thunder*, now bobbing in the water like a proper ship, albeit dragging a fifty-foot long wet bag behind it. "Sure'd like to ride this again," he thought out loud, running his fingers along a beam. "That would be fun."

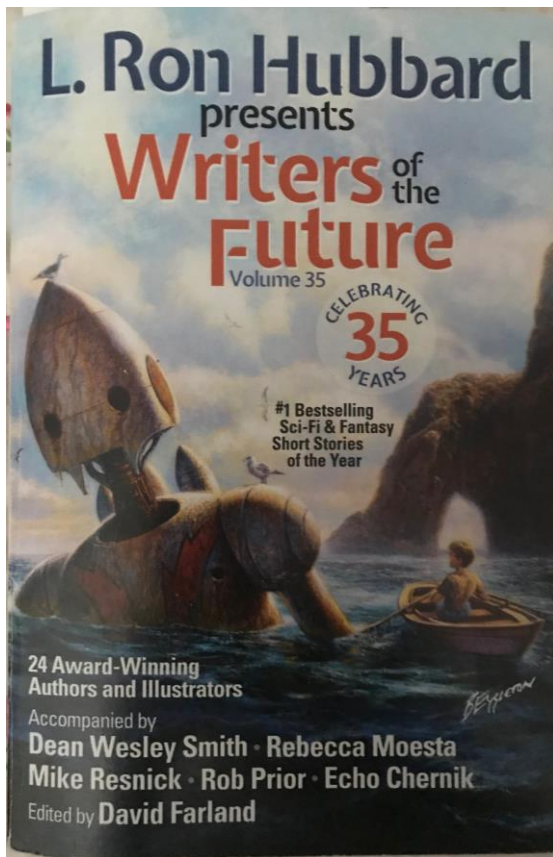
Howell clapped the boy's shoulder. "Who knows, lad? Who knows?"

"Call me Calvin, sir."





## Steamy Book Reviews!



*Writers of the Future, Volume 35*, edited by David Farland. Galaxy Press, 2019. 448 pp.

It has been many years since I received a review copy of a recently released book. If I remember correctly, the very last one was Kent McDaniel's *Jimmy Stu Lives!* (2012), and the first time anybody sent me something to review was a cassette tape set of a radio drama called *The Secret of Dominion* (1995) that at the time I thought was okay, but now is best left forgotten in my distant past.

Two months ago I received an email from the publishers of the Writers of the Future contest asking if I would be interested in reading and reviewing the latest collection of winning stories from this quarterly contest. After a bit of gnashing of teeth, I acquiesced mainly along the grounds of "Hey, it's a free book, so why not?"

There are twelve stories in this latest anthology, each illustrated by an Illustrators of the Future contest winner (this latter competition has been running for 20 years

now), and I freely admit that the artists represented are all very good. The quality of these illustrations – the cover of the book, by the way, is by Hugo Award winning artist and *lotF* judge, Bob Eggleton – is excellent, which is something I wish I could say about the fiction content. To be fair, of these twelve stories, there are definitely some very good stories, and even the lackluster tales do reveal the talent of their writers. Still, the biggest quibble about this collection of stories is that I expected more actual science fiction stories in this book because most of them I would classify as fantasy.

Case in point is that one of the better tales in *Writers of the Future, Volume 35* is a supernatural tale that riffs off Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos and is cast in a Steampunk setting "The Damned Voyage" by John Haas. The writing style is consistent with the time and place of this story, and overall the pacing and descriptive language is done very well. Unfortunately, Haas's use of foreshadowing is rather heavy-handed, so it is easy to guess the ending half-way through and somewhat diminishes the reader's enjoyment. Even so, I am impressed with what Haas attempted in an all-too familiar mythos, and his style is consistent. It would be interesting to see what John Haas might come up with over the course of the next few years.

The additional non-fiction writings from Mike Resnick, Echo Chernick, Rob Prior, and L. Ron Hubbard (notes written in 1938) are good, and provide good background into the selection process of how the

Writers of the Future and Illustrators of the Future contests operate. In fact, the last 14 pages are devoted to exactly this. It is all very helpful information, and I have to admit that the simple fact that this contest has now been running for 35 years is a testament to its staying power.

