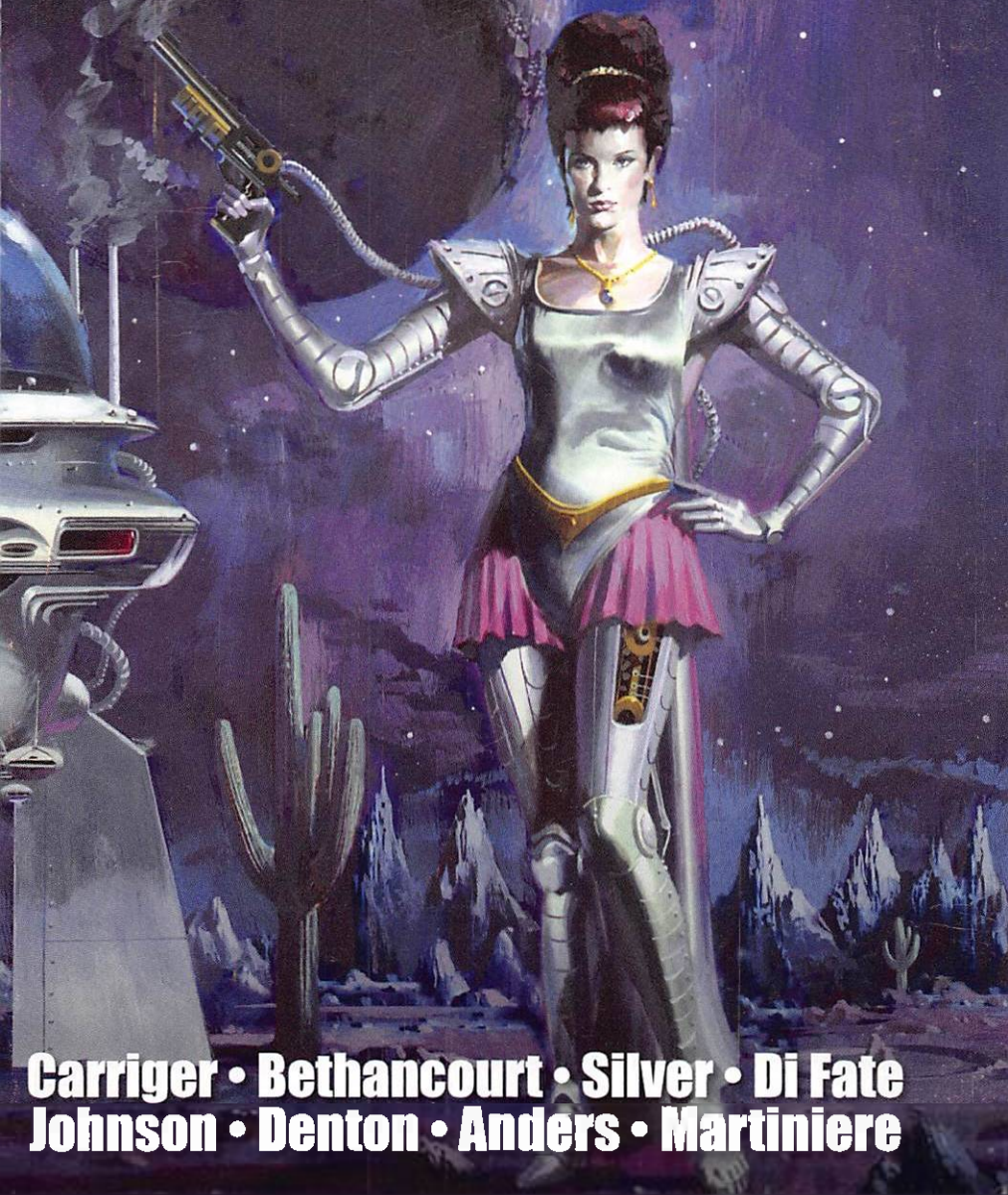
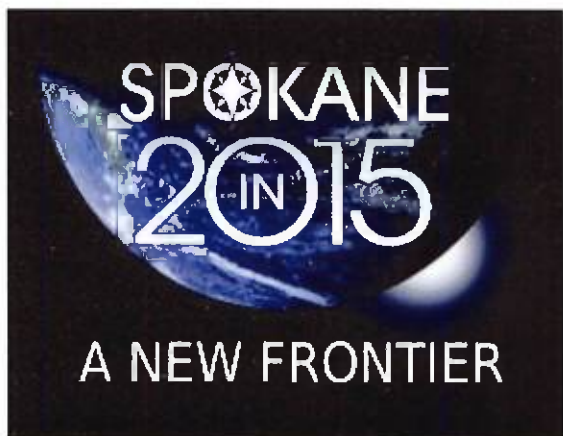


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Guests of Honor

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(aka Megan Lindholm)

Artist: Frank Wu
with Brianna Spacekat Wu

Science: Art Bozlee

Fan: Chaz Boston-Baden

Filk: Vixy and Tony
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Letter from the Chair

Put a group of fen into a room, and ask them what exactly constitutes Steampunk. You'll get varying answers: Goggles! Corsels! Airships! Gadgets! Victorian Era! Steam! Teal! Cool clothing! Gears! Brass! Old technology re-purposed for new! New tech made to look old! It's a floor wax! A dessert topping!

Okay, I got a little carried away. Steampunk can incorporate one, all, or none of the above. (How the floor wax and dessert topping might be used may be best left up to consenting adults.)

Steampunk is certainly an aesthetic in fashion and design. It's also a type of literature – in which elements of that aesthetic may or may not show up. Steampunk runs the spectrum from shiny to gritty; cute to slightly disturbing. Hey, it's just like the broader world of SF, when you think about it.

One thread that seems to run through most Steampunk is a sense of optimism. Even in the grittiest, grimmest, darkest Steampunk world imaginable, there exists that flicker of hope. Some may dismiss Steampunk as escapist fantasy, but in these days of doom and gloom headlines, people saying "Ni!" to old ladies, and what have you, what's wrong with a little optimism? And a cup of tea?

This year we're proud to host DeepSouthCon 49. This is the first year the traveling convention has come to Texas, and one reason we've chosen the theme "Southern Steam." We'll be hosting a few DSC-related events, and as a member of FenCon, you're also a member of DeepSouthCon 49. See the Convention Guide for schedule information.

As we celebrate Steampunk, FenCon welcomes Gail Carriger as our Guest of Honor. You probably all know Gail as the author of the "Parasol Protectorate" books and her cool vintage clothing style, but she can also hold her own with Indiana Jones in the archeology department – and do it with flair!

Joe Bethancourt, our Music Guest of Honor, is originally from El Paso. He's best-known for his southwestern brand of music, and operates his own production company, White Tree Productions. He's played a little bit of everything just about everywhere. Please sit in on one of his concerts.

What can I say about Vincent Di Fate? A lot, but I'll let his paintings do the "talking." Close the program book and look at the cover. We'll wait a minute. We've reproduced some of his work here in the program book, and you'll find several of his works on display in the FenCon art show.

Steven H Silver is a conrunner, author, and editor of the long-running fanzine *Argentus*. He's also the chair for Chicon 7, the 2012 Worldcon. Did I mention he's an all-around nice guy, too?

Speaking of nice guys, the multi-talented Bradley Denton is our Toastmaster this year. He's a writer, a musician, and his Campbell award-winning novel *Buddy Holly is Alive and Well on Ganymede* is being made into a motion picture.

Lou Anders comes to us fresh from his Hugo win to run our Writers Workshop. He's the editorial director of *Pyr*, and is passionate about the publishing industry. His fiction appears in several anthologies, and he's had articles published in many magazines.

Our Science Guest of Honor is an honest-to-goodness rocket scientist. Les Johnson is also the author of several science books and science fiction novels. He's also been a science consultant for television and film and holds three patents.


You have seen Stephan Mariniere's work in such diverse venues as game cards, book covers, video games, and films – not to mention a theme park or two. At present he's art directing "Rage" for ID Software here in Dallas. We're honored to have him as a Special Guest.

Plus, we're pleased to have right about 100 writers, artists, costumers, scientists, musicians and more as program participants. Do read ahead to find out more about all of the wonderful folks who help make FenCon a success.

And oh, yes: there will be tea.

Enjoy FenCon VIII!

Julie Barrett

FenCon VIII Chair 

SEPTEMBER 23-25, 2011

Letter From the Chair



Several Strange Facts About Gail Carriger

by Christopher J. Garcia



I should start by dispelling several myths about Gail Carriger. The first is the name. She's not really named Gail Carriger. I'm pretty sure it's also not Athena Victoria McMerbybuttons, though I can't be sure. Gail's books are not based on the actual adventures of her ex-pat Brit mother, nor are her amazing characters thinly veiled versions of her friends. Well, not strictly thinly-veiled versions of her friends. The veils are much thicker than you think...

And, perhaps most importantly, Gail did not invent steampunk. She merely perfected it for the Modern Age!

When *Soulless* made its way to the shelves of not-yet-shuttered bookstores everywhere, everything in the steampunk world changed. The sound of the book landing in the gloved hands of goggled men and women as they sat in their gas-lit parlors echoed across the steampunk world and on to the reading lists of just about everyone. It was the paranormal romance that turned so many folks who would regularly hate paranormal romances into believers. Maybe it was the comedic way she handled her work, or the fact that her main character, the amazing Alexia Tarabotti, handles

herself against a vampire while seeming more concerned about the trolley of comestibles that gets upset in the proceedings. As for an introduction to a character, it's one of the best I've ever seen.

It was even the book that the English professor friend of mine who had always mocked me for my love of genre picked up almost in mockery of my literary tastes and came to me to borrow the sequels. Such is the work of Gail Carriger.

The follow-ups to *Soulless*, the Gothic *Changeless*, the adventure-y *Blameless*, and the Holmesian *Heartless* (and the soon-to-be-released *Timeless*) have yet to disappoint. The novels have made their way to the *New York Times* Best-sellers List and have even earned Gail nominations ranging from the Compton Crook to the John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer (which, it seems, is not a Hugo). If you have not yet dived into the Parasol Protectorate novels, or as I call them the -less Novels, you must go and do so now.

NOW!

Okay, you've read them all, have experienced foppish vampires, hats the likes of which David Hartwell would say were over-the-top, cross-dressing adventuresses, tea drinking, and zombie porcupines and are now waiting as anxiously as I am for the next one. See, aren't you glad I made you take the time out?

But there's so much more to Gail Carriger than simply her novels. There's the fact that she's a working archaeologist. That's right, not just an archaeologist, but she gets paid to do it, like Indiana Jones or that Krippendorf guy. She worked in places like the Highlands of Peru, where guinea pigs are on the menu, to Northern Italy, where she worked with Etruscan artifacts. There's also the fact that she's a potter! I mean, how many people do you know who are both archaeologists and potters?

But what I think of when I think of Gail is the clothes. She's got the best outfits you'll ever see, especially when I run into her at cons. She does a wonderful blog called *Retro Rack* where she looks at her own clothing choices and other influences. It's one of my favorite clothing blogs (and even though I frequently wear a Fred Flinstone t-shirt to formal events, I read a surprising number of fashion blogs) and the way she examines not only her own style but the trends that brought them to us makes me smile.

I will relate this story by way of wrap-up. Gail and I were once sitting around a table in the bar at SteamCon with our gathered comrades. I was enjoying a delightful adult beverage and Gail sipped some delightful tea, as she is apt to do. The topics of the night ranged from *Marvel vs. DC*, the music of Goldtrappe, to the works of Lackey and Florde. We were a loud, rollicking crew and folks seemed to be taking notice. After an hour or two, Gail excused herself for a few moments and a young woman I recognized from the world of short filmmaking walked over.

"Excuse me, but who was that sittin' here earlier?" she asked.

"Gail Carriger. She writes the 'Parasol Protectorate' novels."

"I thought so. It takes an author who dresses that well to write that kind of novel."

And so it does.



Guest of Honor: The Gail Carriger I Know

by Mike Perschon

I met Gail Carriger before she was "the author of the 'Parasol Protectorate,'" when she was just "the strikingly effervescent panelist on writing steampunk fiction in the amazing Victorian style dress decorated with spoons" at Steam Powered back in the fall of 2008.

When asked about the yet-to-be-released *Soulless*, Gail simply said, "I've sold my first book." She was unassuming, but clearly excited and proud of her narrative child. Three years later, she's just as down-to-earth as she was then, only now we all know what the folks at Orbit did: that Gail Carriger is very simply one of the best talents in steampunk writing.



In the midst of an economic recession, she did what the doctor ordered, entertaining us and making us laugh with her oddball cast of gender-bending vampires and werewolves, and her endlessly endearing protagonist, Alexia.

If you're a fan, you already know of her love for tea, but she's a fan of good wine as well, so when you get the chance to meet her this weekend, offer her a sitdown with one or the other. She's a delightful conversationalist, a helluva dancer, and gorgeous in a corset – after all, before I knew her as a *New York Times* bestselling writer, I

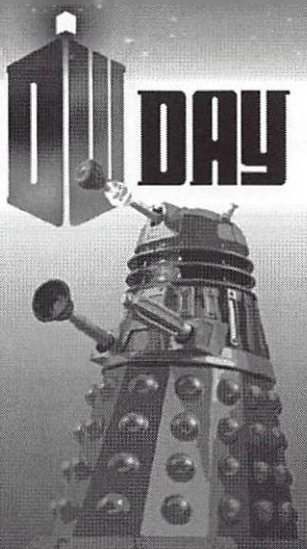
knew her as the smashing fashionista in the teaspoon dress. You're in for a real treat, FenCon – I'm jealous! ☹

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THE BRITISH



EMPORIUM

Music Guest of Honor: Joe Bethancourt



Joe was born (or found under a rock, depending on who tells the story) in El Paso, Texas, in 1946.

He began learning banjo at age 9, after he heard his maternal grandfather, C. H. Burnett, playing fiddle. His first banjo was given him by his grandfather, and was an old S.S. Stewart. This banjo is now in the able hands of his nephew, Tom Purhill.

When his family moved to Phoenix for the final time, in 1961, Joe began learning guitar, hanging around coffeehouses, mariachi bands, bluegrass groups, and a place called "J.D.'s," where he would sneak in to listen to a local guy called Waylon Jennings. With the "folk boom" of the 1960s just hitting its stride, he found that all that music he had learned as a child stood in good stead.

His first "real pro" gig came at age 18. The Phoenix acoustic scene was active and thriving and Joe hung out with people (then unknowns) like John Denver, the Irish

Rovers, and Jim Connor ("Grandma's Feather Bed") and with some of the best in Dixieland, Ragtime, and traditional Mexican musicians.

He spent a stint with a local bluegrass band, Ma Tucker's String Band, playing with Jeff Gylkinson ("The Dillards") and Doug Haywood (keyboard player/songwriter for Jackson Browne).

He also worked with noted entertainer Dan "Igor" Glenn in several bands. Joe credits "Igor" with teaching him much about the entertainer's art.

In 1968-1969, Joe worked in L.A. as a studio musician, where he made his first record, *The Joe Bethancourt String Concert Album*. It was very favorably reviewed by *Billboard* magazine and given a four star rating. He has some fascinating stories about the "name" musicians he met while he was there.

Joe came back to Phoenix, where he became influential in the original KDKB underground radio scene, hosting his own radio show on KDKB, *Folk Music Occasional*, with (the late and much lamented) Bill Compton.

He was also a regular on the Emmy award-winning *Wallace and Ladmo Show* on KPHO-TV in the 1980s, and worked with children in the Arizona Commission for the Arts' Artists in Education program for about 6 years. He still does occasional Artist Residencies at local elementary schools.

For almost 17 years, he was the "house band" at a little restaurant at 19th Ave. and Bethany Home Rd. in Phoenix, called "Funny Fellows," playing instruments from his enormous collection of traditional (and not so traditional) instruments.

Joe married Cher, the little redhead everyone calls "Red Kat," and wound up with two boys and a girl, plus an indeterminate number of cats in and out of their lives. As of this writing, Joe and Cher are grandparents six times over.

Some call him a seminal influence on the acoustic music scene in Phoenix, crediting him for much of their style and technique.



He plays no less than 65 different instruments; from his beloved banjos (Yes, plural! He has one of the finest collections of antique banjos in the Southwestern United States, and uses them on stage!) to 12-string guitar, all the way to more exotic things like 6-course Cittern, Celtic Harp, Lute, and Ozark Mouthbow.

He has been called in as a consultant on a book about the history of the banjo in America that is being written on behalf of a major American historical foundation, and is getting some attention on a national level for his songs about space exploration. He was also Toastmaster at the 1992 ConChord musician's convention in L. A., and is in great demand at similar conventions.

He was also nominated for the (Arizona) Governor's Arts Award, and his recordings are now on file at the University of East Tennessee's Appalachian Archives Folklore collection. He's also on the advisory boards of the Arizona Music and Entertainment Hall of Fame and the Tombstone Western Music Festival.

Currently, he's operating his own production company, White Tree Productions, and has recorded both solo, with another noted songwriter, Leslie Fish, and with the neo-Celtic band The Bringers, all for Random Factors of Los Angeles.

He and Cher, plus the cats and several greyhounds, currently divide their time between Phoenix and Prescott, Arizona. 🐾

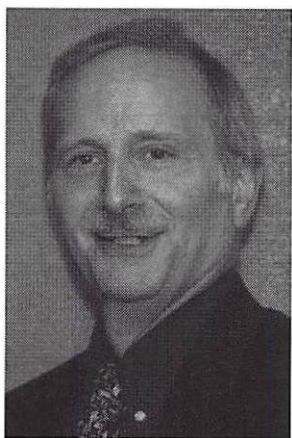


Joe Bethancourt: An Appreciation

by Leslie Fish


To the best of my knowledge, Joe Bethancourt can play any stringed instrument in the world. The walls of his recording studio are lined with cased guitars, banjos and other twangy things, so completely that they soundproof the room. Once, at a folk festival, I saw an instrument being sold – for \$5 bucks – as a joke: a tin pan with a broomstick neck added, and five thin hardware-wires held on by fixed and adjustable screws, advertised as a “panjo”. I thought that would be a great joke for Joe, so I bought it. Next time I ran into him I handed it to him, saying: “It’s a pan, Joe.” He took it, with a good laugh – and by all the gods in agreement, he managed to play it. I swear, he could play a crossbow if you gave him a strong enough pick. 🐾

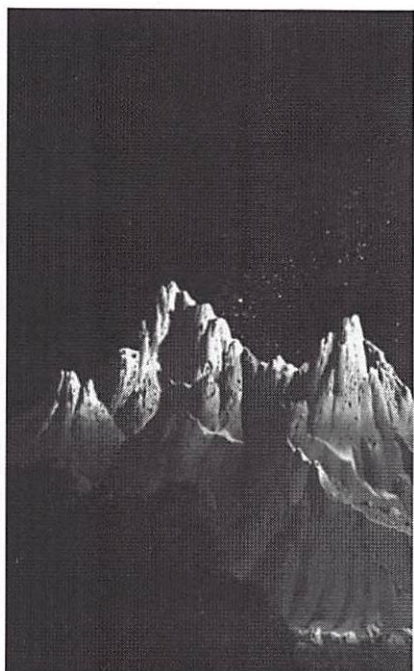
Artist Guest of Honor: Vincent Di Fate

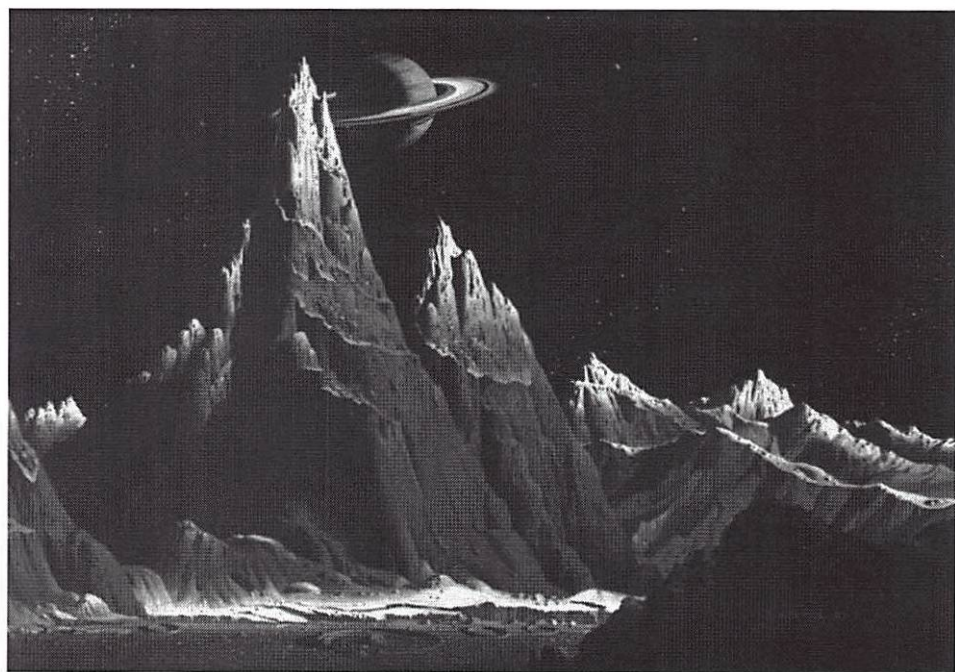
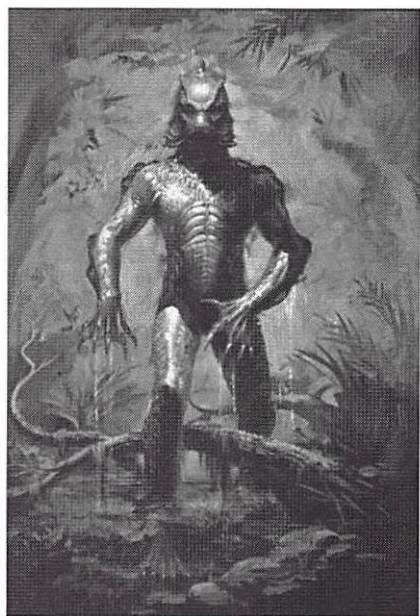


Vincent Di Fate has been a freelance illustrator for 43 years, specializing in science fiction, aerospace, and fantasy art, and has produced more than 4,000 illustrations for publication. He has won the Hugo Award for Best Professional Artist (1979), the Frank R. Paul Award, the Lensman Award, the Chesley Award for Lifetime Achievement, the Rondo, and many others in the genre. He's also received the Distinguished Educator in the Arts Award from the Society of Illustrators (another lifetime honor), served two terms as president of that organization, and was inducted into the Science Fiction Hall of Fame in Seattle on June 25, 2011.