Other stories in this collection that bear mentioning are “A Harvest of Astronauts” by Kyle Kirrin, “Super-Duper Moongirl and the Amazing Moon Dawdler” by Wulf Moon, “Lost Robot” by Dean Wesley Smith (Not a contest winner; this story was based on the cover art by Bob Eggleton), and “A Certain Slant of Light” by Preston Dennett. These four stories are all tightly written and enjoyable in their own rights, and are science fiction. Too many of the other stories are fantasy – such as “An Itch” by Christopher Baker, and “The First Warden” by Kai Wolden – and while I agree that they are good stories, they did not stand out to me when compared to the other stories in this book. For that matter, I would not have included “Yellow Submarine” by Rebecca Moesta or “Untrained Luck” by Elise Stephens because they are too contrived and have predictable plots.

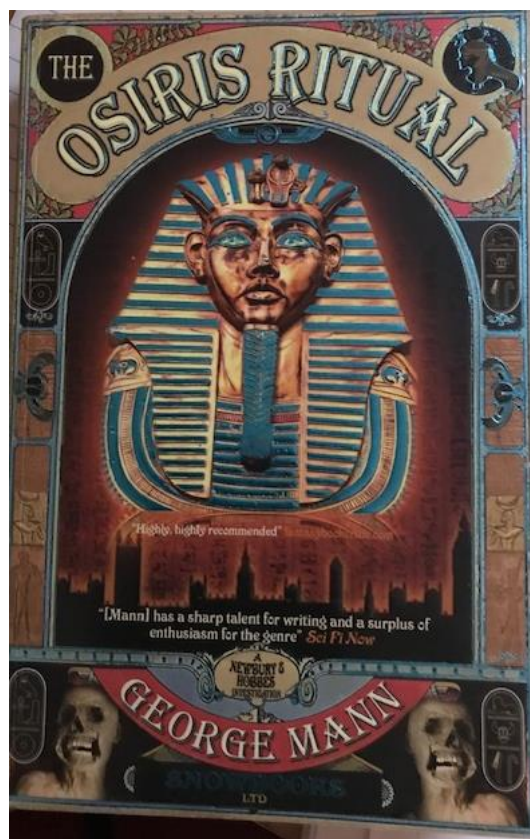
Maybe I am just being a science fiction purist here. Heck, I appreciated the reprinted story by L. Ron Hubbard “The Idealist”, first published in *Astounding Science Fiction* in 1940, for its directness of storytelling and brisk pacing. Reading this story convinced me why Hubbard was a dominant figure in the Golden Age of Science Fiction (the late 1930s through the end of the 1940s). It is a very good story, and coming after Hubbard’s article “Tomorrow’s Miracles” it was a good example of what a science fiction story could be: thought-provoking and well told.

As for the artists included in this collection, I think they will all do very well in the near future. In particular, keep your eyes open for Allen Morris, Qianjiao Ma, Sam Kemp, Christine Rhee, and Vytautas Vasiliauskas. Like I said earlier, all twelve of the artists selected are very good, but these five people produced superlative work. Very evocative work that tied in beautifully to the stories they illustrated.

If the purpose of The Writers of the Future and Illustrators of the Future contests are to identify men and women of talent, the judges have done their job well. While I may not have liked each story (always a risk in anthologies), I agree that all of these men and women are talented, so I do believe we readers and aficionados of the science fiction, fantasy, and supernatural genres will have some writers to enjoy for many years to come.

***The Osiris Ritual*, by George Mann.  
Snowbooks Ltd, 2009, 348 pp.**

When one comes across a writer you have heard much about, and those friends who were gushing about this book or that series by such-and-such author, you tend to be a little leery at first. Fortunately, once I started reading *The Osiris*



*Ritual*, the second book in the Newbury and Hobbes Investigation series, by George Mann, I was hooked by the end of the first chapter. That is always a good clue that the rest of the book is going to keep me interested.

*The Osiris Ritual* is set in the late Victorian era, establishing it firmly in the Steampunk period, featuring many of the interests of that time. Notable among those are mummy unwrapping parties and an unbridled passion for supernatural pursuits, and these two elements are only two of the fun aspects of this book. In short, it features Sir Maurice Newbury, Gentleman Investigator for the Crown, and takes place shortly after the conclusion of *The Affinity Bridge* affair.

Unfortunately, Newbury's down time is brief because of the reemergence of his villainous predecessor, Knox, who is hell-bent on achieving immortality. The immortality Knox seeks is attainable from an ancient Egyptian ritual that literally is unwrapped during that previously mentioned party. Mann effectively describes this event and its nasty outcome, and Newbury is drawn into an intricate web of deception and vengeance. He is aided in his investigation by Veronica Hobbs, a young intern whose stubbornness matches her intelligence. The two of them make a great team for tackling these supernatural crimes. This particular investigation is made even more complex by the return of a former British agent who is not really himself anymore.

The affair is so baffling that Newbury is reluctant to take time away from it to attend to the mysterious murders in the wake of the unveiling of an Egyptian mummy, let alone Veronica's apparent obsession with tracking the growing pool of young women who have disappeared after being used as props in a magician's stage act. Mann does a great job of intertwining these two separate investigations because – guess what? – they are diabolically related. In the process *The Osiris Ritual* zips right along due to Mann's excellent pacing, ending chapters on cliffhanger situations that encourage the reader to keep going to find out what happens next. A very enjoyable novel that makes one want to find and read the other books in the Newbury and Hobbes series.

Speaking of which, here they are:

#1 *The Affinity Bridge*

#2 *The Osiris Ritual*

#3 *The Immortality Engine*

#4 *The Executioner's Heart*

#5 *The Revenant Express*

If you like reading steampunk stories featuring mystery, history, the supernatural, great characterization, witty dialog, exciting adventures and escapes, I highly recommend these books.





# FIGBY

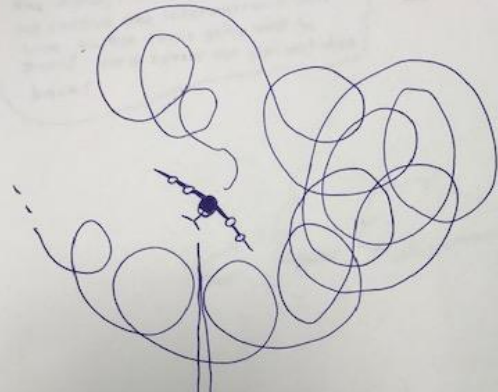
By Bill Fischer

The Yekaterinburg, Russia to Vancouver flight ~ over the pole...

Well Figby, soon we shall pass over the North Pole ~ the top of the planet. I hope the winds are calm!



Suddenly... a polar microvortex!

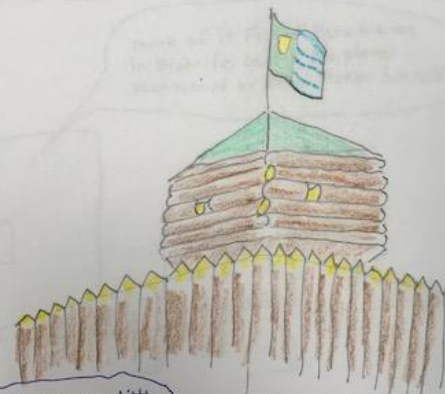


... In the unlikely event of a water landing, coach class passengers will find a flotation device under the seat. Please give it up to a first class passenger. Thank you for flying Delta!

Well Figby, as we bid adieu to the trackless, frozen wastes of the arctic, I have calculated that we crossed the International Date Line 66,510 times going West to East! We'd better set our watches back!



...Fort Vancouver, 1849...



my watch is a little weird!

I'm not getting any bars...

FZ



## From the Hinterlands



*There was nary a peep from readers in response to last issue's contents, but a handful of people checked in, but not in the form of letters of comment. \*sigh\* So it goes. I only hope that this issue's contents will generate some interest.*

On the other hand, I did hear from **John Hertz** (sent a potsarcd noting Pablo Miguel Alberto Vazquez's (my Corflu 37 co-chair person) bio on the sfbios.com website), **A. B. Kynock** (who sent artwork that will likely see print in the next issue), **Sam Long** (a brief acknowledgement regarding his poem "Ozyfandias" used last issue), and **Taral Wayne** (sent in the story "The Grime is Afoot!").