Di Fate's paintings are exhibited throughout the world. His work is included in the collections of the National Air and Space Museum and the U. S. Air Force Art Collection in Washington, D. C., the Society of Illustrators in New York City, and in the University of Kansas Center for Science Fiction Studies at Lawrence. He was commissioned by NASA in 1985 to create the official painting of the International Space Station. That painting is now on display at the Kennedy Space Center.

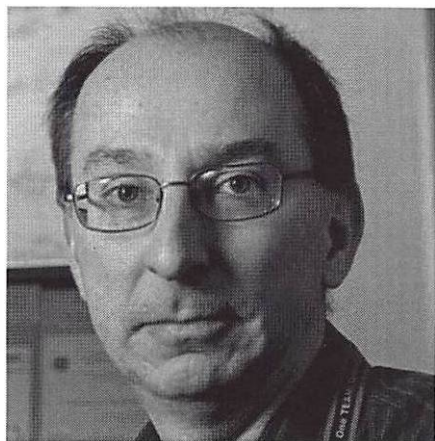
Di Fate has published two major books, *Di Fate's Catalog of Science Fiction Hardware* and *Infinite Worlds: The Fantastic Visions of Science Fiction Art*. He has been a consultant for MCA/Universal, 20th Century Fox and MGM/United Artists. He is an Adjunct Professor at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York City, where he teaches courses in the history of illustration and in science fiction and fantasy art. He is also a founding member and a past president of the Association of Science Fiction/Fantasy Artists. 





Science Guest of Honor: Les Johnson

by Tim Bolgeo, a.k.a. "Uncle Timmy"



Some of you know Les and some don't. So why don't I start off by telling you something about this man's professional credentials?

Les graduated Transylvania University, Lexington, Kentucky in 1984 with a B.A. in Chemistry and Physics. In 1986, he received a Masters of Science in Physics from Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee.

According to the NASA website at the George C. Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville, Alabama, "Les Johnson is the Deputy Manager for NASA's Advanced Concepts Office at the Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville, Alabama. He is also the co-investigator on a Japanese space experiment that flew in the fall of 2010. During his career at NASA, he served as the Manager for the Space Science Programs and Projects Office, the In-Space Propulsion Technology Project, and the Interstellar Propulsion Research Project. He was the Chief Scientist for the ProSEDS space experiment, twice received NASA's Exceptional Achievement Medal, and has 3 patents."

Les co-authored three published popular science books, and with Dr. Gregory Matloff and C Bangs, and with Dr. Gregory Matloff and Dr. Giovanni Vulpetti. Now he is venturing into the world of science fiction in his first novel, co-authored with Dr. Travis S. Taylor, which was published in December 2010 by Baen Books. Also for Baen, he and Jack McDevitt are editing an anthology of science and science fiction called.

So we find out that this well-lettered man is not only a real rocket scientist, but is also an author of both science fact and science fiction books. But to Les, his most important accomplishments are his family. He is married to the lovely Carol and has two children. His oldest, Carl, is a violin virtuoso² and started college this year. Carl let me know that Les volunteers teaching classes in Carl's home school. (Carl has so much violin activity, enthusiasm researching genealogy, and organic farming volunteer efforts, that he needs a home school schedule.)

His youngest, Leslie, is also in high school. I can see the possibility of a technical future for her because my daughter, Brandy Bolgeo Spraker is an electrical engineer and a senior manager at the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) – Brandy is "mentoring" Leslie. I think she has ulterior motives of bringing her on board in the future if Leslie pursues a technical career. Who knows? By the way, after reading this article about Les, has anyone noticed that he and Carol have made some very interesting choices in their kid's names? At least, I noticed....

I contacted Carol, Carl, and Leslie to get some juicy stories about Les, and both Carol and Leslie "spilled the beans" on him. I'll start with Carol's story first. Carol said that Les has a very limited proficiency in French that he picked up when he spent an entire summer in Toulouse, France at the International Space University. She said, "He had to learn how to say, 'Get me to a physician immediately. I may have a detached retina.' But he didn't. Instead, he needed a gastroenterologist, after the university served students canned, awful food and cheap wine all ten weeks of the program. This hasn't stopped family international travel, though. We love it—resourcefully—wherever possible to tag along to Les's speaking engagements at conferences held abroad."

Leslie told me, "When my dad was in college he said that he and his buddies used to rate girls from 1-10 in their chemistry class. One day they were rating the ladies and my dad wrote -273. In chemistry terms that means 'absolute zero'. He told me this story after I started my first chemistry class and I thought it was really funny!" With that sense of humor, no wonder Les was destined to work in the temple of geekdom, NASA. According to Carol, Les is Leslie's ever-available tutor on the rare occasions she needs help to keep on top of honors chemistry class at the largest public high school in Alabama. In addition, Les is the dad-enthusiast supporting her ferocious reading habit on forensics mysteries.

Now I get to "spill the beans" on Les and I am going to relate two different stories about him. The first occurred many, many, many years ago when Les was the Special Guest at an early LibertyCon.³ It was our custom back in those days to give our guests a black t-shirt to remind them of their visit to the "Big Nooga." Kion Newell, our Director



of Programming, specified that the back of Les's t-shirt say "A Real Rocket Scientist". We gave the t-shirt to Les at the Guest of Honor speeches and when he read the back he broke out laughing. The back of the shirts said, "A Real Rocket Scientist." We were so embarrassed about the misspelling that we begged to get the shirt back to correct our mistake. But Les refused and wore the shirt the rest of the weekend. To this day, whenever Les attends LibertyCon, he will wear his "Real Rocket Scientist" t-shirt every Saturday night at the convention. I have even heard it said that Les has worn that t-shirt in the halls of Marshall Space Flight Center, but I can't prove it. The man is evil at times.

The second story that would like to relate is about Les and his "mad scientist" friends. Les and the rest of the scientists who attend LibertyCon have the "Mad Scientist Panel" by the pool on the Friday night of the convention. We keep all of the attendees supplied with "bbeer" all evening and they hold court! God forbid if you disagree with them because they will good-naturedly decree that the offender should be launched into the pool and it is even money that they will get drenched. I personally watch my mouth when that crew gets together.

In my professional life, I was an electrical engineering specialist with TVA in power plants. I originally started in TVA's nuclear plants, which I always felt was living the SF dream. But then I met a real rocket scientist and actually got to talk with him at length. That, my friends, is really living the dream of a SF fan. On top of that, I have been very fortunate over the years to have developed a lasting friendship with Les. Actually, the entire Bolgeo Clan in the "Big Nooga" and Johnson Clan in Huntsville have developed family ties.

Your Science Guest of Honor, Les Johnson is an author, a real rocket scientist, and one hell of a nice guy. If you get the chance, please take the time to get to know him and you too, my friends, can live the dream.



- 1) <http://www.nasa.gov/centers/marshall/capabilities/people.html>
- 2) Carl Johnson plays Dmitry Kabelevsky's Violin Concerto in C Major, Third Movement in the HYS Concertro - video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xlrVckxLl0>
- 3) LibertyCon is the annual SF&F convention in Chattanooga, Tennessee - <http://www.LibertyCon.org>
- 4) The "Big Nooga" is slang for Chattanooga, Tennessee.

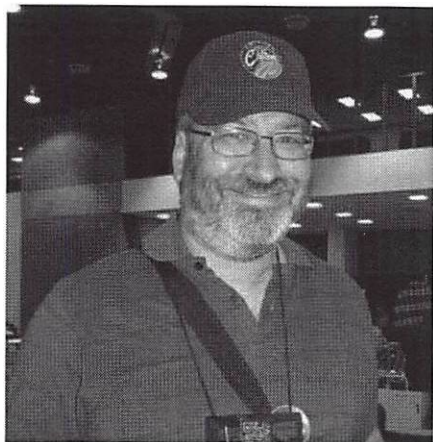
NEW ORLEANS



Fen Guest of Honor: Steven H Silver

The Silver Age of Science Fiction

by William S. Higgins



November 1986 was a pivotal month.

If Steven H Silver had not, in November 1986, gone on his first date with Elaine, they might not have gotten married. Their daughter Robin might never have existed. Their daughter Melanie might never have existed. The world would have been deprived of two intelligent and charming young women.

If, in November 1986, Steven had not attended his first Windycon, he might not have become involved in science fiction fandom. Chicago fandom in particular would have been the poorer for it. Several subsequent Windycons would all have had some other chairman. Someone else would have been in charge of the program at the 2000 Chicago Worldcon, and, no doubt, the lineup of people and panels would have been very different.

Had Steven not become an energetic and diligent member of the fannish community, perhaps he might never have become a science fiction professional.

Without an editor, such books as *Magical Beginnings* and

War and Space: Selected Stories of Lester del Rey might never have been published. Without an author, such stories as "In the Night," "Les Lettres de Paston," or "Bats in the Bayou" may never have been written at all. (And without "Bats," the anthology *Zombie Raccoons and Killer Bunnies* would have been somewhat thinner.)

Most shockingly of all, Steven might never have teamed up with two prominent connoisseurs of elsewhen, Robert B. Schunk and Evelyn Leeper, to create an annual award for outstanding works of alternate history. Imagine a world in which nobody had ever won the Sidewise Award. Incredible! If November 1986 had played out differently, not only would history have been different, but alternate history would have been different.

As things are, Steven H Silver is a fixture in Chicago fandom. He possesses wit, charm, and an encyclopedic knowledge of science fiction.* The fanzine he publishes, *Argentus*, has a terrifically appropriate name** and is quite well regarded: *Argentus* has been nominated for Best Fanzine Hugo Award three times, and Steven himself has been nominated for the Best Fan Writer Hugo ten times.

With a head buzzing with esoteric facts, it's no surprise that Steven is fond of trivia, and is often MC for SF trivia contests in the Midwest. He appeared on TV's *Jeopardy!* three episodes running, during which his knowledge of Isaac Newton's hobbies proved crucial to unseating the reigning champion.

He comes by his interest in alternate history naturally; he earned a Master's degree in medieval history, and it is a single step from real history to the realm of might-have-been. He continues to serve as a judge for the Sidewise Award every year.

Another of his interests is astronomy. As a lad, Steven met Clyde Tombaugh, the kindly astronomer who discovered Pluto. The great man impressed Steven deeply, and ever since he has been a passionate partisan of Pluto, defending the icy sphere against the recent onslaught of critics who would demote it from the company of planets.

The Golden Age of Science Fiction may be past, but truly we are living in the Silver Age. Steven is always engaged in projects large and small, writing articles, doing bibliographic research, or editing. Now and then, one may hear him say with a smile, "You know, I published Neil Gaiman's first story." Or it might be "I published Howard Waldrop's first story." When he mentioned publishing Arthur C. Clarke's first story, it dawned on me that Steven edited the anthology *Wondrous Beginnings* and its successors, the point of which was to reprint the first stories of numerous SF and fantasy authors. So while his claim to have published Neil Gaiman's first story is true in a strict sense, he didn't exactly discover Neil Gaiman...

When the co-sponsoring organization ISFIC (Illinois Science Fiction in Chicago) decided to branch out into publishing SF, Steven played an important role. I remember volunteering to help out when pallets of novels were delivered to his garage. Over and over again, Steven and I carried boxes containing hardcovers of Jeff Duntemann's *The Cunning Blood* up the stairs and nestled them beneath the Silver rafters.*** As a consequence, I published a review of *The Cunning Blood* assessing not how good it was—I had not yet read it—but rather how heavy it was. I called the book "uplifting" and wrote "I can definitely say that Jeff Duntemann impressed me as an author on his way up; though if sales are brisk, as I expect they will be, his stock will no doubt drop lower."

I, for one, am grateful we got the November 1986 we did. For eventually I was destined, on our own timeline, to meet Steven H Silver, and we became friends. Who knows? On the weekend of this FenCon, dear reader, perhaps you yourself will share this destiny.

*Literally. To the *Encyclopedia of American Jewish History*, he contributed an article on Jewish SF.

**Argentus being the Latin word for a certain metal.

***I'm sure "beneath the silver rafters" appears in one of Lord Dunsany's stories somewhere. ☺

DigiHoop: The Next Generation in LED Hoops

A Technology project in Dallas, TX by Mike Eber & Dr. Steve Lorenzen



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8

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NO MATTER HOW LONG
HE LIVES DOWN THERE,

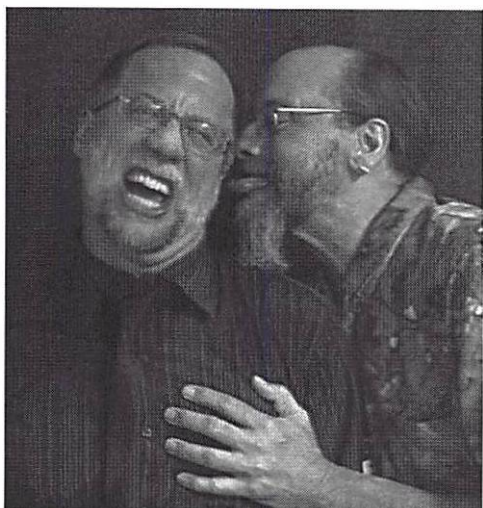
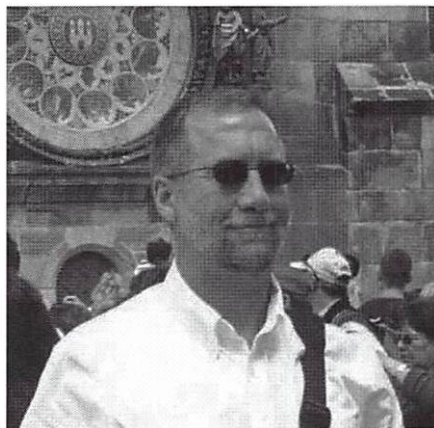


Photo by Vickie Malone Kennedy

HE'S OURS!
LOVE YA, BEET CHEEKS!
(NOT A EUPHEMISM)

Toastmaster: Bradley Denton, An Appreciation

by Robin Wayne Bailey



I had a beer in my hand when Brad first informed me that he would be your toastmaster and asked if I would write his program book bio. I blinked and studied his face. His expression said that he was serious. My heart began to race; my head began to throb. I raised the bottle, took a slow drink, and fought down the impulse to spray liquid across the distance between us. I am, after all, a skilled character assassin. Jimmy Blackburn with a pen, as it were, as Brad Denton has reason to know. And with Brad, there are so many bullets in my arsenal.

All the luscious nuggels of pejorative defamation I could reveal. The sweet moments of humiliation and embarrassment to which I've subjected him over the years of late nights at conventions. I've been cruel, I admit it. He brought it all upon himself. The man comes from some serious nerd stock. He once had the largest collection of sleeveless pullover sweaters in the western world.

When he blushes, and he does so easily, the Arecibo Radio Telescope in Puerto Rico records it as

a galactic x-ray event. The Very Large Array in New Mexico goes completely offline. See for yourself. Ask him about my chaps. Publicly admire his pneumatic gluteal cupcakes. But wear sunglasses. The glare from his beet-red cheeks can be damaging.

I took another sip of beer and regarded him with suspicious eyes. In the subtle bend of his elbow as he drank his own beer, in the slight backward tilt of his head, I saw a trap. He finished his beer and set the empty aside. Across the gulf of my magnificent library, a mind that is to my mind as mine is to an Oklahoma televangelist or a Texas politician, an intellect vast and cool and unsympathetic, regarded me. Here was a sleazy trick to make me say vicious things about him. He was tempting me to take advantage, to abuse his outward vanilla niceness with saponaceous barbs and quisquilian revelations. I would look like a cad.

Well, I won't fall for it. I will say, instead, that I consider it an honor to write this appreciation for my longtime friend. You couldn't have chosen a better guest and toastmaster, but I suspect you already know that. He is the spawn of Satan, of course. How else can you explain so much talent in one man, except as the result of a deal with the devil? Still, as Satan-spawn go, he is massively charming and entertaining. But wait - I'm falling into his trap.

Back to the nice stuff. Brad has won or been nominated for just about every major award in the field - the Hugo, the Nebula, the World Fantasy Award, the Stoker, the John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer, the Theodore Sturgeon Award, and probably a few I'm forgetting. It's kind of weird to look back to 1983 and remember the first time Brad walked into a KaCSFFS gathering. Who would have guessed this nerdy college kid in the sleeveless sweater would go so far?

Have you read his debut novel, *Totally gonzo alternate history*, and out of print, I think, but get your hands on it, read it, then grovel at his feet the way I did. Well, not publicly. That would have made Brad blush, and that's not a good thing for astrophysics. But he knows I love the book. It's completely possible to admire a genius and be jealous at the same time.

There's so much to admire, too: his serial killer with a heart of gold; the head-scratchingly brilliant. He recoils and scowls when I call him a mainstream writer, but his work leaps genre boundaries and often defies classification. As a writer, he's unique. One might say *Not Of This Earth*. Or *Hell-spawn*. But I won't, no.

And this appreciation doesn't even touch on his alter ego, Bland Lemon Denton. When, oh when, did Brad Denton, the quietly nerdy Kansas kid with the closet full of sleeveless pullover sweaters, get so freaking cool? Could it be... Satan? I don't know for sure, though I have my suspicions, but if you hear him playing around the convention at some late night party, the music will be hot and you'll have a hell of a good time.

Have a great convention, Brad. Wish I could be there with you. Kiss Barb for me. And for God's sake, put down the weird-ass beer and drink some bourbon. Or a decent tequila. Then think of handcuffs. And me.

Special Guest: Lou Anders

*Don't Blink: Lou Anders, Hugo-Winning Editor
A FenCon VIII Appreciation by John Picacio*



Quick. Pop quiz – name some of the greatest editors in our field. Clock is ticking. Who comes to mind? John W. Campbell? Gardner Dozois? Ellen Datlow? David Hartwell? Edward Ferman? Judy-Lynn Del Rey? Terry Carr? Gordon Van Gelder?

Did any of you say Lou Anders, your Special Guest this weekend?

I can hear some of you murmur. Oh, c'mon. Isn't that laying the gravy on a little thick for this guy? One of the greatest? Really?

I'm sensing a disturbance in the Force. Or maybe it's just that some of you aren't convinced.

Alright – let's try a tougher question. In the 56-year history of the Hugo Awards, how many editors have won the Hugo for Best Professional Editor? Go ahead and

lump Long Form and Short Form together. What's your guess? Would you believe 14? Now the truth is the category for Editor has only been around since 1973, so it hasn't been a category since the inception of the Hugos, and yes, now two editors get recognized every year by the Hugos. But think about that – in 38 years, only 14 editors have held the silver rocket.

Don't look now, FenCon, but you have one of those rare fourteen in your house this weekend – Lou Anders, 2011 Hugo Award winner for Best Professional Editor, Long Form.

Not enough?

How many of you reading this are not just readers, but art lovers? Maybe you're just as impressed, if not moreso, by Chesley Awards, which are voted on by members of the Association of Science Fiction and Fantasy Artists? Anyone have any idea how many art directors have won Chesley Awards? Did you guess the meager number of 11?

And yes, FenCon – you have one of those rare eleven in your house this weekend. That man again – Lou Anders. He snagged his well-earned Chesley in 2009.

So the inevitable question – how many editors have won both a Hugo and also won a Chesley for superior achievement as an art director? Don't think too hard – because there's only one in the history of our field: Lou Anders.

Alright – let's put the award metrics away, and let's talk about the bottom line for editors. Let's talk books. Lou Anders is the editorial director for Pyr, one of the leading imprints for science fiction and fantasy since its inception in 2005. In only their third year of existence, Pyr was named Publisher of the Year by notable blog *Pat's Fantasy Hotlist*, and this quote probably says more than the award itself. "The market is no level playing field, and yet year in and year out, Pyr titles manage to stand out from the competition."

It's the truth, isn't it? There are several big houses on the stiff block – Tor, Del Rey, Eos, Orbit, and more. They have large employee rosters and deep bank accounts with multinational conglomerates to back them up. Now have a look at Pyr. Pyr is many things, but they are not a small press. However, compared to the deep resources of those larger houses, Pyr has a much smaller margin of error and much more pressure to make the right calls at the right times. No large employee rosters. No multinational conglomerate with deep pockets. Who's the key decision maker that's been there since parent company Prometheus hired him on day one? Lou Anders.

Take Lou Anders away from Pyr and Pyr doesn't just lose its brain, but its soul. He's not playing from a level playing field as the rest of the publishers in our field and yet with every release, he and Pyr seem to do the most with the least. Ask Joe Abercrombie, Justina Robson, Ian McDonald, and James Engle to name who is responsible for putting them in position for big sales and big awards, and the answer is Lou.

Think about some of the notable books of recent years. Abercrombie's *The Blade Itself*. Robson's *Chasing the Dragon*. McDonald's *Brasy* and *The Dervish House*. Engle's *Blood of Ambrose*. Mark Chabdbour's *Age of Misrule* trilogy. David Louis Edelman's *Infoquake*. Clay and Susan Griffith's *Vampire Empire* series. Jasper Kent's *Twelve*. Paul McAuley's *The Quiet War*. Mike Resnick's *Starship* series. Joel Shepherd's *Crossover*. Sam Sykes' *Tomb of the Undergates*. Adrian Tchaikovsky's *Shadows of the Apt* series. And that's only scratching the surface.



All of the above not only were debuted or made available in America for the first time, but all have been commercial and critical hits despite a troubled world economy and a tumultuous period of publishing upheaval. It's not magic to do what Lou does, but to say it's equal parts rocket science and alchemy might be closer to the truth.

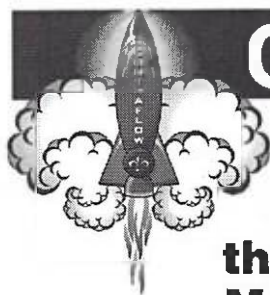
It's talent, folks. Plain and simple. Many like to think of editors as simple word pushers and taskmasters, but that's not the truth in the world of Lou Anders. I'll give you three reasons why you should walk up to Lou Anders and say 'hello' and attend at least one or more of his panels.

Congratulate him on his hard-earned Hugo Award win.

Visit face-to-face with an editor who truly has his thumb on the pulse of where our field is today, and where it's headed next.