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# regional convention calendar



## [Galactic Swag Expo Fort Worth](#)

Comics, sci-fi, and gaming.

Saturday, July 27, 2019 10:00 AM - 7 PM

Sunday, July 28, 2019 10:00 AM - 5 PM

ESports Stadium

1200 Ballpark Way

Arlington, TX 76011

**DFW MetroPlex area**

Comics, sci-fi, and gaming event....packed with exciting family-friendly activities and attractions. We will be showcasing several full-scale movie vehicles from popular sci-fi

movies, games and TV shows. Plus Cosplay, Makers, and more!

See also our [Galactic Swag Expo Ft. Worth Facebook page](#)

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## [ArmadilloCon 41](#)

For Austin's Science Fiction & Fantasy Readers and Writers

August 2-4, 2019

OMNI Southpark

4140 Governors Row

Austin, TX 78744

**Austin, TX area**

GOH: Rebecca Roanhorse

Toastmaster: Marshall Ryan Maresca

Fan Guest: Dan Tolliver

Editor Guest: Patrice Caldwell

Science Guest: Moriba K. Jah

Special Guest: Martha Wells

Panels, Art Show, Gaming, Charity, Full Day Writer's Workshop, Dealer's Room, and more!

[ArmadilloCon](#) is a literary science fiction convention held annually in Austin, with several hundred attendees.

We are a place where the smartest people in the world gather to celebrate their uniqueness and intelligence. Oh, and we talk about books too.

The primary focus of ArmadilloCon is literary science fiction, but that's not all we do -- we also pay attention to art, animation, science, media, and gaming. Every year, dozens of professional writers, artists and editors attend the convention. We invite you to attend the convention especially if you are a fan of reading, writing, meeting, sighting, feeding, knighting, and all the other things folks do at a sci-

f/fantasy convention.

Sponsored by the Fandom Association of Central Texas, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization

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## [Glitch Con](#)

"A fandom oriented convention focusing on Sci-Fi, Fantasy, Gaming, and Anime."

August 2-4, 2019

**Springdale, Arkansas area**

We are a fandom oriented convention focusing on Sci-Fi, Fantasy, Gaming & Anime. Bringing the very best of what these cultures have to offer to NW Arkansas to bring the local fandom communities together & provide the very best entertainment.

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## [Dallas Comic Show Fantasy Festival](#)

Celebration of comic books, pop culture, and retro fun that will offer a little something for everyone.

August 10-11, 2019

Premier Event Center

1165 S Stemmons Fwy #176

Lewisville, TX 75067

**DFW Metroplex area**

#DallasComicShow is a family-friendly event in the DFW area featuring exciting comic book and media guests, costumed characters, gaming and Anime content.

Our mission is to bring back an affordable pop culture convention experience to the DFW area, something everyone can enjoy and embrace without breaking the bank. This is show run by fans and done for fans. We are here to make sure you have fun.

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## [Dublin 2019 An Irish Worldcon, the 77th World Science Fiction convention](#)

August 15-19, 2019

Convention Centre Dublin

Spencer Dock

North Wall Quay

Dublin 1

D01 T1W6

Ireland

**Dublin, Ireland**

GOH: Bill Burns and Mary Ensley

GOH: Diane Duane

GOH: Ginjer Buchanan

GOH: Ian McDonald

GOH: Jocelyn Bell Burnell



GOH: Steve Jackson

Five days of programming on hundreds of topics from books to media, from art to costuming, from movies to television to anime, from science fiction to science fact, as well as an art show, masquerades, the Hugo Awards ceremony, dealer's rooms, and much more!

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## **Bubonicon 51: The Future Is Now (2019 Is History)**

Science Fiction & Fantasy Convention

August 23-25, 2019

**Albuquerque, New Mexico area**

Co-GOH: Allen Steele

Co-GOH: Ursula Vernon

Artist GOH: Greg Spalenka

Toastmaster: Darynda Jones

Science Speaker: TO BE NAMED SUMMER 2019

Panels, Art Show, Dealers Room, Gaming, Auctions, Film Screenings, Readings, Autographs, Filking, Science Talk, Costume Contest, Green Slime Awards, Fan Programming, and more!