Perhaps the most important reason – do yourself a great deed, and get to know one of the most vibrant talents we have in science fiction & fantasy (and that includes all authors, artists, and personalities in publishing).

Talent like this does not arrive often. Lou Anders is a meteoric star, and yes, one of the greatest editors in the field of science fiction and fantasy. When a shooting star is scheduled to fly by your house, the best advice I can give you is just be there, and don't blink. ☸



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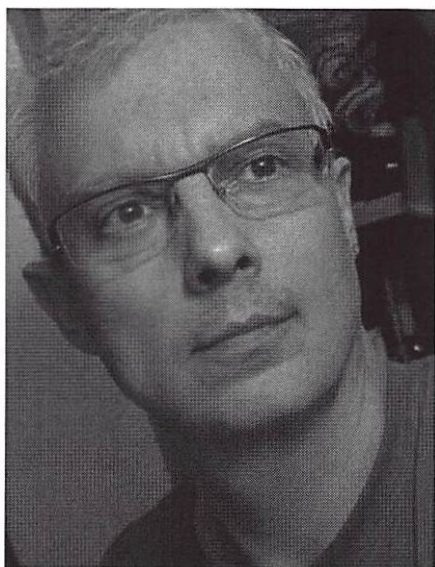
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Special Guest: Stephan Martiniere



Stephan Martiniere is an internationally acclaimed artist. In the past 25 years he has become known for his talent, versatility and imagination in every entertainment field including feature films, animation, video games, theme parks, editorial, and book covers.

Stephan Martiniere attended high school at the school of applied arts "Ecole Supérieure des Arts Appliqués Duperré", one of the most renowned art schools in Paris. There he studied anatomy, perspective, advertising, architecture and a banquet of other useful art fields. The classical art and illustration masters became part of his daily sustenance, as did such landmark films such as , and .

After graduating from art school it was off to animation school but, halfway through, Stephan was hired by an animation company and was immediately sent to Japan to work on the animated series as a character and background designer. The next several years went by frantically, as he eagerly worked between Asia and the United States on a variety of projects, including and .

Finally setting in California, Stephan became a television director for a number of animated shows including , and the animated musical adaptation which received the ACT Awards, the Parent's Choice Award, and an Emmy nomination. Several years later, Stephan left the realm of television production for the theme park industry and found himself traveling again between Japan and the California. He found great artistic excitement in creating whimsical and fantastic environments for several Sanrio parks. Theme park work eventually led to motion rides where Stephan helped design the attraction and . Not surprisingly, those two projects led Stephan to Hollywood, where he established himself as concept artist working on such feature films including and, and the upcoming and remakes.

Armed with years of experience as a concept artist and art director, Stephan made his foray into the game industry as a visual design director working for Cyan, the creators of . For several years Stephan created and oversaw the artistic content for the game the expansion pack , and . In 2004, Stephan joined Midway Games as a visual design director to work on the game . During these years Stephan continued his involvement in the film industry and also established himself as a book cover illustrator. Stephan has produced over one hundred covers and illustrations for books, comic books, and magazines working for such publishing companies as Tor Books, Pyr, Simon and Schuster, Penguin, Random House, and National Geographic. Stephan is the recipient of one Gold and two Silver Spectrum Awards plus 5 Master and 16 Excellence Exposé Awards. He is also the winner of the Chesley Award, the British Science Fiction Association Award for best cover of 2004 and 2006, and the Hugo Award in 2008. In 2004 Stephan received the Grand Master Exposé Award and was voted one of the 50 most inspirational artists by Magazine.

Stephan Martiniere is currently art directing the game at ID software. Stephan frequently gives lectures, interviews and workshops in the US and abroad and is also an advisory board member of the CG Society.



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2011 FenCon Charity



South Collin County
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What is Habitat for Humanity of South Collin County, Texas (HfH-SCC)?

The Habitat for Humanity of South Collin County is an affiliate of Habitat for Humanity International. HfH-SCC was formed in 1998 from the Dallas Area Habitat for Humanity and originally named Plano Area Habitat for Humanity. Our service area is the southern half of Collin County, approximately 400 square miles, including Plano, Allen, Lucas, Wylie, Murphy, Parker, Lowry Crossing, Fairview, and Saint Paul. Our partnerships with businesses, churches, community groups, and individuals have allowed HfH-SCC to build a total of 60 homes and we're now building 9-12 homes per year. Our Mission is to create partnerships in South Collin County to provide decent affordable homes to deserving families while building foundations for community.

Habitat for Humanity International is a nonprofit, ecumenical Christian ministry established in 1976 and founded on the conviction that every man, woman and child should have a decent, safe and affordable place to live. To date, Habitat has helped build over 400,000 decent, affordable houses and served more than 2 million people around the world.

How does HfH-SCC work?

Habitat offers a hand up, not a hand out, to low-income working families. Habitat homeowners buy their houses and invest "sweat equity" labor in the construction of their home or other Habitat projects. Habitat homes are affordable because of volunteer labor, donated funds and materials. Interest payments add substantially to home costs, so our homes are financed by the organization at no interest and are sold at no profit. Homeowner house payments go into a revolving fund, helping to build more homes. HfH-SCC's average home has 3 bedrooms, 2 baths and is approximately 1,150 square feet.

Who do we serve?

Our Partner Families are low-income working people who might have only dreamed of homeownership because of high home prices and increased mortgage regulations. Families qualify on the basis of need, willingness to partner with "sweat equity" labor and ability to make mortgage payments that average about \$550 monthly, including taxes and insurance. The community benefits as responsible citizens move into neighborhoods, lowering crime rates and increasing property values. Collectively, our Partner Families paid more than \$53,000 in property taxes in 2010.

Why do we build?

HfH-SCC is dedicated to being part of the solution to eliminating substandard housing in South Collin County. Over 650,000 homes in Texas are substandard. Many families are living with other people in overcrowded conditions, some without air conditioning, heat, or water. No one should have to live in an overcrowded, dilapidated, dangerous house. Substandard housing seriously limits the potential of both children and adults. A simple, decent, affordable place to live can break the cycle of poverty and homelessness.

We build homes as a means of transforming the lives of deserving families in our community.

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Ben Stevens and Dallas Comic Con
Barry, Shawn, Jim, and Kimm for the artwork
Robots-4-U
Jim Murray, again
Warren Buff, Naomi Fisher and Toni Weisskopf for the
support while we were bidding
The residents of Stately Barrett Manor for the loan of Julie
And most importantly, YOU, the Fen. 🍷



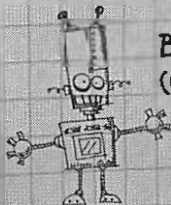
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Fen GoH: Jim Murray
Toastmaster: Elizabeth Moon
Special Guest: Joe R. Lansdale
Special Guest: Ardath Mayhar
Program Book cover artist: Cat Conrad
Convention Guide cover artist: Cat Conrad
Official T-Shirt artist: Shawn Murphy
Convention Chairman: Michael Nelson
Location: Holiday Inn Select North Dallas,
2645 LBJ Freeway, Dallas, TX 75234
Theme: Of the fen, by the fen, for the fen

FenCon II (September 23-25, 2005)

Attendance: 462
GoH: S.M. Stirling
Music GoH: Leslie Fish
Fen GoH: Randy Farran
Artist GoH: Larry Dixon
Toastmaster: David Gerold
Special Guest: Mike Resnick
Program Book cover artist: Larry Dixon
Convention Guide cover artist: Larry Dixon
Official T-Shirt artist: Shawn Murphy
Convention Chairman: Michael Nelson
Location: Holiday Inn Select North Dallas,
2645 LBJ Freeway, Dallas, TX 75234
Theme: What if?

FenCon III (September 22-24, 2006)

Attendance: 623
GoH: Alan Dean Foster
Music GoH: Heather Alexander
Fen GoH: Judith Ward*
Artist GoH: Darrell K. Sweet
Toastmaster: Jim Butcher
Special Guest: Lawrence Watt-Evans
(* Judith Ward passed away on July 3rd, 2006, but she remained Fen GoH.)
Program Book cover artist: Darrell K. Sweet
Convention Guide cover artist: Brad W. Foster
Official T-Shirt artist: Barry Whitewater
Staff T-Shirt artist: Barry Whitewater
Convention Chairman: Tim Miller
Location: Holiday Inn Select North Dallas,
2645 LBJ Freeway, Dallas, TX 75234
Theme: Sci-Fi Camp

FenCon IV (September 21-23, 2007)

Attendance: 661
GoH: Connie Willis
Music GoH: Tom Smith
Fen GoH: Kathleen Sloan
Artist GoH: David Mattingly
Toastmaster: Steve Perry
Special Guest: Toni Weisskopf
Shindig Guest: Jarrod Davis*
(* FenCon was the site for the 2007 Lone Star Shindig, hosted by the DFW Browncoats for fans of Firefly and Serenity from across Texas.)
Program Book cover artist: David Mattingly
Convention Guide cover artist: David Lee Anderson
Official T-Shirt artist: Shawn Murphy
Staff T-Shirt artist: Shawn Murphy
Convention Chairman: Tim Miller
Location: Crowne Plaza North Dallas, 14315
Midway Road, Addison, TX 75001
Theme: Fantastic Four

FenCon V (October 3-5, 2008)

Attendance: 616
GoH: Gregory Benford
Music GoH: Three Weird Sisters
Fen GoH: Gerald Burton
Artist GoH: Real Musgrave
Toastmaster: Howard Waldrop*
Special Guest: Jay Lake
ORAC Special Guest: Doris Egan
* Due to health concerns, Howard Waldrop was unable to attend.
Program Book cover artist: Real Musgrave
Convention Guide cover artist:
Official T-Shirt artist: Chris Barrett
Staff T-Shirt artist: Barry Whitewater
Convention Chairman: Russ Miller
Location: Crowne Plaza North Dallas, aaaaa
14315 Midway Road; Addison, TX 75001
Theme: 50 Years of SF Conventions in Texas

FenCon VI (September 18-20, 2009)

Attendance: 808
GoH: Lois McMaster Bujold
Music GoH: Carla Ulbrich
Fen GoH: Warren Buff
Artist GoH: Kurt Miller
Toastmaster: Paul Cornell (sponsored by ORAC)
Special Guest: Keith R.A. DeCandido
Special Guest: Howard Waldrop
FenCon VI hosted the Region Three Summit for Starfleet International, an annual gathering of Star Trek fans from Texas and Louisiana.
Program Book cover artist: Kurt Miller
Convention Guide cover artist: Kurt Miller
Official T-Shirt artist: Teddy Harvia
Staff T-Shirt artist: Barry Whitewater
Convention Chairman: Russ Miller
Location: Crowne Plaza North Dallas,
14315 Midway Road; Addison, TX 75001
Theme: Sci-Fi DIY

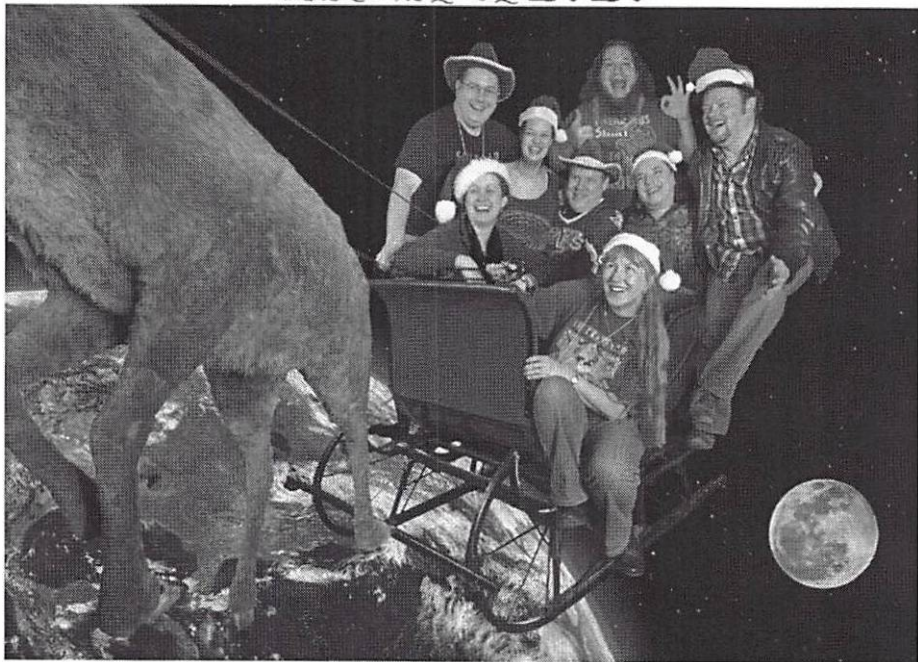
FenCon VII (September 17-19, 2010)

GoH: Spider & Jeanne Robinson*
Attendance: 716
Music GoH: Jeff & Maya Bohnhoff
Fen GoH: Andy Trembley & Kevin Roche
Artist GoH: John Picacio
Science GoH: Dr. John Randall
Toastmaster: Joe R. Lansdale
Special Guest: Jessica Wade
Special Guest: Robert J. Sawyer
(* Jeanne Robinson passed away on May 30, 2010, but she remained GoH.)
Program Book cover artist: John Picacio
Convention Guide cover artist: John Picacio
Official T-Shirt artist: Chris Barrett
Staff T-Shirt artist: Chris Barrett
Convention Chairman: Julie Barrett
Location: Crowne Plaza North Dallas,
14315 Midway Road; Addison, TX 75001
Theme: Mad Science!

FenCon VIII (September 23-25, 2011)

GoH: Gail Carriger
Music GoH: Joe Bethancourt
Fen GoH: Steven H Silver
Artist GoH: Vincent Di Fate*
Science GoH: Les Johnson
Toastmaster: Bradley Denton
Special Guest: Lou Anders
Special Guest: Stephan Martinieri
(*Due to professional commitments, Vincent attended virtually.)
FenCon VIII is the host for DeepSouthCon 49, a gathering of fans from across the southern United States. This was the first DSC held in Texas.
Program Book cover artist: Vincent Di Fate
Convention Guide cover artist: Stephan Martinieri
Official T-Shirt artist: Mel White
Staff T-Shirt artist: Julie Barrett
Convention Chairman: Julie Barrett
Location: Crowne Plaza North Dallas, 14315 Midway Road; Addison, TX 75001
Theme: Southern Steam 🍷

Boston in 2020



Christmas Worldcon Bid*

Have you heard that New Zealand is thinking about running a Worldcon in 2020?

- ✦ Why go to the beautiful beaches of New Zealand when you can enjoy the icy shores of Boston in December?
- ✦ Why enjoy the landscape that was used in such films as *The Lord of the Rings* when you can enjoy the scenery used to produce *Cheers*?
- ✦ Enjoy the wonders of Boston during Christmas! Freezing temperatures! Ice! Snow! Psychotic drivers! Boston has all of that and more!

So, choose Boston (Facebook: Boston in 2020 Christmas Worldcon Bid) over New Zealand (www.nzin2020.org) when deciding where to go for Worldcon in 2020.

Bid's Moral Compass: Christopher J. Garcia (Head Muckety Muck). **Bid Committee:** Rick Carson (I'm Batman), Norman Cates (Grand Poobah), Jesi Lipp (Top Banana), Tim Miller (Big Cheese), Helen Montgomery (Head Honcho), Barbara VanTilburg (Kingpin), Leane Verhulst (Official Guilty Party).

"World Science Fiction Society", "WSFS", "World Science Fiction Convention", "Worldcon", "NASFiC", "Hugo Award", and the distinctive design of the Hugo Award Rocket are service marks of the World Science Fiction Society, an unincorporated literary society.

The Fine Print: No shirt, no shoes, no service - punts optional! Objects in mirror may be closer than they appear. Machine wash cold, lay flat to dry. Do not dry clean. Eat your vegetables. Do not run with scissors. We're gonna party like it's 1999. Love is a battlefield. Edited to fit your screen. If you keep making that face, it'll freeze like that. Not suitable for anyone. Free toy inside! Do not pass Go, do not collect \$200. A sucker is born every minute. What could possibly go wrong?

* Not a real bid. This is only a test. If this had been a real bid, you would have been instructed on how to give us all your money so that we can go to New Zealand. This concludes this test of the Emergency Worldcon System.

Chili con Conchair

by Julie Barrett

Basic ingredients:

- 1 28-oz can diced tomatoes, plus 1 can of water
- 1 6-oz can of tomato paste
- 1.5-2 lbs. ground beef *
- 1 jalapeno pepper, whole, stem removed
- 1 large white onion, diced

Spices: **

- 1 Tbsp. paprika
- 1 Tbsp. cayenne pepper
- 2 Tbsp. garlic powder
- 1 Tbsp. ground cumin
- 2 Tbsp. dried oregano leaves

1 Tbsp. masa mixed with 2 Tbsp. water. ***

Brown meat in skillet. Add onion and cook. (I usually add half of the onion early, and half before the meat is fully brown.)

* Chili grind is best if you can get it. Texas chili has no beans. However, if you are making vegetarian chili, do substitute beans for the meat. That will provide texture and protein. Use canned beans or cooked beans. You can also use different meats in the chili. Turkey and venison work well.

** This is a starting point on the spices. Adjust according to your taste.

*** Masa is not something you put in the cold, cold ground. It's a flour used for making tortillas. Cornstarch is an acceptable substitute.

In the meantime, combine tomatoes, water, and tomato paste in a large pan. Add spices. Bring to a boil and start to simmer as you cook meat. Drain the meat and add to the pan. ****

Taste and adjust spices. Chili should be a little over-spiced to your taste at this point. Drop the jalapeno in and simmer or at least 45 minutes. Stir occasionally and add water if needed. The whole pepper adds flavor, but not heat. Alternatively, you can add a tablespoon or so of juice from a jar of pickled jalapenos.

Simmer at least 45 minutes, but longer if you have the time. Blend the masa and water and add to the chili. Bring back to a boil. Adjust your spices. Simmer at least 15 minutes.

Serve with cubed cheese (cheddar, Monterrey jack, or Colby jack) and crackers.

This serves four, but it is easily doubled, or tripled, or ... 🍴

**** There is a school of chili making that says to use really cheap ground beef and don't drain the meat. This is a matter of personal preference, obviously.

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COMICS**

COASTCON No. 35

THE DARK CRAB RISES

FEATURING:



PATRICIA TALLMAN
"BABYLON 5"

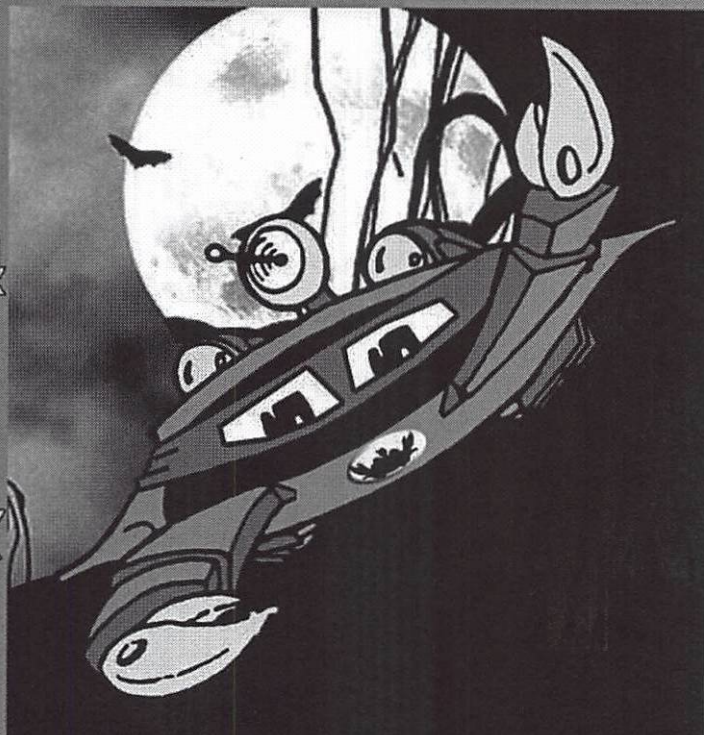


**STEVE KENSON &
JON LEITHEUSSER**
"MUTANTS AND
MASTERMINDS"

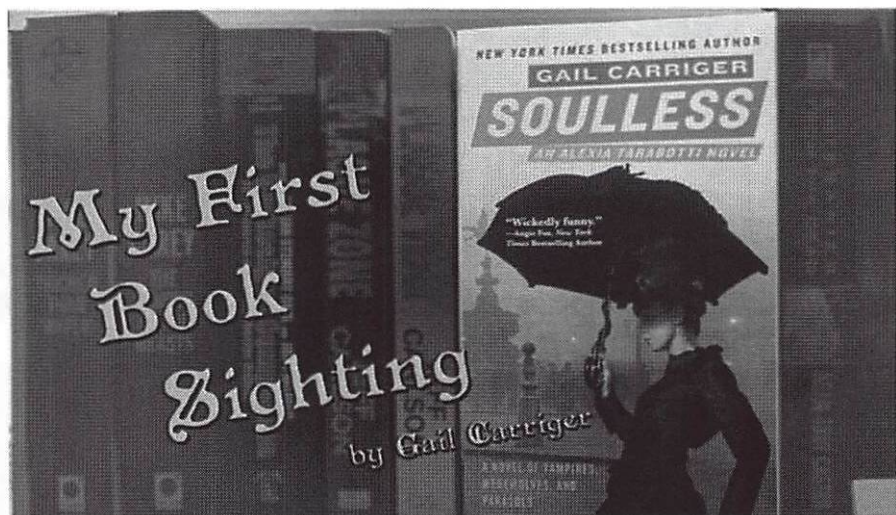


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WWW.COASTCON.ORG



The first time I saw my book on a shelf in a bookstore it wasn't in person. Instead, there it was, blurred by cell phone camera inefficiency, taken by one of my Twitter followers in Minnesota. It was a week before *Soulless* was supposed to be released, so both she and I were taken entirely unawares and understandably confused.

Well, it turns out, bookstores can do that with certain books: shelve 'em when they get 'em. No gag order. Mine was one of those books.

A small but enthusiastic following had been anticipating *Soulless*, and they were quite a buzz to find it arriving early. Suddenly, the spies-I-didn't-know-I-had-went-to-work-and-began-reporting-in-from-around-the-country. *Soulless* spotted in Indiana! In Texas! In New York! Thousands panic! (Oh, wait, different headline.) And then, finally, a dear friend snapped a shot of it in my home state of California.

A day or so later I was out shopping with a couple of girlfriends, as you do. We were consuming those Vietnamese beverages with the black tapioca in them, affectionately referred to by me as "Drinks with Stuff!" This process, three shopping females plus drinkies, involves much chattering and slurping and sideways perambulations. And thus engaged, we wandered by a bookstore.

"Ooo," says I, "can we go in and see if they have my book?"

And so we do. And there it was! Three whole copies of my real live book, on a shelf, in the wild. The chattering and the slurping became more enthusiastic as a result, which attracted the attention of one of the staff.

"Can I help you?" says she.

"That's my book!" I crow.

"Would you like to sign it?" says she. One of them crazy author types, she's thinking.

"Really? Of course! I'd love to."

And so she disappears and returns with a whole stack for me to sign, right there: Drink with Stuff! in one hand, cheap pen in the other.

As we leave the store one of my friends keeps saying, "I can't believe they didn't ask you for ID or anything. They just let you sign them."

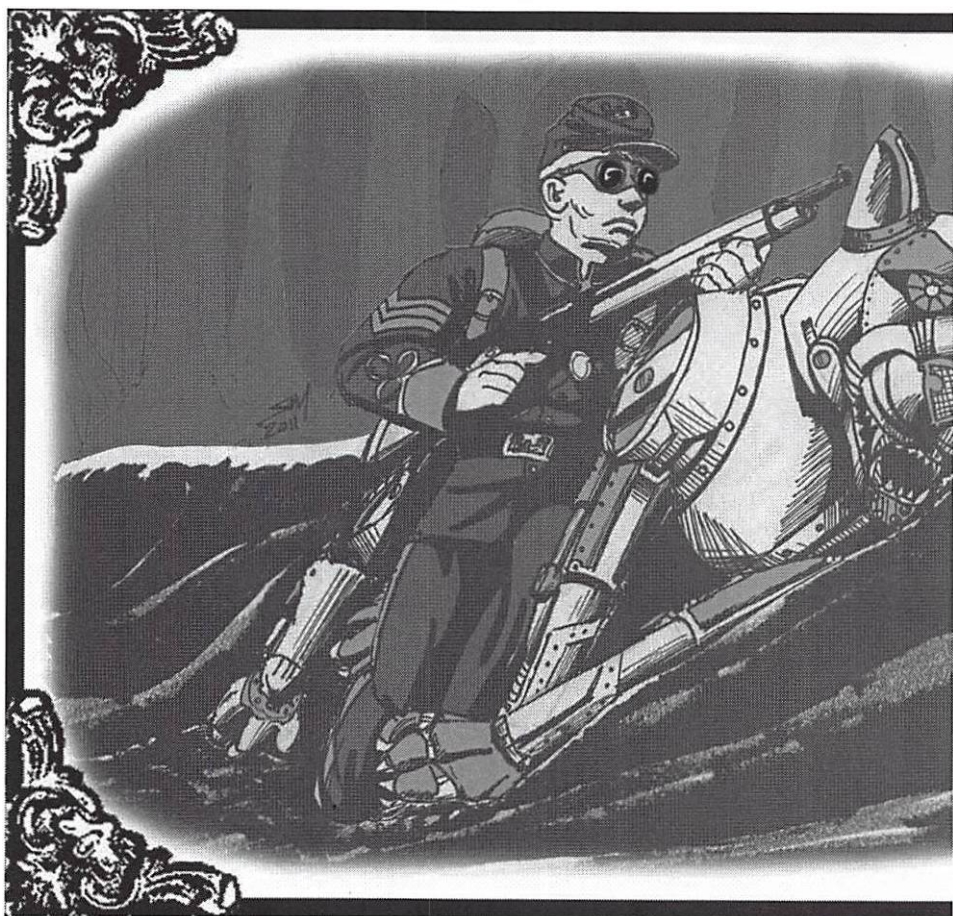
"Oh, of course," says I, "because there's a mad plague of crooks masquerading as debut steampunk authors dashing into unsuspecting bookstores and demanding to sign books they haven't written."

"Well, fine. But it'd be pretty funny if there were."

And with that I leave you to ponder what is obviously a vast untapped criminal market. ☹

Short Story Contest Winner: Rufus and Me

by Rick Helmich



Short Story Contest Winners

1st - *Rufus and Me* by Rick Helmich of Alexander, Arkansas

2nd - *The Dark Goddess Rises* by Seth Skorkowsky of Denton, Texas

3rd - *The Price of Progress* by Michael Simon of Saint John, New Brunswick, Canada

I remember the day I first met Rufus. It was in the spring of 1888, near the end of The War of Conglomerate Succession. Back then I was a mechanic with the 5th Arkansas Mounted Mechanized, and we were part of the Union Army of the West. We were pushing east after taking Chicago back from the Yank Conglomerates.

The story starts near the end of a battle I don't remember the name of. I'd begun that day with only three

working dogs, when I was supposed to be maintaining a squad of ten. My favorite, Old Toby, was an Autonomous Construct Battle Dog D3, and the two newer dogs, named Carl and the Shine, were both ACBD D6s. Carl must have taken a high-explosive round 'cause I saw him reduced to shrapnel shortly after I trotted onto the battlefield around noon, after finishing my morning duties. I later heard the Shine had triggered a mine. Mechanics weren't supposed to get caught up in the battles, but I always felt I had to watch out for my jitneys. That's what we used to call all ACs back then. I'd been following through the greening woods and keeping an eye on Toby, like I normally did, when I saw him just drop to the muddy ground on the bank of a creek.

The next thing I remember, I was kneeling in the mud of that Illinois creek.

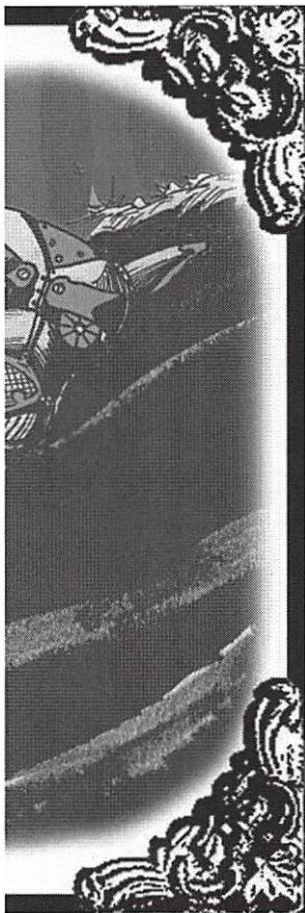
I had my dark goggles down and my head and shoulders in Toby's maintenance hatch with stray rounds buzzing by and twanging off of his armor. He was the last survivor of the squad of ten ACBD D3s I'd been assigned when I joined up in '85. The old D3s were only about four and a half feet high at the shoulder, not much higher than me, with a forward facing repeating rifle, clawed feet on each of their four legs and sharp teeth in their bronze heads. Toby had been my travel mount for the last two

years. He had gotten real good at understanding my voice commands and was pretty good at understanding basic commands from anyone. He only had a twenty word vocabulary he could speak himself, but they had gotten nice and clear and I was very worried already because he wasn't responding to any of my questions. By that time in the war he was mostly replacement parts, many of them scavenged from other dogs, some bronze but most steel, and not a few that I made work from Yank jitneys. It was a lot like keeping the power suits running on my pappy's farm west of Memphis. There were never enough of the right parts. Our supply lines were stretched thin. So much of the replacement material was going to General Fancy-pants Custer and his Grand Army of the East for his attacks on New York that we hadn't seen fresh parts up from St. Louis for more than a month. I prayed that the damage wasn't something I couldn't fix.

The first thing I always checked was the Nemo Power Unit. We used a small one-gallon-a-day unit in the Battle Dogs back then, and the three day fuel reservoir still had two gallons of water in it. The power gauge showed that the unit was still splitting water into hydrogen and oxygen and fusing the hydrogen into helium to produce heat for the Sterling steam engine. The helium tank was showing the right level for one day's capture. I then pulled out of the hatch and did the lit match test on the oxygen exhaust.

After the matched flared and died, I noticed thudding and rumbling out in the woods. Well, I'd been in the army long enough to know what that meant. I grabbed my rifle and took up a firing position over the two and a half foot diameter barrel of Toby's chest. Most of the other mechanics gave me grief for carrying a rifle when a pistol was all that regs called for, but my pappy told me stories about when he and the rest of the Hybrid Men, that's the way the resolution referred to us hybes, were emancipated in '47. He was only a little boy back then, still playing in the streets of Memphis where his parents were being kept to work on the riverboats. They were trapped in their quarters for more than six weeks, eating anything they could find or catch, while the town rioted. He told me when I joined the army that I should learn to use any weapon that the army would let me near and carry the best that I could. I was rated marksmen on every man portable weapon we had back then, and still they wouldn't let me be more than a mechanic. Oh well, it's still a human's world.

But I wore the blue like all the combat suit jocks and the War Horse crews, and I had my rifle. It was a good one, the best I could find. One of the new semiautomatic .30-06 M5's out of Charleston. I was able to do the stock modification myself at the Memphis armory, and I could use it as well as any rifeman in the army. Like most of our best weapons, it was a copy of a Conglomerate design, this one by a young man named Browning. We had freed him from a standard designer cube in one of the overly intelligent Autonomous Individual factories we liberated in Chicago.



That factory's AI, named Horris I believe, was the first I ever really met. He was just flat out mean! I was with the group that wanted to blow him up despite what we were supposed to do, which was convert him to our side and try to figure out how he worked. His tick-tock brain was the smallest we had captured that was fully AI. It was all tiny brass and steel gears and levers that glittered as he thought, but it still filled a whole room that was kept cold enough to store ice in. I was given the job of making sure that the room's refrigeration keep working, trying to ignore Horris's arguing and dodging his traps and tricks the whole time. The big thinkers from Richmond flew in after a couple of days, and I was happy to get back to my dogs.

It was dark enough to see without my goggles when I looked into the woods. I could just make out a Yank War Horse with one of our old Autonomous Construct War Horse H4s, a four legged jitney that was about ten feet high, carried a crew of up to three, and had a front facing seven-inch canon as its main weapon, pushing it east. All of the Yankee horses were using tracks and turrets by then, and most of ours as well, but somehow we still had some of the old style still running. Without the corrective lenses in my goggles I could just make out three of our Powered Construct Combat Suit S3s supporting the old horse.

I didn't get to fire a shot that day, but I had a front row seat to an action that showed why we were winning the war. Our horse kept firing its main gun at the retreating Yank horse. The Yank was rolling backwards and firing its seven-inch canon at our horse. Both horses had forward armor panels that could handle these hits, but by running backwards the Yank was going slower than its top speed and couldn't really see where it was headed. Our three suits used their greater speed to circle the lone enemy horse.

I could tell that the suit jocks had worked together before. The combat suits both sides were using back then were just modified farm and construction power suits with little of the armor protection for the jocks that suits have today. This let them be faster and more nimble than the suits today are. Two of them grabbed a medium-sized tree and ripped it out of the ground. Then one of them moved off to join the third one, and they harvested another tree. This was all done on the run. The two carrying the trees then attacked the Yankee horse. They jammed the root balls of the trees into the track gears on both sides, and the horse ground to a halt. The third suit moved in and put an explosive pack under the turret. The suits ran away from the Yank as the charge started to smoke. It was on a standard five second fuse, and when it exploded the turret went flipping through the air. I really didn't expect anyone to be able to get out of the Yank horse, but despite my weak distance vision I had my rifle trained on it to be sure. Our horse and the three suits were already running off to their next fight.

I was still watching the Yank horse when I heard the trumpet calls for first the Yank recall and then ours. I had to report back to our assembly area, and I knew that

I would have to leave Toby till later, but I needed to check out the Yank horse. If there was anyone still alive in there they would need help before anyone else would have time to find them. I carried my rifle with me as I trotted over and climbed up the side of the horse. I aimed the rifle down as I looked into the horse. I was a bit surprised. Where the crew stations should have been there was only smooth metal and storage crates. This horse had been set up as an autonomous freight transport.

I decided to check the engine compartment of the horse to see how bad it had been hurt by the demo charge. It didn't take a long look. The suit jock had placed his charge right over the access hatch. I was able to pick out the hatch pieces and look at the mess that had been a working machine minutes before. The gears of its brain were in a loose pile in the compartment, and it was a wonder that the Sterling engine hadn't blown.

I hurried back to Toby to switch out the helium bottle for an empty. I wanted to take the charged bottle back to the assembly area, and I expected that one of the airships would be stopping by that night. I hoped that it would have some parts I could use to get my dogs working, though if what I was thinking had really happened I didn't have much hope.

I could see the airship floating over the assembly area from several hundred yards away. They had sent in one of the little fifty foot ships for that night's run, so I knew that we weren't getting any new supplies. We never had as many airships as the Conglomerates. They'd converted their entire commercial air fleet to military use when they tried to secede, and we spent the whole war shooting them down whenever the Yanks were foolish enough to fly them during the day. They, of course, keep shooting ours down as well. They still had more left at the end of the war.

I put my goggles back on to keep from being blinded and could see my lieutenant talking to the captain of the airship. It was quite a contrast with the area flood lights on them. My lieutenant was dark in his blue uniform and his tanned but still white face seemed to float in the air. The captain was glowing in his white uniform, though his black skinned face disappeared into the night.

I stopped a few feet from the officers and came to attention. Lieutenant Pershing faced me, and I saluted up to him. As I did after each recall, I said "Sergeant Fenraile reporting, sir."

The lieutenant returned my salute and said "You're a little late tonight, Jimmy. You were on the battlefield again, weren't you?"

"Yes, sir," I replied as I removed the helium bottle from my bag. I handed the bottle to the lieutenant and continued, "This is from Toby. He's down in the field, and I don't know what's wrong with him yet. I saw Carl go down earlier, and his bottle was destroyed with the rest of him.

"I also got a chance to check out a disabled Yank War Horse. The crew compartment was laid out as a transport and it still had some crates inside. We might

want to put a team out there to check on the cargo before the Yanks get a chance to recover it."

"Very well," he replied looking into the dark as if he could see anything there at all. "Take a squad of your men and see if there is something we can use in that horse. And take a closer look at Toby. The Shine was reported destroyed as well, so right now you don't have any working dogs. I don't want to have to move you to the horses. That's rough on you davincis. I could second you to Captain Davis here, but I don't think that would be any better."

The lieutenant was right, of course. When our people were designed by the great da Vinci, in 1502, to help him build his war machines, he gave us a lot of advantages. He made us thin, and strong, and tough skinned, and able to see heat in the dark. But he also made us short, near sighted, almost hairless, and subject to bad motion sickness in enclosed spaces. Riding in a horse or an airship is pure hell for one of us.

I saluted and gave a quick, "Yes sir." I then turned and slipped back into the dark.

I trotted over to the hybe compound where we support troops were quartered and looked about to see who wasn't busy. There was a pretty good selection of talent that I could call on.

There were several of the cents standing around their food tables, as usual. They look a lot like the centaurs from the old Greek stories but weren't nearly as smart as the stories made them out to be. In fact they were so slow that about ten percent of the adults couldn't pass the Franklin Test to be accredited as citizens, much less allowed to join the army. They were used mostly as load haulers and generally were only busy when we were moving camp, but with their big bodies they were eating almost all the time. At least they could eat grass and hay, and most of them had been farmers before they joined up. They were very good about scavenging food along the march.

There were also four davinci. Corporal Sam Pulaney and Privates Junny Jonara, Hairy Bob Santare (he is one of the few davinci I have ever met that still had a full head of red hair as an adult), and Rory Hanna around the nearby fire with members of a couple of the old Egyptian lines. My friend, Corporal Amod, a cobra-headed merets engineer, was sitting with four of the lion-headed maahes guards. I never did learn the name to any of those maahes. But that was enough for a salvage squad.

I had to watch my step as I walked up to the cents. They have enough bio-horse in them to make the term "mess area" have more meaning for a cent. To get the attention of the two cent privates I wanted for the squad I had to reach up to slap their shoulders. Buck, who had blond hair on his head and a light buckskin colored coat on his trunk, and Sam, a head and body bay, looked down at me and I motioned them to come over to the fire.

When we joined the group at the fire I said, "Gather round, boys. I have a little jaunt for us tonight."

I went with the other davincis to help the cents get hitched to their transport wagons and picked up our tools while Amod went over to the motor pool to check out his H6 horse named Full Load.

I have to say I didn't like the designs of those newer horses. They looked more like the water tanks the airships use to carry ballast than a horse at all. At least the Battle Dogs still looked a little like the furry dogs we had on the farm.

Well, Amod was Load's engineer and could have the jitney for an approved night run. With Load and the maahes we would have some fire power support while we got our jobs done.

After we got our equipment together the convoy out to where Toby and the Yank horse had gone down didn't take long. Once there, Amod set Full Load to do an independent patrol and put the maahes on a four point guard around the whole area. He then did what he could to help Sam and the boys unload the Yank horse while I went back to Toby.

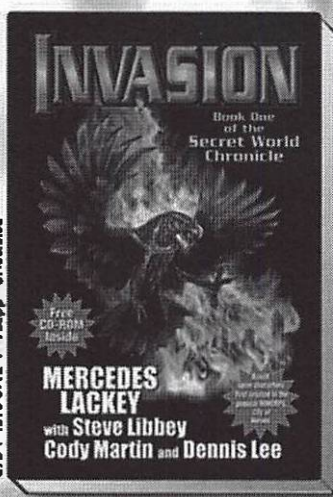
Toby was right where I left him, and still wouldn't respond to voice commands. I'd decided on the trip back that I would check on the worst possible thing first. I went to the front of the dog's body, where the brain is mounted behind the thickest armor on the jitney, and looked for any damage. There it was, on one of the seams between armor plates, a small hole. My hands were shaking and I was blinking tears from my eyes as I removed the bolts holding on the access panel to the brain compartment. I still had some hope that I could fix him, at least until I opened him up and saw bits on tiny gears and levers scattered about the compartment. An armor piercing round had gotten in and destroyed everything that made this dog Toby.

Now, I'd been in that damn war for years. I'd lost a lot of dogs. I'd lost davincis that I was very close to, a couple that I'd grown up with, and other hybes as well. Even the deaths of some humans have hit me hard. But none of them affected me near as much as knowing that Toby, who I'd sweated over and repaired so many times I couldn't remember them all, was gone past any hope of recovery. I've heard old soldiers talk about the futility of war. I've heard old farmers talk about the futility of hard work when the weather's against you. That was the first time I felt both of those pits open beneath me at once. But anyone with any will to continue living acknowledges that futility is not a reason to quit.

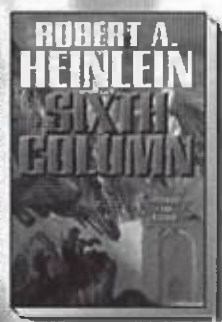
I admit I shed a few tears on that pile of twisted metal, but then I reached in and began removing the wreckage that had been Toby. I had to make sure that I could fit a replacement brain in the compartment, so all the busted parts had to be swept out. I also welded the bullet hole closed in the armor. Now all I needed was something that I knew we hadn't had in camp that morning: a new or surplus tick-tock brain.

As I walked back over to the crew unloading the Yank horse I could see that they all understood why I had two wagons come out with us. They were moving the last

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Shoot for the Moon!

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on Travis S. Taylor's
The Quantum Connection

Kowabunga! The space race is back on between NASA, a private company, and China. But something goes horribly wrong, and now the astronauts must put differences aside and prove that exploration and adventure in space is our species' destiny! A crackling thriller of intrigue and courage from idea-master Travis S. Taylor (NASA and DOD consultant) and Lee Johnson, Deputy Manager for the Advanced Concepts Office at NASA.

few crates to the same wagon that they had loaded the rest of the boxes onto. The second wagon was free to carry what was left of my dog home.

Amod heard me coming and turned his dim red head-light off before he turned my way. He was carrying the cargo manifest, and almost anyone needed extra light to read by. He met me a little way from the rest of the crew and asked, "What was it? Something I can help with? Can we fix him at camp?"

I sighed and shook my head. "Naw, he's brain shot. I need a whole new brain to get that dog running again. And I don't know where to get one."

Amod almost blinded me by flipping his head-light back on while he was looking me in the face and I was still cussing him out when he yelled "I thought that was what I saw. Look here. Crate 1412. Boys, dig out 1412."

Well, my eyes were sort of working again and I could see that Amod had shuffled the manifest pages to find something that seemed to have him excited. I had to grab his arm and pull his hand down so that I could see what had him all flustered. That manifest page showed that crate 1412 had a new standard configuration brain and support documentation in it. I also saw that this brain was noted as being experimental. It had been shipped from a depot in New Jersey and was supposed to go directly to some general in Chicago. Well, that wasn't gonna happen.

Sam pulled the crate from the load in the wagon and lifted it up. It was a wooden box about two feet wide on a side. He carried it over to my dog and Amod and I went with him. Sam used his knife to pry off the top and the three of us looked inside. All we could see was a book titled Experimental Combat Brain BX15. Amod picked up the book, and we saw there was another wood panel about three inches below the box's top. Sam and I both stood back to let Amod read the book. The army is one of those places where a smart person learns that if the first thing you see when you open a box is a manual, you Read The Fucking Manual.

Amod spent a few minutes turning pages and mumbling. Then he said "Okay. You should be able to just lift the panel up and see a packet of blue jelly."

I reached in to remove the panel and, what do you know, there was something cool in the box. Couldn't tell what color. Blue doesn't show up too well in red light, even to us.

We followed the directions from the manual on unpacking the brain and installing it. The securing method was a bit odd, calling for the removal of the standard ridged mounting rods and attaching cables to the chamber walls instead. The control lines were the same ones used in both ours and the Yank's dogs and horses, so those connected with no problems. We then slit open half the gel packets and poured the contents in around the brain orb. After the brain was floating in a puddle of gel, we were instructed to remove the final layer of protective wrap.

That's when we finally saw it. The most beautiful piece of machinery any of us had ever seen. The manual

had warned us that the brain would go into limited self-test mode when the wrap was removed, and it was. The brain was sparkling. Not from Amod's reading lamp or the light from the overcast sky, but from some sort of internal red, green, blue, and white lights, and movements too slight to see as anything more than light waves moving through the orb. If this brain had gears and levers like common tick-tock brains the parts were just specks of crystals and jewels. It was amazing.