Presented by the NMSF Conference in association with various kind folks of the Albuquerque SF clubs.

Bubonicon 48 will benefit at least the Williamson Library Collection at Eastern NM University, the Roadrunner Food Bank, and the Albuquerque Public Library Foundation. Bubonicon 47 gave away \$6,000 to the charities/non-profit organizations!

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## **Lexicon 2019**

Free comic-con & fandom event

Saturday September 14, 2019 10AM-5PM

Stillwater Public Library

1107 S. Duck

Stillwater, Ok 74074

**(northeast of Oklahoma City, west of Tulsa, OK area)**

LexiCon 2019 is a FREE comic-con and fandom event intended to draw together community members who share similar interests and to provide library materials to those who enjoy pop culture. It features vendors, panels, cosplay, and gameplay, and displays for fans of comics, gaming, sci-fi or fantasy TV shows, movies and books, graphic novels, and anime.

LexiCon will take place on Saturday, September 14, 2019 from 10:00 am to 5:00 pm. Events will be spread between the Stillwater Public Library, Prairie Arts Center, and Stillwater Community Center.

More information about special guests, events and activities will be released over the coming months.

We're looking forward to a great event! Have questions? Email [libraryevents@stillwater.org](mailto:libraryevents@stillwater.org) or call 405-372-3633, ext 8120.

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**In case you haven't noticed, the bottom of the page is approaching.**



## [Mondo Con](#)

Film, music, art, & toys  
September 14-15, 2019  
Palmer Events Center  
900 Barton Springs Rd  
Austin, TX 78704

### **Greater Austin, TX area**

MondoCon is a celebration of everything we love, including movies, art, comics, music, toys and food. It's a weekend curated with our fans in mind, featuring incredible Artists & Creators from around the world, Panels, Screenings, Food Trucks & Interactive Events.

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## [Spooky Spectacle](#)

[Formerly Known as the Granbury Paranormal Expo]

September 14, 2019 10 AM-7 PM

September 15, 2019 10 AM-5 PM

Will Rogers Memorial Center 3401 W Lancaster Ave. Fort Worth, TX 76107

### **Fort Worth, TX area**

Ghost hunters! Horror! Sci-Fi! Fantasy! Cosplay! And much more!

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## [FenCon XVI: Gateway to the Future](#)

A Fan-Operated Science Fiction and Fantasy Literary and Filk Convention

September 20-22, 2019

\*Sheraton DFW Airport Hotel

4440 W. John Carpenter Freeway (near SH 114 at Ester's Road)

Irving, Texas, 75063

### **(DFW Metroplex area)**

**NOTE: New hotel in 2019!**

GOH: Trevor Quachri

Music GOH: The DoubleClicks

Fen GOH: Helen Montgomery

Artist GOH: Jenn Ravenna

Science GOH: Julie Czerneda

Special Workshop Guest: Angie Hodapp

Toastmaster: Orlando Sanchez

Art Show & Auction, Dealers Room, Panels, Concerts, Filking, Short Story Contest, Writers Workshop, Children's Programming, Masquerade, Readings, Gaming, Demos, and lots more!

FenCon is a production of the Dallas Future Society, a not-for-profit organization dedicated to the advancement of science, literature, and music for the future of all mankind.

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## Monster-Con

Best lil free horror Con in Texas!  
September 28-29, 2019 10 AM-7 PM  
Wonderland of the Americas Mall  
4522 Fredericksburg Rd.  
San Antonio, TX 78201

### **San Antonio, TX area**

Free admission plus free parking!  
Scream Queen Beauty pageant, Guest artist, writers, art walk, over 100 vendors for shopping, Photo ops, psychic faire, Gaming and more!  
Hosted by Wizards and Wands Arts and Crafts Show (and 13 others)  
See also: [Monster-Con Facebook events page](#)

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## STAPLE! The Independent Media Expo

Indies Comics Show  
Saturday October 12, 2019 (11am-6pm)  
Sunday October 24, 2019 (12-6pm)  
Millennium Youth Entertainment Complex  
1156 Hargrave St.  
Austin, TX 78702

### **Austin, TX area**

Premiere event in the Southwest for independently created comics, zines, art, crafts, games and more, with over 200 exhibiting artists, hours of panels, programming, and on & off-site events! 14th Annual Show!