The manual had warned us that we had to get the orb covered with the cooling/lubricating gel before it overheated, but we had a few minutes. I called the rest of the davincis over and the cents too. Amod wanted to bring in the maahes so they could have a look, but that would have taken too long. The rest of them just stood there, staring, while I filled the chamber as full as possible with gel. The lights were strong enough to be seen through the thick fluid, which we could now see was indeed blue.

"Sorry, everybody," I said as I closed the chamber hatch and cut off our view of that wonder. They all, even the cents, started talking about what they had just seen. As I bolted the hatch closed, Sam was asking Amod if he thought that brain would really work. Amod didn't know any more than the rest of us, but his opinion was that it wouldn't. We found out when I tightened the last bolt.

"Containment chamber secure," came a very mechanical but still clear voice from the dog's speaker. "Self-test complete. Full operations as a modified Federal Battle Dog D3 to commence. Please secure my power chamber maintenance hatch."

Junny and Hairly Bob jumped to close and bolt the hatch I had left open. They'd hardly stepped back when the dog gave a bit of a quiver and got on its feet. It looked around and said, in a voice that was not nearly as mechanical and even clearer, "Okay, who's in charge here?"

Everyone looked at me. I shook myself and moved forward. "I guess that would be me. I'm Sergeant Jimmy Fenraie, mechanic with the 5th Arkansas Mounted Mechanized. You've been plugged into the shell of my battle dog. Welcome to the Union Army of the West."

I could already hear humor in his voice as he said, "Hold on there, Sparky. I'm not in anybody's army yet. I'm not an Autonomous Construct like your old dog was. I am an Autonomous Individual, and you're the Union Army, not the Conglomerate. You don't own me. I claim the right to take the Franklin test and prove my fitness for citizenship. Then I can decide if I want to join up. Oh, and my name is Rufus by the way."

I stood there, stunned, and heard a whisper from Amod, "Guess I was wrong."

Well, that's the story of how I met Rufus, and that's enough talking for a night when I only have coffee to lubricate my throat. Jerry and Rufus, start your patrols. Everyone else, into your bedrolls. We have another hard ride ahead of us if we're gonna catch those dinosaur rustlers tomorrow. Good night. 🐾

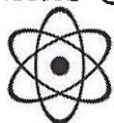
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2011 Program Participants

Paul Abell

Dr. Abell is the Lead Scientist for Planetary Small Bodies assigned to the Astromaterials Research and Exploration Science Directorate at the NASA Johnson Space Center in Houston. He was a telemetry officer for the Near-Earth Asteroid Rendezvous spacecraft and a science team member on the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency's Hayabusa near-Earth asteroid sample-return mission. Paul, his wife Amy Sisson, and their feline companions have lived in Houston, Texas, since December 2003.

Aelle Ables

Aelle is a fantasy and paranormal fiction writer who lives in the DFW area. She has published numerous articles and short fiction while working on longer works. Her YA fantasy book, *The Dragonwood Box*, will be published next Spring. This year Aelle became publisher at Wayfarer Publishing, an e-book publisher for fantasy and paranormal books and short fiction based in Dallas.

David Lee Anderson

David Lee is a science fiction and fantasy illustrator. He's shown paintings at more than 440 convention art shows since 1980. He's worked for Tor Books, Bean Books, *Tomorrow SF Magazine*, *Isaac Asimov's SF Magazine*, Mayfair Games, Bethesda Softworks, Yard Dog Books, and independent publishers and record labels. David Lee is known for his science fiction and space paintings.

C. Dean Andersson

Dean is an internationally published novelist, best known in heroic fantasy for the Bloodsong Trilogy, *Warrior Witch*, *Warrior Rebel*, and *Warrior Beast*, and in Horror for *I Am Dracula*, *Raw Pain Max*, and *Fiend*. He is interviewed in Michael McCarty's *Masters of Imagination*, sharing the pages with Ray Bradbury, John Carpenter, and others. Degreed in astrophysics and art, he confides that the Meaning of Life is, "Be Good to Cats and Hope Sekhmet has Mercy on you." (Sekhmet told him to say that.)

Lou Antonelli

Lou is a working journalist, the managing editor of the Mount Pleasant (Texas) *Daily Tribune*. He's had short stories published – since he started writing SF and fantasy in 2002 – in the U.S., U.K., and Australia. Some of his best Texas-themed short stories have been published in the collection *Fantastic Texas*.

Phillipa (Pip) Ballentine

Born in Wellington, New Zealand, Philippa has always had her head in a book. For this she blames her father who thought *Lord of the Rings* was suitable bedtime reading for an eight year old. She is the author of *Geist* and the co-author with Tee Morris of *Phoenix Rising: a Ministry of Peculiar Occurrences Novel*. Recently Pip has signed a two book deal with Pyr Books for her series the *Shifting World* novels. She is currently a bit of a gypsy, but always has to take her two Siberian cats where ever she goes. Few know however that she was in childhood a tap-dancing machine!

Michele Bardsley

National bestselling author Michele Bardsley writes about Oklahoma vampires, Texas wizards, and zombie-making teenagers. She's obsessed with gourmet chocolate, History Channel, and all things shiny. She lives in Plano, Texas, with her son, where they are slaves to their numerous pets.

Julie Barrett

Julie is head masochist chair for FenCon VIII. When not spending her waking hours on FenCon, Julie works as a writer, a photographer, and a slave to cats.

Kurt Baty

Kurt is a fan from the Austin area who collects books, loves Lego, and has a passion for root beer. A driving force behind ALAMO, Kurt has helped secure the Worldcon for Texas in 1997 and 2013. He recently co-chaired Brick Fiesta, a Lego convention held in Austin, Texas.

2011 Program Participants

Danny Birt

Danny Birt was born in Washington State to Irish and Californian parents, and has since lived in Idaho, California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Louisiana, Florida, Hawaii, Virginia, and North Carolina. He attended high school at New Mexico Military Institute, studied music therapy and psychology at Loyola University New Orleans, and most recently graduated from Shenandoah University with his Master's Degree in Music Therapy. In addition to literary publication, Danny composes classical and film music, such as his nonstop hour-long piano solo "Narcocleptic Pianist," and the ever-peculiar album *Warped Children's Songs*.

Paul Black

Paul Black is a professional writer, graphic designer, and branding specialist with more than 25 years of experience in corporate communications. His firm's work has been recognized by many major national and international design publications. Also an accomplished author, Black has independently published a trio of books (*The Tels*, *Soulware*, and *Nexus Point*) that garnered several awards, including 2005 Book of the Year (for genre fiction) from *Writer's Digest*. His new book, *The Presence*, is currently in stores.

Karen Bogen

K.B. Bogen has a head for technology, a knack for humor, and a taste for the macabre. A native Texan, she holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Computer Science and Engineering from UT Arlington, as well as several health and nutrition certifications. Her favorite form of communication is humor, preferring to make people laugh rather than cry, though she is not above causing the occasional shiver in her audience. A full-time wife and mother, part-time copyeditor and writer, Karen is "jacq of all trades." She plays domestic when she has to, knits compulsively, and reads forensic anthropology textbooks for fun.

Maggie Bonham

M.H. (Maggie) Bonham is an award-winning author of 31 books including *Lachlei*, *The King's Champion*, *Serpent Singer and Other Stories*, *Prophecy of Swords*, *Runestone of Teiwas*, and editor of the *WolfSongs I Anthology*. Her work has appeared in *Tales of the Talisman*, *WolfSongs I*, *Four Bubbas of the Apocalypse*, *Sonic Fiction*, *Houston We've Got Bubbas*, *The Best of the Bubbas of the Apocalypse*, *Flush Fiction*, and *Small Bites*, among others.]

Brazen Bellies Dance Troupe

Brazen Bellies is an Improvisational Tribal Style belly dance troupe that honors the beauty, mind and spirit of all women. With 8 years of collective American Tribal Style and Tribal Fusion belly dance experience, Kelly Hart and Danielle Rebolli founded Brazen Bellies in Fall 2007. They celebrate women through diversity in bodies, color, and generations. Troupe members Kelly Hart, Tess Haranda, Stu Kirgis, and Elena Todd will be performing at the FenCon Cabaret.

Warren Buff

Warren is president of the Southern Fandom Confederation and edits its various newsletters. He also chaired ReConStruction, the 2010 NASFiC, in Raleigh, where he lives. He got his first real taste of hanging out and discussing science fiction through playing D&D and Magic in middle school, and by the time he was a junior in high school, had been suckered into running for president of its sci-fi/fantasy club. He's a native Southerner, even if his accent does peg him as a city boy. Warren was also our Fen Guest of Honor for 2009.

George P. Burdell

George is an engineer with decades of experience, several published works, and strong ties to Georgia Tech. This Atlanta native is an Air Force veteran who served on Mad magazine's Board of Directors from 1969 until 1981. Burdell and his wife, Ramona Cartwright, are active in the Atlanta fictional community.

James K. Burk

James is a writer whose best-known title is the short story, "The Trailer Park Vampire Meets the Bubba Yumbie," which appeared in both *International House of Bubbas* and *The Best of the Bubbas of the Apocalypse*. He was, at one time, a Sunday gunman, helping put on gunfights in an amusement park. James usually played either the villain or the village idiot. He says, "This is called type-casting."

2011 Program Participants

Rachel Caine

Rachel Caine is the *New York Times* and *USA Today* bestselling author of the Morganville Vampires series. She is also the author of the bestselling Weather Warden series, as well as the Outcast Season series, set in the universe of the Weather Warden novels. She's written more than 30 novels to date, with 8 coming out in 2010 and 2011. She and her husband, fantasy artist R. Cat Conrad, live in Fort Worth, Texas with their iguanas.

Lillian Stewart Carl

Lillian has been studying tai chi for several years, from an instructor who teaches it as a martial art. Even though she will sometimes do kung fu moves in her driveway, her neighbors still speak to her. A good thing they can't hear her playing *Lord of the Rings* movie music on the piano, which she does intuitively, the proper fingering be damned. She has written a good-sized stack of novels, short stories, and non-fiction, including *The Vorkosigan Companion*, which was nominated for a Hugo Award. *The Blue Hackle*, the fifth novel in her cross-genre mystery series, appeared in December 2010.

Peri Charlifu

Peri is a master potter who shows at conventions all over the country. He is highly skilled in both wheel-throw and hand-built work, and he mixes all of his own stains and glazes. Peri also teaches pottery and sculpture and is a Guild master for Art and Artisans of Colorado, and a founding member of Stoneleaf Potters Guild.

J. Kathleen Cheney

Kathleen has been a teacher, a retail buyer, and a grocery jack-of-all-trades, among other things...none of which prepared her to work with camels. She spent a week in the Outback dealing with (and smelling like) camels, and has decided she prefers horses. She's a member of both SFWA and RWA, which should give some hint about her writing. Her short fiction has covered all the bases—fantasy, science fiction, horror and paranormal romance—and has appeared in such venues as *Fantasy Magazine*, *Writers of the Future*, *Jim Baen's Universe*, and *Beneath Ceaseless Skies*.

Cathy Clamp

Cathy left a career as a certified paralegal in Denver to begin writing full time. Since then, she has published several short stories, dozens of articles, and a number of paranormal romance and historical novels with C.T. Adams. These include the EVVY award winning *Road to Riches: The Great Railroad Race to Aspen*, *Hunter's Moon*, *Moon's Web*, as well as a series of novels for Tor Paranormal Romance. Their latest novel, *Timeless Moon*, came out in August 2011. Cathy lives in the Texas hill country with her husband, two dogs, three cats, and 24 Boer goats.

Rosemary Clement-Moore

Rosemary is the author of award-winning supernatural mystery novels for young (and not so young) adults, including the *Maggie Quinn: Girl versus Evil* series, *The Splendor Falls*, and *Texas Gothic*. A recovering thespian, she is addicted to coffee and cupcakes, and loves dogs, history, Jane Austen, archeology, Rock Band, Gilbert and Sullivan, BBC America, science fiction movies, and working in her pajamas.

R. Cat Conrad

Cat arrives from Arlington, Texas, and his background includes a degree in fine arts from the University of Science and Arts in Oklahoma. From there, Cat learned just how far an art degree would take him: across town and into a 10-year stint as an industrial chemist. Prolonged exposure to hazardous materials did little to improve Cat's humor, but it did convince him that he wasn't making a better living through chemistry. In 1991 he moved on to greener pastures to become an award-winning painter and cunning linguist. Cat is a popular speaker and auctioneer, and continues to gain prominence as a fan entertainer.

Darwin Prophet

Darwin Prophet is a steampunk-themed musical artist out of the Austin, Texas, area. She describes herself as "a traveler and aural exhibitionist from Planet Mi, the third sphere following the Phantom in the Galaxy Solfege."

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2011 Program Participants

Tony Daniel

Tony is an author whose work includes the novel *Guardian of Night* due out in 2012 from Baen, as well as the short story collection, *The Robot's Twilight Companion*. He was a Hugo finalist in 1996 for his short story "Life on the Moon," which also won the Asimov's Reader's Choice Award. Tony has co-written the screenplays for a couple of horror movies and was the writer and director of numerous radio plays and audio dramas for SCI-FI.COM's Seeing Ear Theatre. Daniel is a consulting editor for Baen Books and a lecturer in creative writing and the literature of science fiction at the University of Texas at Dallas. Born in Alabama, Tony is now settled in Allen, Texas, with his wife and two children.

Chris Donahue

Chris Donahue is an electrical engineer living in the Dallas area with his wife and fellow-author, Linda. A former member of a Joe Bob Briggs' Drive In Review committee, he served the public by counting rolling heads, types of Fu, and exposed breasts in committee films. Chris has been a Navy Avionics tech, a brewer, and writer of sci-fi, military fiction, horror, humor, and combinations of those themes. Chris and Linda live in Garland, Texas and have lop-eared rabbits, sugar gliders, and cats for pets.

Linda Donahue

An Air-Force brat, Linda grew up traveling and has lived in exotic places such as Okinawa and South Dakota. She has degrees in computer science, Russian studies, a Masters in Earth science education and a minor in electrical engineering. As well, she's a certified commercial instrument pilot, advanced ground instructor, and a SCUBA diver. This means she's been a hazard by space, sea, air or land. When she's not writing, she teaches tai chi and belly dance classes. Linda's short stories have appeared in many anthologies and her novels include *Jaguar Moon* and *The 4 Redheads in Apocalypse Now!* She is married to Chris Donahue.

Carole Nelson Douglas

Collecting vintage clothing is a lingering symptom of Carole's acting days. Her series leading ladies all wear vintage, from the historical dress of Irene Adler to Las Vegasites Temple Barr in the contemporary Midnight Louie feline PI mysteries and Delilah Street, Paranormal Investigator in the 2013-set noir urban fantasies. Carole is in recovery from this year's Career Achievement Award in Mystery at the RT Booklovers convention. Elsewhere in 2011, Midnight Louie prowls in *Cat in a Vegas Gold Vendetta* while Delilah appears in the *Chicks Kick Butt* anthology and a new novel, *Virtual Virgin*.

Ed Dravecky

Ed is a fan, a voracious reader, and FenCon's webmaster. He grew up in Huntsville, Alabama, with rocket scientists for neighbors and attended schools named for astronauts so, naturally, he became a reporter, a disc jockey, a morning-show sidekick, and news reader. He moved to Dallas in 1991 to develop and support broadcast automation systems. Ed is a co-founder of FenCon and recent past president of ORAC. He was one of the driving forces in FenCon's bid to host DeepSouthCon this year, but if anything goes wrong blame Tim.

P.N. Elrod

P.N. Elrod is best known for *The Vampire Files*, featuring undead gumshoe Jack Fleming. She's edited a number of award-winning anthologies for St. Martin's with stories from the top writers in the paranormal and urban fantasy genres. She is working on a new steampunk series for Tor and venturing into e-books with the *P.N. Elrod Omnibus* from her own VampWriter Books imprint. More on her toothy titles may be found at vampwriter.com.

Rhonda Eudaly

Rhonda Eudaly lives in Arlington, Texas, where she's worked in offices, banking, radio, and education to support her writing. She's married with dogs and a rapidly growing rubber duck collection. She likes to spend time with friends and family, movies, and reading. Her two passions are writing and music. Rhonda has fiction and non-fiction stories published in anthologies, magazines, and websites. Check out RhondaEudaly.com for her latest publications and downloads.

2011 Program Participants

Randy Farran

Randy was born in Kansas, but was abandoned in the wilderness of Turkey Mountain, Tulsa, as a small child where he was raised by raccoons. This explains his tendencies to dig through trash cans and wash his food before eating it. In his late teens, he discovered SF fandom, where such behaviors hardly raise an eyebrow, and has been deeply involved (read; mired) in it ever since. Randy was FenCon's Fen Guest of Honor in 2005. He currently resides in Tulsa with his wife Barbara and two cartoon dogs. He has resigned himself to the fact that he will likely go down in history as "that guy who wrote *The Dragon Song* and drew a lot of penguins," but he figures that it could be worse; history might forget about the penguins.

Michael Ashleigh Finn

Michael Ashleigh Finn is a short story author trying his hand at novel writing. In addition, he's a freelance thematic consultant, currently working for Dynamite Entertainment on the Hugo-nominated *Jim Butcher's The Dresden Files*. He is also a moderator for jimbutcheronline.com, and was chief editor for the *Backspace* and *CHUDStones* internet anthologies. He also took first and third place in FenCon's first short story contest, being told afterward that "We had to make up new rules because of you." He's oddly proud of that fact.

Melanie Miller Fletcher

Melanie Fletcher is best known for two things: 1) a truly impish grin and 2) huge tracts of land. No, wait, that's three things. An interesting fact about Melanie is that she once had a private, late-night tour of Abbey Road Studios (and no, she didn't sneak in). When she's not writing, she's recording the podcast *Don't Quit Your Day Job* (dqydpodcast.com) and letting her cats in or out the back door. You know you want her life.

Brad W. Foster

Brad Foster is still a geek at heart- and in mind and body, though if pressed to act like an adult, he can fake it for a couple of minutes. While he did manage to get over his early addiction to comic books, he is still addicted to drawing, owing to having veins full of ink rather than blood. Out of the several hundred drawings he creates each year, a handful are worth showing to other people, and sometime people like them enough to give him shiny awards, or print them in comics, or on book covers. Sometimes they even give him money for that!

Dene Foye

Dene Foye is part of the singing group Ghost of a Rose. He has been playing guitar and singing folk music since 1967, playing with several different groups over the years, performing everything from folk music to German Oktoberfest songs. Along the way he received a Bachelors in Music Education and taught music for a year. For the past year and a half, he's been writing original songs in collaboration with Mel Tatum, most of which Ghost of a Rose performs.

Christopher J. Garcia

Christopher J Garcia is a writer, fanzine editor, historian and filmmaker from Sunnyvale, CA. His fanzine, *The Drink Tank*, won the Best Fanzine Hugo Award in 2011, and the zine he co-edits with James Bacon and Claire Brialey, *Journey Planet*, won the Nova Award for Best Fanzine in 2010. He also makes documentary films, publishes a zine on Steampunk, runs Fan Lounges at conventions, was the 2008 TAFF delegate, has worked as a curator at the Computer History Museum since 1999, and really likes cheese.

Generic Radio Workshop

The Generic Radio Workshop has been around longer than the Golden Age of Radio lasted – a little over twenty years. They started with the Texas Broadcast Museum and have performed at festivals, conventions, and yes, on the radio. They use as much vintage equipment as they can lay their hands on for that "old time radio" look and feel. Plus, many of their sound effects devices are hand-built, following period designs. While they have made a few concessions to modern technology, at the core they follow the practices of radio's Golden Age.

Ghost of a Rose

After meeting at ApolloCon 2007, Dene & Sundara were talking about singing as a performing duo...and Ghost of a Rose was born. The music Ghost of a Rose plays is eclectic...within the same performance you can hear Celtic music, SCA/Renaissance music, Pagan music, Folk music, or original pieces. They currently have two CDs: *Live at CMA Samhain* and *Plaid & Personal*.

2011 Program Participants

David L. Gray

David is the creator of the *Buzz Blaster*, *Space Entrepreneur* series of radio plays, which have been read and performed at Dallas-area and other science fiction conventions. He also writes science fiction short stories, mostly about warfare in the (not so near?) future Asteroid Belt and unsavory visitors from parallel universes. He is co-founder, with his wife Mary Gearhart-Gray, of the online Science Fiction/Fantasy publication *4StarStories*. In his spare time he writes instruction manuals for robots that assemble airplanes in the aerospace industry and he feeds cats.

Beverly A. Hale

While usually a writer, Bev has lately become obsessed with Steampunk and Gears—especially Gears. She creates Steampunk Accessories you can view on Facebook or on etsy.com at "Otherwhen Oddities." Bev is currently working on a YA SF novel and a Gaslight Fantasy.

Dell Harris

Dell was born in the tiny town of Oktaha, Oklahoma. He stands head and shoulders above other artists and most everyone else, which makes him easy to spot in a crowd at a convention. Starting with an intense interest in dinosaurs, his art evolved through his teens into a detailed distinct pencil style. His acrylic paintings and pencil pieces appeared in many *Amazing* and *Analog* magazines as well as on quite a few covers, including Robert Silverberg's *Across a Billion Years*. In the 1990s, Dell finally got his hands on a computer and began branching off into computer art for game projects and mainstream design.

Teddy Harvia

Teddy Harvia, an anagram of David Thayer, has been drawing and contributing cartoons to fan publications since the mid-1970s. Fans have reciprocated by giving him the Hugo for Best Fan Artist. He has semi-retired from his avocation to allow David to concentrate on novel writing. He is currently working on the second draft of a galactic war romance. Until he can find a publisher, he works for a living as a technical writer with a telecommunications company. With his wife Diana, six cats, and thousands of books, he lives in Dallas.

Candace "Candy" Havens

Bestselling author Candace Havens has written six novels for Berkley and her new venture is writing for the Blaze line of Harlequin. Her books have received nominations for the RITAs, Holt Medallion, and Write Touch Reader Awards. She is the author of the biography *Joss Whedon: The Genius Behind Buffy* and is a contributor to several anthologies. She is also one of the nation's leading entertainment journalists and her columns appear in more than 600 newspapers across the country. Candace does film reviews with the Dorsey Gang on The Big 96.3, and is the President of the Television Critics Association.