[NOTE: STAPLE! is an indie comics show and does NOT feature celebrity type guests.]

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## Fandemic Tour

Comic Con.  
October 18-20, 2019  
NRG Center  
1 NRG Park  
Houston, TX 77054  
Houston, TX area

Celebrity autographs/photo ops, panels, cosplay & fan group tables in exhibitors hall, and more!  
This is a "family-friendly" show so no "risque" costumes. "Anyone 11 or older must purchase admission at the regular price. Two children, aged 10 or under, are admitted free with each paid adult admission. You may be asked to provide proof of the children's ages."  
Zero tolerance for harassment. ASK before snapping photos of costumed people at the event.

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## Dallas Fan Days

Ultimate Fan Experience.

Friday October 18, 2019 4:00PM - 8:00PM

Saturday October 19, 2019 10:00AM - 7:00PM

Sunday October 20, 2019 10:00AM - 5:00PM

Irving Convention Center at Las Colinas

500 West Las Colinas Blvd.

Irving, TX 75039

### **(DFW MetroPlex area)**

Twice annual comics, sci-fi, horror, anime, and gaming event in Texas. Packed with exciting family-friendly activities, celebrity & comic guests, and much more! The pop culture extravaganza is host to tens of thousands of fans at the Irving Convention Center for the two or three-day event every Spring and Fall.

Local fan groups supporting this event include:

[Name/Fandom]: 501st Legion (Star Wars), Rebel Legion (Star Wars), Mandalorian Mercs (Star Wars), Austin Browncoats (Firefly/Serenity), DFW Ghostbusters, DFW Cosplay Gallifrey (Dr Who)

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## Retropalooza

A Celebration of All Things Retro!

Saturday October 19, 2019 9 AM – 5 PM

Sunday October 20, 2019 10 AM – 5 PM

Arlington Convention Center

1200 Ballpark Way

Arlington, TX 76011

### **DFW Metroplex area**

An annual event featuring some of the best YouTube personalities in the universe, free-play console games, contests and competitions, guest panels and over 150 vendor booths.

Kids 12 and under are FREE! That means it's fun for the whole family.

Parking is \$5.00

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## Alamo City Comic Con

Comics con

(Presumably October 2019)

### **San Antonio, TX area**

"The primary goal of ACCC is to celebrate the artists who provide entertainment to the public via comics, movies, TV, gaming and cosplay. We also aim to bring unique celebrities and attractions to the Alamo City, allowing attendees to take advantage of the "mega" comic con experience. Alamo City Comic Con also gives back to the community by participating in many fundraising events throughout the year."

We offer the opportunity to meet, get autographs, take photos and view panels with some of your favorite celebs, artists and writers. You can also purchase your favorite comics, collectibles, and toys from all our exhibitors.

## MillenniumCon XXII (2019)

Texas' Biggest Historical Miniatures Wargame Convention

November 7-10, 2019

Wingate Hotel & Conference Center

1209 North Interstate Highway 35

Round Rock, TX 78664

### **Greater Austin, TX area**

MillenniumCon is presented by Lone Star Historical Miniatures society. LSHM promotes the miniature wargaming hobby throughout the great state of Texas. The annual Millennium Game Convention in Round Rock, TX is our signature event.

MillenniumCon XXII is a three day convention that supports Tabletop Wargaming with Historical Miniatures.

We provide a unique event to celebrate our passion for playing wargames, crafting the miniatures and terrain used in these games, and researching the historical events that inspire our imagination. While we do focus on games involving historical time periods, our convention caters to many different gaming tastes and styles.

Unlike other conventions that support multiple genres, we don't have one group trying to be all things to all people. There are also a limited number of RPG games but the emphasis is on miniatures games.

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## Wizard World Austin

Comic Con

November 8-10, 2019

Austin Convention Center

500 East Cesar Chavez Street

Austin, Texas 78701

### **Austin, TX area**

Comics, Celebrity Guests, Artist Alley, Panel discussions, Masquerade Ball (extra fee), Movies, Comics, Toys, Video Gaming, Games, TV, Horror, Wrestling, MMA, Original Art, Collectibles, Anime, Manga & More!