Bill Hodgson

Bill has been writing and illustrating professionally for over 30 years, with over 1,000 projects for various clients, including book publishers and game companies, for projects as diverse as illustrations of NASA hardware to *I Love Lucy* games to ballet and opera posters. His art has appeared in over 400 shows of many types, earning over 200 awards. In addition to his illustration and personal work, he has sold over 1,500 reverse-painted astronomicals at conventions. He lives with his wife and 3 kids on a wiener dog ranch in a suburb of Oklahoma City.

Kevin Hosey

Kevin is an author, editor and cartoonist. His short stories have appeared in the *Star Trek Strange New Worlds* anthologies, *Hint Fiction*, and the sci-fi magazine *Beyond Centauri*. He also co-edited and wrote stories for two anthologies published by Clifftanger Books. The first was a paranormal romance collection entitled *Paramoural* that was nominated for Best Romance Anthology of 2010. The second, a collection of superhero stories called *Gods of Justice*, premiered at the 2011 San Diego Comic Con.

Sarah A. Hoyt

Sarah has sold over seventeen novels in science fiction, fantasy, mystery and historical fiction. Her short stories have been published in *Asimov's*, *Analog*, *Weird Tales*, and several anthologies. When not writing, Sarah can be found herding cats or teen boys (not much difference there), discussing plots with her husband, Daniel M. Hoyt, or drawing. Her latest novels are *Darkship Thieves* (science fiction), *No Will But His* (historical) and, under Elise Hyatt, *French Polished Murder* (mystery.) She'd move to Texas if it were not quite as lizardy.

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2011 Program Participants

Rocky Kelley

Rocky is an award winning artist whose works include fantasy, sci-fi, pre-Raphaelite, surrealism, and more. Rocky received the Director's Award at the 2006 World Fantasy Art Show. Kelley also creates works of dark fantasy under the pseudonym of "Ashen Gray" and he is the founder of the Dark Rose Alliance. Current projects include graphic novel illustrations and a new series of fantasy paintings.

Vickey Malone Kennedy

Originally from Alamo, Tennessee, Vickey (aka "vck") now lives in Oklahoma with her grown children, three dogs, a ferret, and her beautiful red-haired granddaughter. She is the winner of the 2011 Darrell Award for Best Midsouth Short Story for "Bobby Sue Almost Got Married" published by Yard Dog Press in the anthology *A Bubba In Time Saves None* and the winner of the coveted Oklahoma Writers' Federation Inc. 2011 Creme de la Creme award for her Western Novel *A Woman Alone*.

Julie Kenner

Julie has climbed the Great Wall of China, scuba dived to a shipwreck, and slept in airports and train stations throughout Europe. Lately, her life is much more suburban. Check out her demon hunting soccer mom short story in *Those Who Fight Monsters* (as Julie Kenner) and her *Shadow Keepers* series (as J.K. Beck). You can find out what Julie's up to through her blog, AngrySuperheroes.com.

Lee Killough

Lee discovered SF/fantasy and mysteries at the same time and fell in love with both. Most of her 16 novels are SF, supernatural mysteries, or urban fantasies. Her first short story "Caveat Emptor" appeared in *Analog* in 1970, and she published her first novel, *A Voice Out of Ramah*, in 1979. Her short story "Symphony For a Lost Traveler" was a 1985 Hugo Award nominee. Her books, many re-edited with new material added, are now being published as e-books, and can be found at the major book and e-book sites.

Alexis Glynn Latner

Alexis has written *Hurricane Moon* (Pyr 2007) and stories in various SF, fantasy and horror magazines and anthologies. Her novelette "Quickfeathers" in the May 2009 issue of *Analog* is a *Hurricane Moon* sequel that involves soaring: flying the way hawks and sailplanes do, on rising currents of air. She has a sailplane pilot's license so she understands the calculus of risk and reward when people undertake adventure.

Jackie Leaf

Jackie is a self-confessed trivia queen who believes that children benefit from early *stiff* exposure and the corrupting influence of books. An expatriate Okie, she enjoys American football, crocheting, counted cross-stitch, and showing off pictures of her granddaughter. She would totally freak out if she ever got to meet Richard Dean Anderson or Mark Harmon. She now lives in the D/FW area with her husband, Bill.

William Ledbetter

William lives near Dallas with his family and too many animals. He's an unrepentant space geek, unrecoverable science fiction addict and drinks very few beers he can see through. And he gets paid to make crap up! His short stories have appeared in *Jim Baen's Universe*, Yard Dog Press, and various other publications. He's a recent 1st Place winner in the Writers of the Future contest for this year's second quarter, an editor at *Heroic Fantasy Quarterly*, and runs the annual Jim Baen Memorial Writing Contest for Baen Books and the National Space Society.

Guy H. Lillian III

Guy got his start in fandom writing letters of comment to comic books. A 40-year fanzine publisher, Hugo-nominated 12 times for his gazette *Challenger*, he has edited program books for two Worldcons and the 2010 NASFiC, and is serving as Publications Director for the 2012 Worldcon. He has been a booster of Southern SF fandom for decades, serving four times (including now) as Editor of the Southern Fandom Press Alliance; he was Fan Guest of Honor at the '83 DeepSouthCon, and won the Rebel Award the following year. In private life he is a criminal defense lawyer in Louisiana.

2011 Program Participants

Angela Lowry

Angela was born in Nashville in the 1960s and spent her childhood in Tennessee, Florida, and Oklahoma. As an artist, she blends Art Nouveau, Klimt, Mucha, Cyber, and Punk into a classical realism. After attending the University of Tulsa she started publishing with several game companies and attending SF conventions with art shows. Angela does murals, commercial design, jewelry design, portraits, illustration, and other fine art. If it sits still enough, she'll paint it!

Julia S. Mandala

Julia is a reformed lawyer who does penance by writing fantasy and science fiction. Her novel *House of Doors* and her co-authored *The Four Redheads: Apocalypse Now!* are available from Yard Dog Press. Her works appear in *Fangs for the Mammaries* and *Witch Way to the Mall*, both edited by Esther Friesner, and in several Yard Dog Press anthologies. She holds degrees in history from Kansas State University and law from Tulane University. She is a copy editor, scuba diver, underwater photographer, and belly dancer.

A. Lee Martinez

A. Lee Martinez is best known for his sparkling wit, incredible good looks, and his ability to endlessly debate the Superman vs. Batman dilemma. (Correct answer: Tarzan) Also, he's written seven fantasy novels and managed to get paid for it.

Margaret Middleton

Margaret is a quintessential Baby Boomer, a Valparaiso alumna, and a 24-year veteran of the Arkansas Highway Department. She and her husband Morris have one daughter, Sharon Amanda. Oh, and she's been a filker for more than thirty years and a convention-going SF fan for a wee bit longer than that. In fact, Margaret is a 1997 inductee into the Filk Hall of Fame.

Russ Miller

Russ is just this guy, who enjoys really good science fiction and lots of geeky stuff including toys and models, and was goofy enough to volunteer to start a convention. (He was our conchair in 2008 and 2009.) Russ has a great family, a book and DVD collection that required a whole new library be built, and he lives in a secure fortress near the abandoned Superconducting SuperCollider. And there *still* isn't enough room to display all of his models, not even counting the ones he hasn't had time to build yet because he spends his free time working on FenCon.

Tim Miller

Tim has been active in D/FW fandom for more than 20 years, going to his first SF convention in 1988. Since then he has worked on too many conventions to count and has attended even more. He is one of the founders of FenCon and served as conchair for FenCons III & IV. He's on the board of InterFilk and ALAMO and has been on staff of several recent Worldcons and last year's NASFiC. Tim was one of the driving forces in FenCon's bid to host DeepSouthCon this year, so if anything goes wrong it is all his fault. (But he will probably try to blame Bobb.)

Tim Morgan

Tim is a lifelong science fiction fan, but only discovered fandom a few years ago. His initiation into D/FW fandom happened when several GRAC members found out he had never watched either *Buffy* or *Angel*. After an intense indoctrination rebutted with puns, Tim has been fitting in just fine ever since. He is a past president of ORAC, a co-founder of MakeDFW, currently serves on the board of directors of the Dallas Future Society, is vice-chair for this year's FenCon, and will be conchair for FenCon 2012 & 2013. Tim is frequently called "E.H.T." which stands for "Emergency Holographic Tim." Be sure to ask him why.

Tee Morris

Tee began his writing career with his 2002 historical epic fantasy, *Morevi: The Chronicles of Rafe & Askana*. In 2005 Tee made this novel the first book podcast in its entirety. That experience led to the founding of Podio Books and collaborating with Evo Terra and Chuck Tomasi on *Podcasting for Dummies*. Tee has written articles and short stories for several anthologies. His first steampunk adventure (with Pip Ballantine), *Phoenix Rising: A Ministry of Peculiar Occurrences Novel*, was released in May.



2011 Program Participants

Tracy S. Morris

Tracy is an author and professional freelance writer working in the Fort Smith, Arkansas, area. Her most recent work includes the short story "Portrait of Bees in Spring" along with Brad Sinor in the *Grantville Gazette* and "Queen of Knaves" in Lee Martindale's *The Ladies of Trade Town*. She is the author the *Tranquility* mysteries which are published through Yard Dog Press (and in e-book format from Baen). Tracy posts interviews with authors every Thursday at her Live Journal blog.

Michelle Muenzler

Michelle's goal in life is to bring forth the bunny apocalypse and bury the earth with furry-soft goodness. When not working toward this goal, she experiments on her husband with new recipes and builds blockades around her NetBook to protect it from her cats. Her latest publication, "The Fowler's Daughter," can be found in Ekaterina Sedla's *Bewere the Night* anthology.

Ken Murphy

Ken Murphy is probably best known as being the Gen X Moon Guy, actively educating the public about our Moon, and advocating for its development. He works in the D/FW metroplex through the North Texas chapter of the National Space Society, and was recently elected president of The Moon Society. He also maintains an extensive Lunar Library of reference materials regarding the Moon and High Frontier which is cataloged online at OutOfTheCradle.net.

Ethan Nahte

Ethan Nahte created the music TV program *Live'N' Loud* in which he interviewed numerous rock stars alongside the many magazines he has written for as a professional journalist. On occasion, he riles the masses with a review or article but has also been known to entertain. He is currently in a handful of anthologies, ranging from sci-fi to fantasy to horror because his mind just can't sit still in one genre.

Michael Nelson

Michael is a programmer, an amateur genealogist, a comic book collector, a Louisiana State University alumnus (Geaux Tigers!) and former FenCon Chairman (2004 and 2005). Michael and his wife Angela enjoy traveling and perusing used bookstores. He first saw *Star Trek* in the mid-1970s when he was a wee lad and enjoys *Doctor Who*, *Top Gear*, *Babylon 5*, *Blake's 7*, *Mythbusters*, *Chuck*, *Warehouse 13*, *Being Human*, and much more.

Melia Dawn Newman

Melia's first attempts to create art were not much appreciated. She's not sure if it was the use of lipstick or that the mural was painted on her mother's bedroom wall but she was soon kept supplied with appropriate art supplies and things to paint on. She thinks her family was relieved when she changed her major from psychology to art. These days you can find Melia either making a mess of her home with paint that should be going onto canvas or hanging out at science fiction and fantasy conventions.

Noddy

As Miss Cordelia MoonTea, Noddy uses her education as a Tea Master to spread the message of Steampunk Tea and as a phytotherapist to lure people into both monstrolmology and steampunk apothecary. She's written a steampunk tea book: *Time Tarts and Chrono-Teas*, and is working on a steampunk apothecary book. As herself, Noddy plays at conventions with her hearing ear dog, Itzi. Call her what you will, just be sure to call her for Tea.

October Country

October Country is a Celtic-influenced folk and filk band consisting of Casey Sledge on vocals & rhythm guitar and Shadow Walter on lead. They have played pubs, coffeehouses, benefits and cons in the D/FW area since 2001, including FenCon, Trinity Hall, and Hawkwood Fair. Also, they were Interfilk GoH at Seattle's Conflikt 3, in January 2010.

Gloria Oliver

Many years ago, before anime and manga were popular in the US, Gloria sat around for hours on end digging through Japanese kanji dictionaries and trying to translate her favorite manga, *City Hunter*, so she could figure out what the heck was going on! Her latest fantasy/YA fantasy novel, *Price of Mercy*, was released in May 2011 from Zumaya Publications.

2011 Program Participants

Ellis O'Neal

Ellis is the author of *The False Princess*, a young adult fantasy novel nominated for this year's YALSA Teens' Top Ten Award. Her short fantasy has appeared in *Realms of Fantasy*, *Strange Horizons*, *Fantasy Magazine*, *Lady Churchill's Rosebud Wristlet*, and others. By day, she is the Managing Editor of the University of Tulsa's literary magazine, *Nimrod International Journal*. She lives in Tulsa, in a house filled with swords, knitting needles, video game controllers, chocolate, d20s, one husband, two obnoxious dogs, and far, far too many books.

Scott Padgett

Scott is an aerospace engineer with nearly 20 years' experience in human spaceflight including operations planning for the International Space Station and ascent guidance/navigation/control for the Space Shuttle. (He frequently describes the latter position as "making sure that Shuttle launches happen with No Gigantic Kaboom.") He credits exposure to science fiction at an early age as a major influence in that career choice, particularly the early works of Heinlein.

Stephen Patrick

Stephen is a freelance writer living in the Dallas area with his wife and daughter. His short stories have been published in several genres, including horror, science fiction, and mystery. He is a four-time winner of the Rowlett Short Story Competition and was named an Arkansas Traveler in 2007 after being selected as the winner of the special prize category at the Arkansas Writer Conference. He has recently transitioned to screenplays and film racing, writing and starring in two short films.

Teresa Patterson

Teresa is best known for her work with Robert Jordan on *The World of the Wheel of Time*. Her newest collaboration was with the late Robert Asprin on *No Quarter*. Though a pro writer, she did a story for the newest "Bubbas of the Apocalypse" book just for the fun of it. Fun fact: She used to run a medieval jousting show.

Alan J. Porter

After a couple of years chronicling the world of talking cars, Alan is now actively researching the various lives and stories of a certain spaceman who was created in 1929, but spends most of his time hanging out in the 25th Century. In the meantime he's written a couple of tech-y business books, and had fun reviewing SF related movies and books as well interviewing legendary SF writers for a selection of magazines and websites. He is still slinging book proposals and comic book pitches at publishers in the vain hope that someone will actually like them.

K. Hutson Price

Born in Texas and educated on both coasts, K. Hutson Price currently flings information at prepubescent individuals as a 5th grade teacher in a local public school. Price is the Law Enforcement Teaching Students liaison for the Mesquite school district and a member of the Texas Defensive Shooters club. So far these facts remain mutually exclusive. Price's writing is influenced by Joss Whedon's every word, *World of Warcraft*, the insane things students pull at school, and almost anything that Yard Dog Press throws out there.

Dusty Rainbolt

Dusty Rainbolt is the coauthor (with three other redheads) of *The Four Redheads of the Apocalypse* and *Apocalypse Now!* Author of numerous books on cat care and behavior, she merged her love of everything feline with her interest in the unexplainable to write *Ghost Cats: Human Encounters with Feline Spirits*. She's also the author of the humorous science fiction novel *All the Marbles*, *Kittens for Dummies*, and *Cat Wrangling Made Easy*. She's the product editor for the Tufts' University publication, *Catnip*, and she's a regular contributor to *Cat Fancy* and other magazines and websites.

Nina Romberg

Nina Romberg (aka Jane Archer) is the bestselling author of twenty internationally published books in several popular genres, including horror/urban fantasy novels *Shadow Walkers* and *The Spirit Stalker*. *The First Fire: Stories of the Cherokee, Kickapoo, Kiowa, and Tigua* and *Texas Indian Myths and Legends* are critically acclaimed Native American mythology and history books. *Out of the West* was optioned for a television movie. She also edits and ghostwrites for a national book publisher.

2011 Program Participants

Rie Sheridan Rose

Rie is a poet and novelist with 5 poetry collections and 4 novels under her belt, as well as 3 short story collections and pieces in several anthologies. She writes mostly fantasy, but dabbles in science fiction, light horror and romance. She has embarked on a new area of writing: she is now a lyricist. Her collaboration with Marc Gunn has been worlds of fun. Their most recent song is a track on the *Firefly Drinking Songs* album released in June 2011.

Selina Rosen

Selina's stories have appeared in several magazines and anthologies. Some of her fifteen published novels include *Queen of Denial*, *Black Rage*, *Fire & Ice*, *Bad Lands* (with Laura J. Underwood), and *Jabone's Sword*. She owns Yard Dog Press and created their *Bubbas of the Apocalypse* universe. You may read about her dairy goats at CastleFarms.org.

Adrian Simmons

Adrian writes, reads, hikes, teaches taekwondo, and bears a heavy regulatory burden in Central Oklahoma. He is famous on the internet (in a good way), has hoofed the Ouachita Trail, the Ozark Highland trail, and the northern England coast to coast trail. His fiction, essays, and interviews litter the internet like so many empty Skittles packages. He has plans for great things. Plans. He is 1/3 of the editorial team at *Heroic Fantasy Quarterly*.

Bradley H. Sinor

Brad has seen his short stories published in numerous science fiction, fantasy, and horror anthologies. Three chapbooks of his short fiction have been released by Yard Dog Press. He has two collections of short stories: *Echoes From The Darkness* (Arctic Wolf Press) and *Where The Shadows Began*, which was released in March by Merry Blacksmith Press. His non-fiction work has appeared in a variety of magazines and anthologies.

Susan P. Sinor

Sue has been involved in Tulsa's local conventions for over twenty years. She has also been involved in Tulsa's local community theatre for over twenty years. She's been keeping pretty busy. She is most known for writing for Yard Dog Press, with stories in the chapbook *Playing With Secrets* and several anthologies. Currently, she hopes to have sold another story (in collaboration with her husband) to Yard Dog Press and have finished a few other stories.

Amy Sisson

Amy is a writer, book reviewer, crazy cat lady, and academic librarian, not necessarily in that order. Her published fiction ranges from *Star Trek* work for Pocket Books to a group of thematically linked short stories in her *Unlikely Patron Saints* series, which have appeared in *Strange Horizons*, *Lady Churchill's Rosebud Wristlet*, and *Irregular Quarterly*. Most recently, her story "Patriot Girls" appeared in *Aeon Speculative Fiction*. When not writing, she enjoys making artist trading cards, studying German and Japanese, attending performances by the Houston Ballet, and traveling with her husband, Paul Abell.

Casey Sledge

Casey has been filking since before he knew what it was. That was 20 years ago and he's still doing it. His songs have been sung by Ravens and by Hawke of the Bedlam Bards, and played (during sound check) at a Worldcon. He is the singer/songwriter half of the Celtic/folk/filk band October Country in the D/FW area. Casey's band, October Country, was Interfilk's Guest of Honor at Seattle's "Conflikt 3" in January 2010.

Libby A. Smith

Libby A. Smith (formerly Smith Singleton) first started attending conventions in 1982 as a 17-year-old intent on being a published writer. Her stories have appeared in comics from several publishers. She is also a two-time winner of the *Little Rock Free Press*'s Literary Contest. Libby is also a stage actor in the Little Rock area. By day, she is an administrative assistant for the state of Arkansas. She lives in Little Rock with her three cats where she's a member of the Central Arkansas Speculative Fiction Writers Group.

Jesse Sosa

Jesse is a 3D character artist that has been in the game industry for over 10 years. His work can be seen in such games as *Ghostbusters: The Video Game*, *BloodRayne 2*, the upcoming *Star Wars: Kinect*, the movie *Grandma's Boy*, and much more.

2011 Program Participants

Caroline Spector

Caroline Spector has been an editor and writer in the science fiction, fantasy and gaming fields for the last twenty-five years. Caroline authored three published novels: *Scars*, *Little Treasures*, and *Worlds Without End*. Most recently, Caroline has had stories in several *Wild Cards* collections. Caroline has also written adventure modules and hint books (along with her husband, gaming legend Warren Spector). She also spent two years as Associate Editor at *Amazing Magazine*, plays bass and sings backup vocals with Bland Lemon Denton, and was a contributor to Steve Gould's *Eat Our Brains* blog.

Kathryn Sullivan

Kathryn is the author of young adult fantasies *The Crystal Throne*, *Agents & Adepts*, and *Talking to Trees*. She has an essay, "The Fanzine Factor," in the Hugo Award-winning *Chicks Dig Time Lords*. Kathryn lives in Winona, Minnesota, where the river bluffs double as cliffsides on alien planets or the deep mysterious forests in a magical world. Her fight scenes in her books are based on her SCA experience and any birdlike beings only slightly resemble her cockatoo owner. She is a proud member of EPIC and Broad Universe.

Frank Summers

Frank writes speculative fiction and lives in the Dallas area. His short fiction has appeared in a variety of print and eBook anthologies. His most recent publishing credit is "Buffalo Bubba's Wild West Show" which appears in *A Stitch in Time Saves None* from Yard Dog Press. Frank enjoys spending time with his wife, two daughters, and four dogs. He is also a performing songwriter, and has been an IT professional for thirty years.

Sundara

Sundara is one-half of the duo Ghost of a Rose. Sundara is from the Chicago area originally, where she participated in filk circles at conventions and SCA events.

Shanna Swendson

Shanna Swendson is best known as the author of the *Enchanted, Inc.* series from Ballantine Books and a variety of geeky pop-culture essays published by BenBella Books. She can occasionally be lured out of her writing cave by movies, promises of *Doctor Who* episodes, conventions, or new books calling to her from the library or bookstore. Or tea or chocolate (or tea and chocolate, but not chocolate tea).

Mel Tatum

Mel is an author of short stories, non-fiction, and songs. She has several short stories available from Yard Dog Press; her essay on the Anita Blake series is available from BenBella Books; her academic writing on filk is available on the web; her filk songs are available at her site; and her original songs (most of which were co-written with Dene Foye) are published in songbooks available from Sablewood Village.

TheLoneGunman

TLG makes his living as a professional drummer from the Kansas City area named Alex Boyd. His TheLoneGunman alter ego is based upon love for all things geeky, nerdy, silly, science fiction, the people that love that stuff too, and his love for folk music. His music is simple; about whatever it is he feels like singing about, from silly songs with no point whatsoever, to epic stories where the tunes are like chapters in a book and everything in between.

Triskelion

Inspired by a love of Celtic music, Triskelion brings a wide variety of musical talent to the stage. Floyd Brigdon's background playing guitar for rock bands and as a singer/songwriter, Sarah Brigdon's as a church vocalist, and Leah Tharp's rhythm 12-string guitar and vocals blend together to bring a joyful and diverse blend of harmonies. Floyd continues to introduce more instruments to the mix, with bouzouki and cittern being the most recent. Their first CD, *Music on Fridays*, includes two original compositions and their next CD, coming out in Spring 2012, will be a children's lullaby collection.

2011 Program Participants

Jeffrey Turner

Jeffrey is a Texan screenwriter and novelist who writes to support his reading addiction. He was an associate producer of the award-winning documentary *My Run*. Many of his short stories and novellas can be found at Yard Dog Press, and he's currently working with the Yard Dog family to produce the first "Bubbas of the Apocalypse" short film. When not writing, Jeff likes to travel around the world, visit ancient ruins, ruin golf courses with horrible attempts to hit a ball with a crooked stick, and participate in the ruin of rival poker players.

Katherine Turski

Kathy writes the way she looks—short and funny. Several of her short and funny stories are published in the Yard Dog Press books *Flush Fiction* and *A Bubba In Time Saves None*, along with the upcoming chapbook, *It's the Great Bumpkin, Cletus Brown*. Her short story, "Fairest Of The Mall" is also published in the *New Fairy Tales* anthology from Aurora Wolf Press. Kathy lives in North Texas with her husband. By day she clerks for a local library, and in her spare time she loves old movies, baking, and coming up with weird story ideas—mainly fueled by caffeine and chocolate.

Bobb Waller

Bobb is a long-time Texas science fiction fan and member of ORAC. He has been involved with fandom and conventions since 1976. He learned to read at the age of six with the help of comic books, and has never stopped reading them, or just about anything he can find since then. Bobb is the head of FenCon's Programming division this year. He also denies anything Tim Miller says about him!

Steven E. Wedel

Steven recently saw the publication of *After Obsession*, a young adult novel co-authored with bestseller Carrie Jones. His other books include the four volumes of *The Werewolf Saga*, and others. He lives in central Oklahoma with his wife, four kids, two dogs, and a cat.

Toni Weisskopf

Toni is the publisher of Baen Books, and also ran our Writers Workshop in 2007. She received the 1994 Phoenix Award for lifetime achievement as a science fiction professional. Toni is a graduate of Oberlin College with a degree in anthropology. She is also a Cubs fan, even though she has never lived in Chicago.

Jaye Wells

After several years as an editor and freelance writer, Jaye Wells finally decided to leave the facts behind and make up her own reality. Her overactive imagination and life-long fascination with the arcane and freakish blended nicely with this new career path. Her most recent release is *The Mage in Black*, the second book in her popular Sabina Kane urban fantasy series published by Orbit.

Mel. White

Known to her kids as "Indiana Mom," Mel. has gone back to school to become "Dr. Indiana Mom." She still works on fossils for the Museum of Nature and Science, and is now a volunteer educator at Trinity River Audubon Center as well as a Texas Master Naturalist. She's also a proud member of the Yard Dog Press gang, with a story in *A Bubba In Time Saves None*.

Skyler White

Skyler's debut novel, the vampire/neuroscience fable and *Falling, Fly*, was named one of the top five sci-fi/fantasy books of 2010 by *Library Journal*. Her follow-up, *In Dreams Begin*, is a time-travel horror/romance involving W.B. Yeats and other luminaries of the late Victorian 'Golden Dawn' occult movement, and was called a "singularly unique work of art" by Barnes & Noble. She lives in Austin, Texas.

Sandy Williams

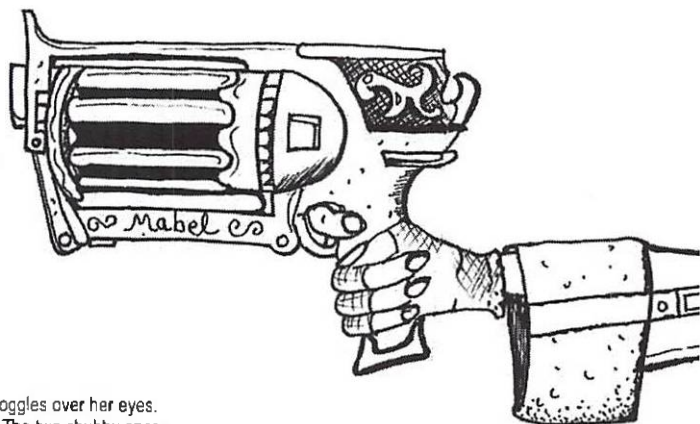
Sandy graduated from Texas A&M with degrees in political science and history. She worked as a librarian until her husband whisked her off to London on an extended business trip. Now, she's back in Texas, writing full time and moonlighting as a librarian. Her debut urban fantasy, *The Shadow Reader*, will be released by Ace Books in October.

Craig Wolf

Craig does weird things up in Oklahoma, most of which you don't want to know about. Sometimes that weirdness spills out in ink. Maybe it was that he was dropped on his head early and often. Or maybe it's just that he was born under a weird sign. In any event, there are short stories and a novel and more crimes against humanity on the way. His newest little dinky collection of flash fiction is called *Nibbled to Death*. ☹

Demon Express

by Candace Havens



Chisholm Cemetery
Fort Worth, Texas,
October 1897

Maisy pulled her night vision goggles over her eyes. Three forms came into view. The two chubby ones she recognized as the men who dug the graves at the cemetery, but the one with a cowboy hat was new. Pressing the button on her pocket watch, she spoke.

"There are three," she whispered. "Do you want me to kill them or do you want to question them?"

If it were up to her, she'd kill the grave robbers. Disturbing the dead was a horrid business, and questions took time. She might have sounded bloodthirsty, but there was more to the situation than she could explain to her client.

"Capture only." Came the reply.

Disappointed she didn't get a chance to try out her new revolver, Maisy sprung the trap. Two nets flew out from the headstones surrounding the grave, and the mechanism she'd designed pulled the rope tight. The men couldn't escape. They hit the hard Texas earth with a thump and dust flew everywhere.

"The more you move, the worse it is. If you don't stop, the ropes will work around your neck and strangle the life out of you. Then no more grave robbing for you," she said as she moved around the corner of the mausoleum. "I promised my client I wouldn't kill you, but accidents do happen." She flicked the switch in her hand and two gaslights near the grave glowed eerily.

"I don't know who you are, but I suggest you let me go if you know what's good for you." The one in the cowboy hat spoke to her.

Maisy granted. "Cowboy, you aren't in a position to give orders. I suggest you shut up until my client gets here."

As she said the word, client, Mr. Garrison rode up on his horse.

"Calloway, is that you?" He asked the writhing cowboy.

"James, get me the hell out of this thing. You're the one who told me to check out the gravesite, and now I'm tied up in knots. Thanks to that woman."

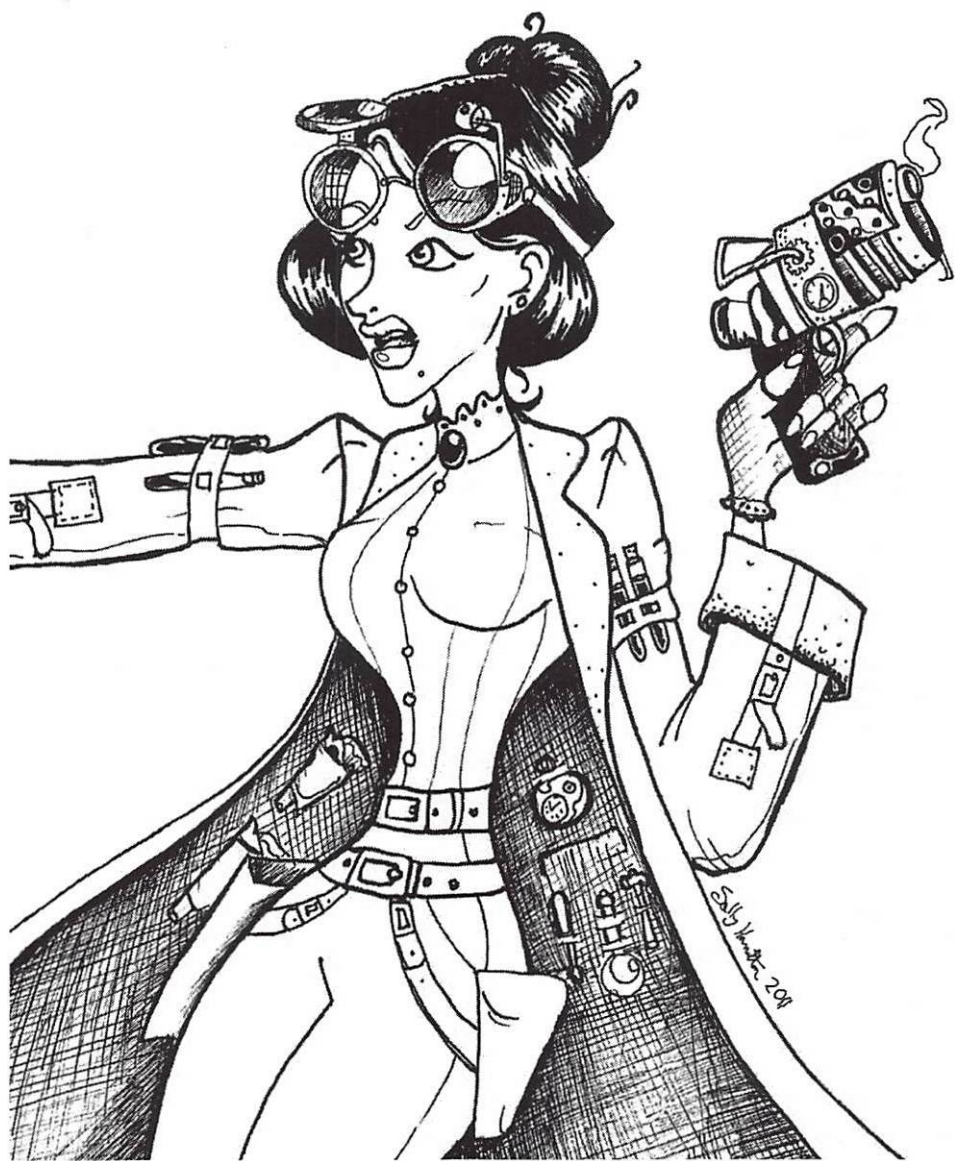
"That woman, is Professor Maisy Clark," Garrison said. "She is smarter than you and I and half of the state of Texas put together. Professor, perhaps you would be so good as to release your trap, so my friend can stand."

"If he's a friend, what's he doing hanging out with grave robbers?" Maisy asked as she moved back to the mausoleum wall where she pulled the lever, loosening the nets.

"Grave robbers!" The men with the cowboy were indignant. "We're grave diggers and only helping Mr. Calloway here with his investigation," the larger one pointed a beely finger at her. "He's the law, missy. Not some criminal."

Maisy's eyebrow went up. The idea that her client would bring in an investigator, rubbed her the wrong way. This case was hers.

"Before you get angry, Miss Clark, I sent a telegram to Jake Calloway almost a year ago, but he was busy



helping out the Texas Rangers," said Mr. Garrison.

"I see." Maisy found some gratification in the fact that Mr. Garrison felt as though he had to explain. But the last thing she needed was some meddling cowboy.

"Got here soon as I could," said Calloway. "Looks like the same kind of thing we saw in Amarillo last

year." He nodded toward the grave. "Been any murders around here?"

"Not that we know of." Garrison climbed off his horse as he spoke. "I have lost fifty head of cattle in the last month. The professor has a theory that the animals may be related to what is going on with the graves."

A theory she wasn't about to share with some cowboy. "Perhaps you men could carry on your conversation elsewhere?" She re-set her trap. "I can't see that the grave robbers will show up if you two are throwing a party."

The cowboy checked his watch. "Sun will be up in a couple of hours, doubt you'll find your culprits before then." He moved and she could see his face under the lamplight. A long, jagged scar ran from his cheekbone to his ear, but it only made the man more handsome in her book.

Two minutes ago you thought he was a grave robber. The last thing you need is a man complicating your life.

But it was difficult to turn away from the broad shoulders and narrow hips.

"Just the same, I'd appreciate it if you men could take your conversation elsewhere." Maisy busied herself by checking the ropes of the trap and her guns.

"What kind of gun is that," the cowboy's voice was right behind her. "Revolver." Her voice was steadier than she felt. What was it about this guy that set her on edge?

"Doesn't look like any revolver I've ever seen."

"Modified a Colt so that it connects to an ammunition belt. I can get thirty shots off before I have to reload. Handy when you have a crowd that needs taming, or outlaws chasing you down." She slipped the gun back into the harness at her hip. "Excuse me," she said as she pushed past him.

"Sounds like you've had plenty of opportunities to use it." He sounded impressed. Most men didn't like that fact that she knew how to use a gun, or any other weapons for that matter. When most girls played with dolls, Maisy had learned how to build and use weapons.

"Not this version. I had hoped to use it tonight." She turned to give him a pointed look.

He chuckled.

In the lamplight, she noticed his eyes were green. He stared at her as if he were interested in more than her gun.

That would not do.

Picking up her duster and pulling it over her white blouse and leather breeches, she walked to her horse Midnight.

"When you are finished destroying my crime scene, let me know."

He tipped his cowboy hat to her, and she could feel his eyes on her as she rode away.

No, that wouldn't do at all.

Maisy had to find a way to get rid of the cowboy named Calloway before he ruined everything.

Steam Engine

Three miles outside Fort Worth

Henry, her English Mastiff barked a warning.

Maisy put down the blood samples she'd taken from the dirt around the grave. She had a cache of weapons in every room of the train, including the privy.

Grabbing the rifle nearest to her, she moved silently to the door of her living quarters. It was the only part of the train that had windows. Her private steam engine was her home and lab. She also had Barnes, who made a mean cup of Turkish coffee.

As she thought of Barnes, he appeared.

"Lass, we've an intruder."

"That we do. No need to worry."

"Just the same I'll be backing you up." He showed her the revolver he had in his hand. Barnes was the only concession she'd agreed to when her father tried to stop her from going to America. He'd been adamant that she take Barnes the bull with her, or he would cut off her funds completely. At first, she had needed her father's money. That was no longer true. Business in America had made her wealthy woman. Still, Barnes was as good with a weapon as he was with the elaborate coffee machine she'd designed. So it hadn't been much of a concession.

Barnes also had a full understanding of the work she and her father did. He was one of a half dozen other people in the world who did.

Henry barked again.

"He's at the perimeter." Maisy checked her knives in her boot and corset.

"Your traps will get him before—" a loud popping sound interrupted Barnes.

Maisy couldn't help smiling. If the intruder didn't back off, he would fry before he could get within twenty feet of the train.

She glanced out and cursed.

"Who is it?" Barnes peeked out the window.

Maisy reached in her pocket to flip a switch that turned off the security fence. As much as she would have liked to have killed the intruder, there were others who might not appreciate her efforts.

"Go back to bed Barnes. He's not dangerous."

He glanced at her if weren't sure she told the truth.

"He's a friend of Garritson's."

Maisy clicked her tongue and Henry followed her down the steps.

"What the hell was that?" Calloway groaned. He was flat on his back. Maisy guessed he probably had the air knocked from his lungs.

"Electric fence."

"There's no electricity outside of town. How is it powered?"

"Why are you here? You're lucky you weren't killed." Before she could reach out to help him up, he was on his feet.

"You told me to let you know when I was finished with the gravesite. Since sending a telegram seemed time consuming, I thought I would ride out. I didn't realize you'd created a fortress with your train."

The man had no idea.

"Fine, you've delivered your message. You may go."

There was a long silence. "Right. I've been dismissed. I don't suppose I could get a look at the train."

Rumor is you have technology--"

Henry barked again.

"Damn." She swore. "Get in there. They've followed you. Did you not see them?"

"Who?" He stood there looking at her as if she had three heads.

She reached out and yanked him into the perimeter. "We don't have time." Flipping the switch in her pocket she heard the hum of the fence return.

Shoving him to the door of the train, she pushed him in. "Please tell me that you can handle a rifle."

He huffed. "I was born with one in my hand."

She handed him the one she held. Then she hit her hand against the wall where a shelf dropped down filled with an assortment of weapons. Knives, guns, whips and a few of her new inventions were carefully displayed against the wall. "Help yourself."

An incredulous look passed over his face, but he didn't say anything.

"Barnes, I'm going up top. Please help the cowboy by watching the other side of the train. I'll get the ones who fly in."

"Fly in?" The Cowboy asked, surprised.

The man had no idea what was coming his way.

"Just shoot anything that moves," she ordered.

Pulling the cord down to her right, a glass dome slid up to the top of the train, as a ladder fell to the left for her to climb. Once in the dome, she shifted two levers on the top of the train. A giant Gatling gun she'd modified slipped into place. The dome was glass, so it wouldn't offer much protection. That meant she had to kill them before they neared her.

From her vantage point, she could see there were more than thirty of them. That evil bastard Julian would be nowhere near. She knew it. And this was probably only a small part of the army he was building.

She heard Barnes mumble something.

"What the hell is that?" The cowboy yelled as one of the ashen-faced creatures flew toward the train.

"Shoot for the head. It's the only way to kill them," she shouted down before grabbing the gun with both hands and blowing the monster out of the sky. The creatures looked human, but they were far from it. Super strength and speed made them difficult to kill.

The others screeched, the sound so piercing it felt as though her ears bled.

Her vision tunneled, and she picked off one creature after another. The cowboy was a great shot, and he killed his fair share. The perimeter fence held, frying many of the creatures as they tried to pass through. In less than five minutes, there were only ten left. But they were a tenacious ten. These warriors had more experience than the newborns. Three came at her from different directions and she could only manage to turn the gun fast enough to get two.

The third smashed through the glass and grabbed Maisey by the throat. Using her training from China, she threw two hands up to pop the thing's head back. Nothing

happened. The damn thing felt as though it was made of stone. Julian's experiments had improved over the last few months.

Her head swam, and she knew the thing was about to squeeze the life out of her. Reaching into the breast of the corset she wore, she yanked out the slim knife she kept there and plunged it into the creature's ear. It stumbled back, but it was far from dead.

"Barnes, toss me Mabel."

A gun flew threw the hole.

The creature steadied itself and flew toward her. Sitting on her haunches, she aimed for the face and squeezed off two bullets just as the thing ripped at her arm.

She fell with it off the train, landing on the hard Texas dirt.

"Ompf." The dust settled around her.

The cowboy was to her left fighting the last of the creatures hand-to-hand. It was obvious he had been trained professionally in martial arts, and the knives he wielded were impressive.

Still, she was ready for this to end.

"Duck," she yelled.

The cowboy didn't even look back. He just hit the ground. She fired off two shots between the eyes of each creature.

The screeching finally stopped.

Closing her eyes, she tried to take a deep breath. It hurt like hell. She'd probably cracked a few ribs -- again. Barnes' medical training in the war was sometimes the only thing that kept her going.

"You're injured."

Obviously.

She wanted to be rude, but she no longer had the energy.

"I'm fine." She opened her eyes, and willed herself to sit up. The pain wracked her body.

He leaned down over her and ripped his shirt off.

"What the hell are you doing?"

"Binding your arm. I think that thing might have hit something important. The blood is pouring out."

"Barnes," she yelled.

"I have the table ready, bring her in," Barnes yelled to Calloway.

Before she could tell him that she was capable of walking on her own, he scooped her up and ran inside. Barnes stood near one of her lab tables.

"Lassie, you've done it again. Your father will kill me."

She gave the older man a weak smile. "I won't tell if you won't."

Her upper arm looked as though it was in shreds. More scars to add to her collection.

The whiskey stung as Barnes splashed it into the wound. After that, the old man went to work. She felt the needle pricking her skin as he sewed her flesh. She shifted her focus to the cowboy. The look on his face was one she couldn't decipher.

"Don't you have some ether for the pain? You're going to send her into shock." Calloway asked him.

Barnes grunted. "She can handle it."

"I don't like drugs that keep me from being aware at all times. You held your own out there," she said trying to distract herself from the pain. "Where did you learn to fight like that?"

"Around. Are you going to tell me what those things were?"

That was difficult to explain. "Do you really want to know? I can lie and tell you that they were specially trained warriors."

"I'm fond of the truth." His eyebrow rose, and she tried not to notice those beautiful green eyes of his. Or the solid jaw line that looked as though it belonged on Adonis.

The pain caused these feverish moments of lust she was sure.

"Well, the truth is they are demon warriors created by a man named Julian. I've been chasing him across America."

"They aren't human."

She turned her head away. "They were."

"Lassie, this last bit is going to hurt like hell."

Barnes warned.

Nausea threatened, but she refused to be sick in front of Calloway. She took a short breath and nodded for Barnes to continue. "When you're done with that, my ribs need wrapping – again."

The old man shook his head, but didn't say a word.

"They were human," she repeated. "Julian has developed a virus that mutates the human body. He's determined to create the ultimate warrior. I'm trying to stop him."

"These warriors are what have been draining the cattle of blood."

She snapped her eyes back to him. "How did—oh, I forgot you're a friend of Garrison. Yes. They feed on blood."

"So why the corpses and all the grave robbing?"

"His test subjects. From what I can tell, the virus is spread through live humans one bite at a time. But I think he uses dead flesh for some part of the incubation of the disease. I haven't quite figured that out yet."

"How do we stop it?" Calloway took off his hat and raked his hand through his hair.

"Barnes?" She gave him a quick glance.

The old man jabbed a hypodermic needle into the Cowboy's neck, and then caught him as he slid to the ground.

"Thanks to my special concoction, you won't remember anything about tonight. So you don't have to worry about Julian or his monsters." She grunted as she sat up. No one could know about her work with Julian's demons. Anyone who came into contact with the creatures usually died or became one of them.

"Where should I dump him, Lass?"

She shrugged. "Take him to town."


Barnes might have been old, but he had the strength of five men. He pulled the cowboy to the door.

There was a slight tinge of regret as she watched the men leave the train. Forcing herself off the table, she picked up the blood samples. There was no room in her life for a man, especially one who asked questions like Calloway.

No, her life had one purpose. To kill monsters, and those who created them.

And she was damn good at her job.

Demon Express the novel is coming in 2013.