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## CONtraflow IX

Science Fiction & Fantasy Literary Convention with a New Orleans Flair

November 15-17, 2019

New Orleans Airport Hilton

901 Airline Highway

Kenner, LA 70062

### **(New Orleans, LA area)**

Fanzine Lounge and Filk Salon. Focuses on science fiction, fantasy, comics, and related literary genres in any form, including but not limited to writing, visual arts, dramatic arts, and interactive fiction.

Panels, Dealers Room, Gaming, Art Gallery, Fund Raising Auctions, Costume Contest, Dances, Room Parties, Artist Alley, Kids Con, Hearts Tournament, plus much more!



## Konsplosion

The River Valley Fandom Con  
November 15-17, 2019  
Fort Smith Convention Center  
800 Rogers Ave.  
Fort Smith, AR 72901

### **Ft Smith, Arkansas area**

All-encompassing, multi-genre convention combining Comics, Sci-Fi, Anime, Gaming, & Pop Culture located in Fort Smith, Arkansas.

Guests, Activities, Vendors, Artists, Tabletop Gaming, Cosplay, Video Games, Nerf Wars, Live Performances, Dances, Stage Shows, Card Gaming, Prizes, Classes, Panels, and so much more!

See also Facebook.com/Konsplosion

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## Dickens on the Strand

Galveston's World Famous Victorian Holiday Festival

**Attendees in Victorian costume are admitted for half price.**

December 6-8, 2019

Strand National Historic Landmark District

Strand & Mechanic Streets between 20th & 25th

### **Galveston, Texas**

For 45 years, Galveston Historical Foundation's Dickens on The Strand festival has highlighted downtown Galveston's Victorian-era architecture while providing a one-of-a-kind holiday destination filled with the sights and sounds of Charles Dickens' work. This year's event continues that tradition with parades, non-stop entertainment on six stages, strolling carolers, roving musicians, bagpipers, jugglers and a host of other

entertainers. Costumed vendors peddle their wares from street stalls and rolling carts laden with holiday food and drink, Victorian-inspired crafts, clothing, jewelry, holiday decorations and gift items.

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## Nerd Con

Small comic con

(Presumably December 2019)

Chambers County Library System

Sam and Carmena Goss Memorial Branch Library

1 John Hall Road

Mont Belvieu, TX 77523

### **Greater Houston, Texas area**

Join us for this family friendly event on December 8, Noon-5pm. Visit with local authors, artists, and vendors! The Lunch Box food truck, and a Ramen Bar will be on site! Bring some cash for food and goodies! Come dressed in your best costume and get ready for the cosplay runway! It's gonna be epic! Register today! <http://bit.ly/2MwE4Jg> Cosplay, books, vendors, comics, food, & more!

What's next

I truly hope that the next issue comes out on time, but just in case, do not hold your breath.

Currently the plan is to have the 47<sup>th</sup> issue of this highly irregular fanzine completed by the end of November this year. That gives me three months to acquire material, which is very doable. I still have to complete two sections of my 2017 TAFF trip report, and one of those will be in the next issue: Prague, Czechia. I have already begun working on that, so this is a good impetus for me. I really want to get the whole shebang finished.

The front and back covers are already on hand, thanks to A.B. Kynock sending another DVD of his work. When an artist does something like that – multiple images to choose from – faneditors swoon with delight thinking they have gone to fannish heaven. Or something like that. The thing is I really appreciate A.B. doing this.

If anybody hasn't heard the news yet, I am co-chairing next year's Corflu, the science fiction fanzine fan's convention. My partner in crime is Pablo Miguel Alberto Vazquez, who is currently finishing his Master's degree in London, England, and he should be returning to Austin, Texas sometime this coming October. Wish him luck, folks.

Corflu 37 (a.k.a., Corflu Heatwave) will be held at the College Station Hilton Hotel and Convention Center over the weekend of March 13-15, 2020. All the information you need to register is at [www.corflu.org](http://www.corflu.org), and the attending membership rate is \$50 USD/£40 GBP at present, going up to \$75 USD/ £60 GBP on September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019. Join the fun, and I look forward to seeing many of you there. I might even write up a brief arkle about that for next issue.