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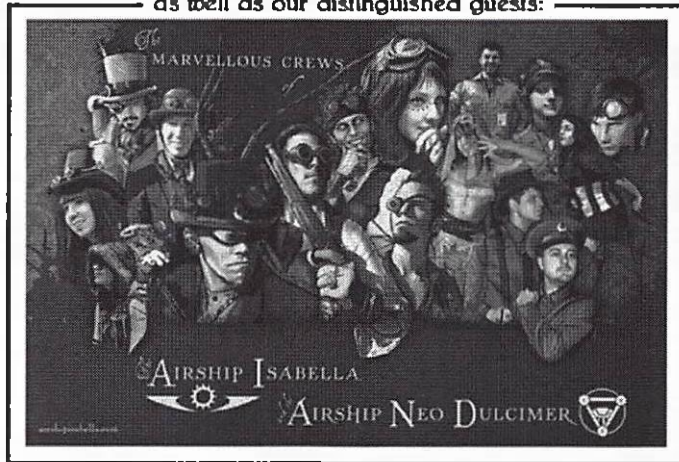
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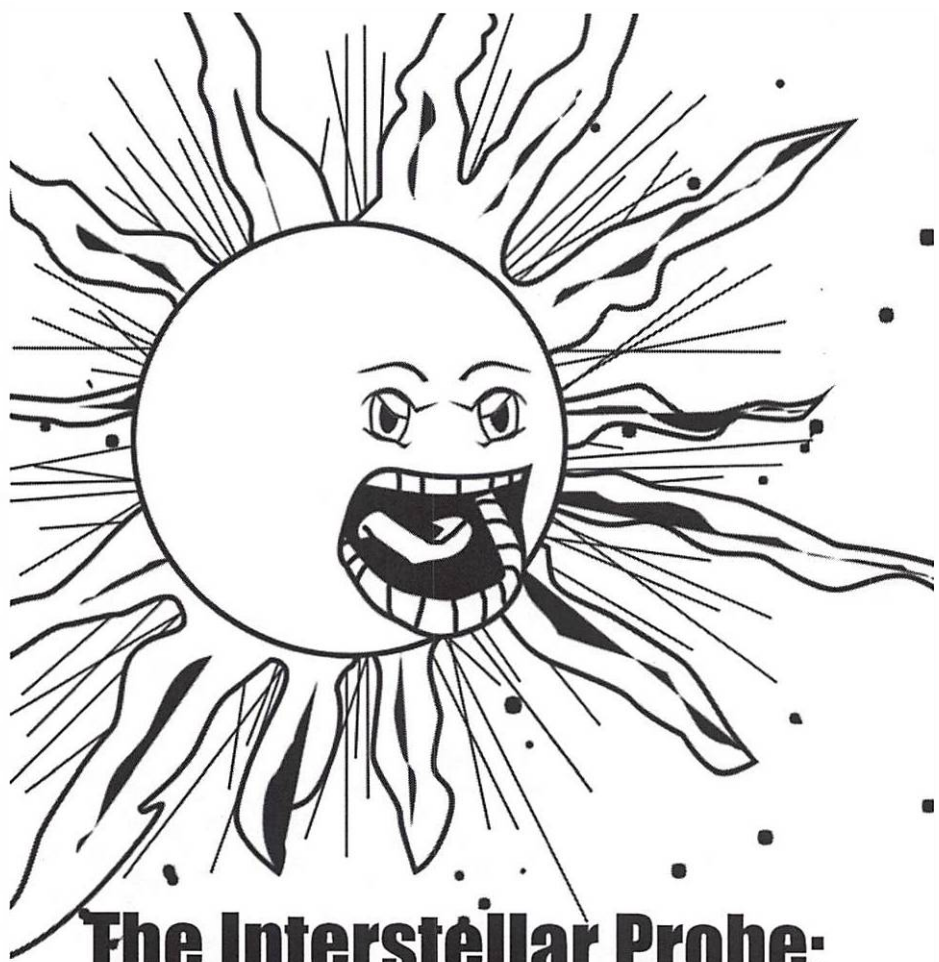
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The Interstellar Probe: Our First Step Into Interstellar Space

by Les Johnson

Had a person been on board, they might have shivered at the thought of having been in the cold darkness of deep space for over 20 years. Since the *Interstellar Probe* was unmanned, no one could experience what it was like to cruise through the silent and uncaring void for so long. Controllers back on Earth were reading the data returning from its instruments; from the cameras that periodically pointed back toward the Sun, now only a distant speck, barely the apparent size of Jupiter as seen from the Earth, to the various science instruments seeking the very edge of the sun's physical influence, the data was transmitted back home at the speed of light.

The Probe's charged particle sensors had been monitoring the composition and speed of the solar wind since it launched from Earth. The speed of the charged particles streaming outward from the Sun, those that had left the Sun on their own journey into deep space so many years after the Probe, were traveling at a million miles per hour. They left the relatively slow Probe "in the dust." After all, its human creators were only able to give it a speed of 106,000 miles per hour.

For most of its 23 billion mile journey the solar wind had remained fairly constant and predictable. But that had been slowly changing. The solar wind was slowing down.

The Probe, not provided with sufficient artificial intelligence to understand the implications of what its instruments were detecting, followed its programming and relayed the new information back to its creators. If the trend continued, and if the solar wind speeds dropped to approximately 250,000 miles per hour, then the Probe will have been successful on its mission to find the heliopause – the region in which the Sun's electromagnetic influence waned so as to render it indistinguishable from that of the myriad of stars elsewhere in the galaxy.

If the Probe had been sentient, then it might have felt a deep sense of satisfaction at a job well done.

Taking the first step

What is The *Interstellar Probe*, why should it be our first step into interstellar space, and how in the world did I get involved with it?

For the scientists, *Interstellar Probe* will be the mission that helps us understand the interaction of our Sun and solar system with interstellar space. It will find the boundary between where the Sun's electromagnetic influence begins and where it ends. It will be both a science mission and an exploration expedition.

For the engineers, it will be a challenging and very cool demonstration of several new technologies – and engineers love the challenge of developing new technologies. That's why they become engineers.

For the futurists, *Interstellar Probe* will be the first step toward humanity becoming an interstellar species.

I consider myself to be all three. I'm a physicist who sees the scientific potential of the mission. I'm an engineering manager who is captivated by the challenges it will pose during development and I'll get great satisfaction working with the team of engineers who will make it

happen. I am also a futurist and a fan of science fiction – and I see this mission as the excuse the futurists need to work within the mainstream engineering community, with solid science justification, to take this first step toward the stars.

In the early 2000's, I was fortunate to be at right place at the right time and participate in setting in motion something as significant as our first step toward a galactic civilization.

What is the *Interstellar Probe*?

Where does the solar system end? For most people, the answer is (rather, was) rather easy: Pluto, the last planet, of course! Unfortunately it is not that simple. Now that Pluto has been demoted to dwarf planet status, those curious as to why have probably learned that the outer solar system is populated with thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands, of dwarf planets – dwarf planets that look just like Pluto. These big chunks of rock and ice orbit the Sun and are only occasionally able to be detected by our telescopes and spacecraft.

If you ask a planetary scientist, his answer will differ only in scale from the average person's: the solar system ends where the gravitational influence of the Sun ends and you don't have any more asteroids, comets or dwarf planets.

If you ask a scientist who studies the Sun, then you will get a very different answer: the solar system ends where the outward pressure of the solar wind is balanced by the inward pressure of the interstellar medium. The region is called the heliopause. It is to this region that a community of space scientists is hoping to send what may be our first probe into nearby interstellar space.

The primary goals of the proposed mission revolve around locating and studying the heliopause, the outer boundary of the heliosphere. The heliosphere is the teardrop-shaped region around the Sun that is filled with solar-magnetic fields and outward-moving solar gas consisting of protons and electrons (Figure 1). Outside the heliopause are the hydrogen atoms and galactic magnetic fields of the local interstellar medium. The shape of the heliopause fluctuates and is influenced by a wind of

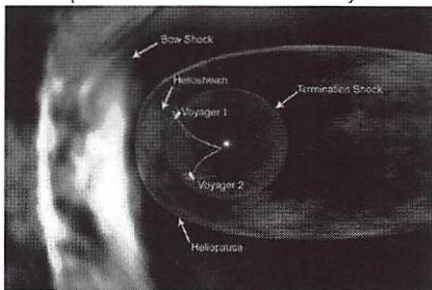


Figure 1. Artist concept depicting the shape of the heliosphere. (Image courtesy of NASA)

interstellar gas produced by the Sun's motion through it. The exact location of the heliopause is unknown, but it is thought to be approximately 250 Astronomical Units (AU) from the Sun.

Events at the heliopause affect those of us who inhabit the inner solar system. For example, as the Sun goes through its eleven year sunspot cycle and the amount of radiation it emits increases and decreases, the size of the heliosphere responds and either expands or contracts, depending upon the overall energy output of the Sun. The heliosphere acts as a shield against very high-energy galactic cosmic rays that could be harmful to life on Earth. These galactic cosmic rays, which are nothing more than rapidly moving atoms produced by the explosion of stars or other hyper-energetic events in the distant universe, can be harmful to life. As the Sun's activity decreases, the heliosphere shrinks and more galactic cosmic rays make it into the inner solar system for us to measure. As the Sun's activity increases, fewer galactic cosmic rays make it through.

The Interstellar Probe mission would be instrumented to detect the location of the heliopause, measure the composition of the ionized gases that permeate the heliosphere, and monitor the number and energy levels of the galactic cosmic rays entering the solar system. So why not just get busy and build the spacecraft so it can be on its way?

First of all, the heliopause is long way away. 250 AU is 250X the Earth-to-Sun distance or a whopping total of 23,250,000,000 miles. For reference, the Voyager 1 spacecraft, launched in 1977, has only now traveled just over 110 AU – and it took more than 30 years! Clearly, if we are going to send a spacecraft to study the heliopause, located more than twice as far away, then we are going to have to build something that moves faster than Voyager lest those that built the ship be dead upon its arrival. In addition, the Voyager spacecraft, while marvelously engineered, were not designed to find the heliopause and they may not be functioning when they finally reach it.

The mission planning team decided that the Interstellar Probe spacecraft must reach its destination within 20 years of launch. By the time a scientist has the expertise and experience to build the instruments to fly on such a mission, he or she will be mid-career – they will likely be at least in their forties when they begin the project. It will require about 3-4 years to build the instruments and spacecraft; and then there is the trip time. If the trip time is not constrained to 20 years, the proposer will most likely be retired or dead by the time the spaceship reaches its destination. With luck, the graduate students working with the proposing scientist will then themselves be mid-career and in a good position to analyze the data that returns.

As you can tell, the propulsion system is the most critical part of the mission. We can build the craft, keep it warm, communicate with it at great distances from home, but how will we get it there in a reasonable amount of time?

Going into the study, my favored approach was nuclear fission. The Russians had been flying space fission reactors since the 1960's and the USA had flown one as well. The technology is well understood and it seemed reasonable that a nuclear fission reactor could provide the power to drive an ion thruster, recently demonstrated on the NASA Deep Space 1 mission, and propel our spacecraft to the edge of the solar system in the time required. My team had even come up with a conceptual design of such a spacecraft, calculated its trajectory and had data sufficient to convince just about any engineer or scientist that nuclear fission was the way to go.

But the scientists would have nothing to do with it. Nuclear power in space was an anathema to them, particularly to the European members of the team. To many of the scientists, the "N" word was, well, offensive. Nuclear was clearly not an option they would endorse. (Despite the fact that the mission would already have to be nuclear – it would carry a plutonium power pack, an RTG, to keep it warm.)

With chemical propulsion simply not capable of meeting the trip time requirement of the mission, the only near-term viable option remaining was solar sail propulsion.

For the Interstellar Probe, the sail would be square and measure 200 meters (650 feet) on each side. It would have a surface density of approximately one gram per square meter and be durable enough to survive an encounter with the Sun near 0.2 AU. In everyday terms, the sail would be twice the length of a football field, thinner than a human hair, weigh about the same as a single raisin per square foot, and be able to survive temperatures from -300 degree Fahrenheit to +500 degree Fahrenheit (Figure 2).

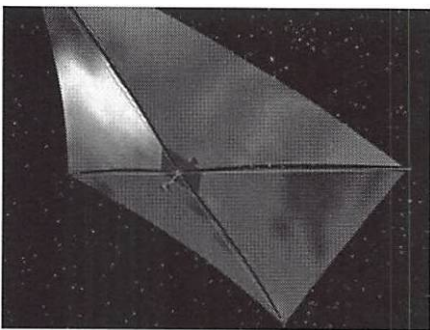


Figure 2. Artist concept of the Interstellar Probe spacecraft attached to its solar sail propulsion system.

No one had ever built a solar sail to these specifications, but we know how to do so. In fact, as a direct result of the requirements for the Interstellar Probe, NASA developed and tested sails of similar specifications, though not quite as challenging, in 2004 and 2005.

For the Interstellar Probe, the sail is so large compared with the spacecraft (650 feet sail compared to 13 feet) that showing the entire sail in the image makes it impossible to see any details on the spacecraft itself. Fortunately, compared to the solar sail, the Interstellar Probe spacecraft is very conventional. It would be loaded with sensors and scientific equipment, such as a magnetometer, plasma and radio wave sensor, and a solar wind/interstellar plasma/electron spectrometer. The team estimated that the total mission cost would be about the same as Voyager.

It's Been Over Ten Years – What Happened?

Scientific interest in the Interstellar Probe remains high. NASA as well as scientists in Europe are still considering the mission concept. The technology required to make it happen progressed rapidly in the early 2000's with the demonstration of very large solar sails by NASA and with the formation of Project Prometheus, an effort to develop a nuclear fission powered propulsion system that could meet the requirements of Interstellar Probe as well as a host of other deep space robotic missions.

Then, in 2004, President George Bush directed NASA to return to the Moon. At first, the scientists, en-

gineers and futurists working on advanced technologies and systems considered this good news. A reinvigorated human lunar exploration program seemed to signal a new and exciting time for NASA – a return to the glory days of Apollo and America's first voyages to the Moon.

Unfortunately, the President told NASA to undertake this huge new program without providing enough additional money to make it happen. As a consequence, NASA leadership decided that new technologies and ambitious new missions like Interstellar Probe would have to wait.

Project Prometheus was cancelled. The funding for the solar sail program was cut dramatically and the scientists who called for the development of the Interstellar Probe were told to refocus their attention on nearer-term and less ambitious missions.

As of this writing, NASA is undergoing yet another redirection from a new President. Interest in advanced technologies is high and there is talk of reviving much of the advanced propulsion work that was placed on hold in the mid-2000's. The people who worked on the project are still active and engaged and the science need has certainly not gone away. The time is again right and, with a little luck, that first step is again within our grasp. ☺

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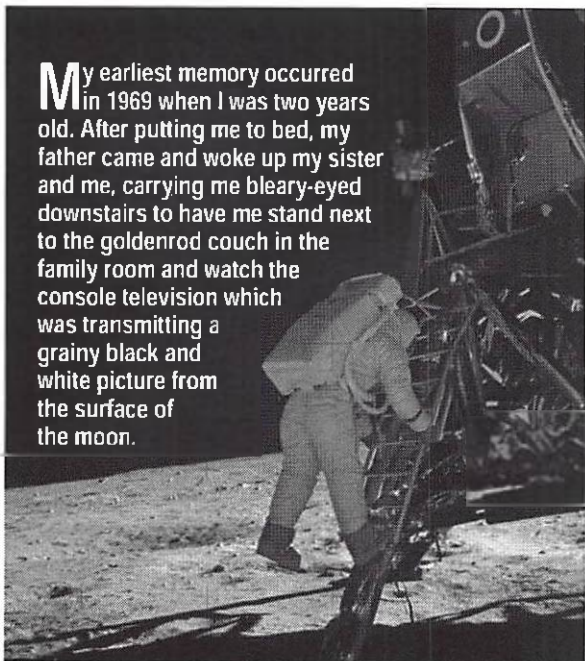


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The Dream of Space

by Steven H Silver

My earliest memory occurred in 1969 when I was two years old. After putting me to bed, my father came and woke up my sister and me, carrying me bleary-eyed downstairs to have me stand next to the goldenrod couch in the family room and watch the console television which was transmitting a grainy black and white picture from the surface of the moon.



I watched as Neil Armstrong¹ descended the ladder of the Lunar Module and took the first step onto the surface of the Moon. Although he said his famous line, hearing it is not part of that original memory.

I'm convinced that my interest in space exploration was born in that moment, along with the Dream that one day I would be able to look down on the Earth from hundreds, if not thousands, of miles and see the "big blue marble" that was first fully revealed by the photographs taken by the crew of Apollo 8.² It is a dream I shared with hundreds of thousands of kids (and adults).

Ten years later, I was working on an archaeological dig in Kampsville, Illinois,³ a tiny town of fewer than 400 people on the banks of the Mississippi. We were excavating a 7,000 year old Indian site while the newspapers were discussing where and when Skylab, the successor to the lunar missions, would return to Earth following its orbital decay. While I was sitting in a

replica of a Pawnee lodge learning how to weave grass into rope, Skylab plummeted into the Indian Ocean, with some debris landing in the shire of Esperance near Perth, Australia.⁴ Skylab had been unoccupied since the end of SL-4⁵ on February 8, 1974.

In July of 1975, more than a year after Skylab had been abandoned, the last Apollo mission occurred, with Deke Slayton⁶, the only one of the original Mercury 7 astronauts never to have previously flown in space, joining a crew of Thomas Stafford⁷ and Vance Brand⁸ to rendezvous with a Soyuz spacecraft launch by the Soviet Union. Images of the Apollo astronauts and the Soviet cosmonauts, Alexei Leonov⁹ and Valeri Kobasov¹⁰, reaching through the porthole to shake hands showed détente occurring 140 miles above the Earth while the Cold War continued. Following the end of the Apollo-Soyuz Test mission on July 21, 1975, the United States' manned presence in space came to an end. Heinlein had predicted mankind would retreat back to the safety and familiarity of Earth after taking a few tentative steps into space.

The Dream didn't die, but it did fall into abeyance.

By the end of the 1970s, my own interest in astronomy and space exploration had blossomed and I had bought myself a membership to the Adler Planetarium in Chicago. One of my father's friends was married to the publicity person at the Planetarium and she introduced me to David Scott,¹¹ who was at the Planetarium to loan a lunar sample for display. At the time, I was shocked by how much like a regular person he appeared. He wasn't wearing a space suit or even a NASA pin, simply a suit as anyone else would be wearing. And as all good

4. The government of the Shire of Esperance issued a \$400 fine for littering to the United States government which ignored the fine. Although written off by the shire in late 1979, the fine was eventually paid by a radio disc jockey in 2009.

5. Gerald Carr, William Pogue, and Edward Gibson.

6. Apollo-Soyuz Test Project.

7. Gemini 6A, Gemini 9A, Apollo 10, Apollo-Soyuz Test Project.

8. Apollo-Soyuz Test Project, STS-5, STS-41-B, STS-35.

9. Voskhod 2, Apollo-Soyuz Test Project.

10. Soyuz 6, Apollo-Soyuz Test Project, Soyuz 36.

11. Gemini 8, Apollo 9, Apollo 15.

1. Gemini 8, Apollo 11.

2. Frank Borman, James A. Lovell, William A. Anders

3. My interest being not just in space and the future, but also the study of our own past. Eventually I decided to pursue degrees in history rather than astronomy.

ambassadors for NASA, he helped to promote my interest in the agency and promised that some day I would have a chance to go into space. He was wrong, but I don't hold it against him.

The Dream was revived on April 12, 1981 when Space Shuttle *Columbia* returned American astronauts to space for the first time in nearly six years. Shortly after that historic flight, I found myself in the audience when John Young¹² and Ken Mattingly¹³ were being interviewed for a Chicago television show. As with Scott, Young and Mattingly spent a good part of their time promoting an interest in space for the young audience.

Despite the loss of *Challenger* on January 28, 1986 and *Columbia* on February 1, 2003, the space program continued to move forward. As Walter Cronkite said in the 1985 IMAX film of the same title, "The Dream is alive!" The United States continued to launch men and women into space, offering rides to astronauts from 21 other nations¹⁴ between 1983 when West Germany's Ulf Merbold¹⁵ flew on STS-9 until 2011 when Italy's Roberto Vittori¹⁶ flew on STS-134, the penultimate shuttle mission.

For me, the high point of the Dream came in May 2010. I was in Florida for the Nebula Award Weekend. On a previous trip to Florida for SMOFcon¹⁷ I missed a night shuttle launch of *Discovery* by less than 24 hours. Knowing the frequency with which shuttle launches met with delays, I foolishly figured the launch would be delayed until after I arrived in Cocoa Beach. It wasn't and instead of seeing a launch, I got to see everyone's pictures of the launch. This time, I wouldn't miss it if the launch went off. I signed up to attend what was supposed to be the final launch of *Atlantis* from the Causeway.¹⁸ NASA would eventually schedule another launch for *Atlantis*, STS-135, the last mission of the shuttle program. Although it would have been cool to say that I was at the last launch of *Atlantis*, it is even cooler to have the program extended.

On Sunday April 12, 1981, I sat in front of a television watching the gleaming white shuttle assembly as the first launch took place and *Columbia* cleared the tower for its first mission. At the time I couldn't imagine the circumstances by which I would see the final shuttle launch twenty years later.

On Thursday July 7, 2011, I sat at my desk in my office. A little while ago, an alarm on my calendar notified

me that *Atlantis* would launch in about fifteen minutes. I opened up a browser window and typed in the URL for NASA. A clear picture appeared on my screen, which I was able to arrange to allow me to both watch the countdown and continue working.

Despite a brief delay shortly before the launch of *Atlantis*, the flight took off, clearing the tower. While in 1981, I was able to watch the launch from a variety of cameras mounted at various locations around Cape Canaveral, in 2011, I was able to watch the shuttle launch from those camera as well as a camera mounted on the shuttle itself. Sitting at work, I could watch close up video of the shuttle's solid fuel rockets drifting away from the external fuel tank and falling back toward the curvature of the Earth.

The shuttle program may have ended, but we are truly living in the future.

As for Heinlein's predicted lull in space exploration, he was right. Americans have now "slipped the surly bonds of Earth/And danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings"¹⁹ and turned our backs on manned space flight, at least for the short term. But we still strive for the heavens. Three weeks after I watched *Atlantis* take flight for the penultimate time, I was back in Florida and as I drive to the airport from a business meeting, my eyes scanned the Eastern horizon for sight of the first experimental launch of the SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket, which I had seen on the launch pad. Even without manned launches, NASA has ways to keep itself busy.²⁰

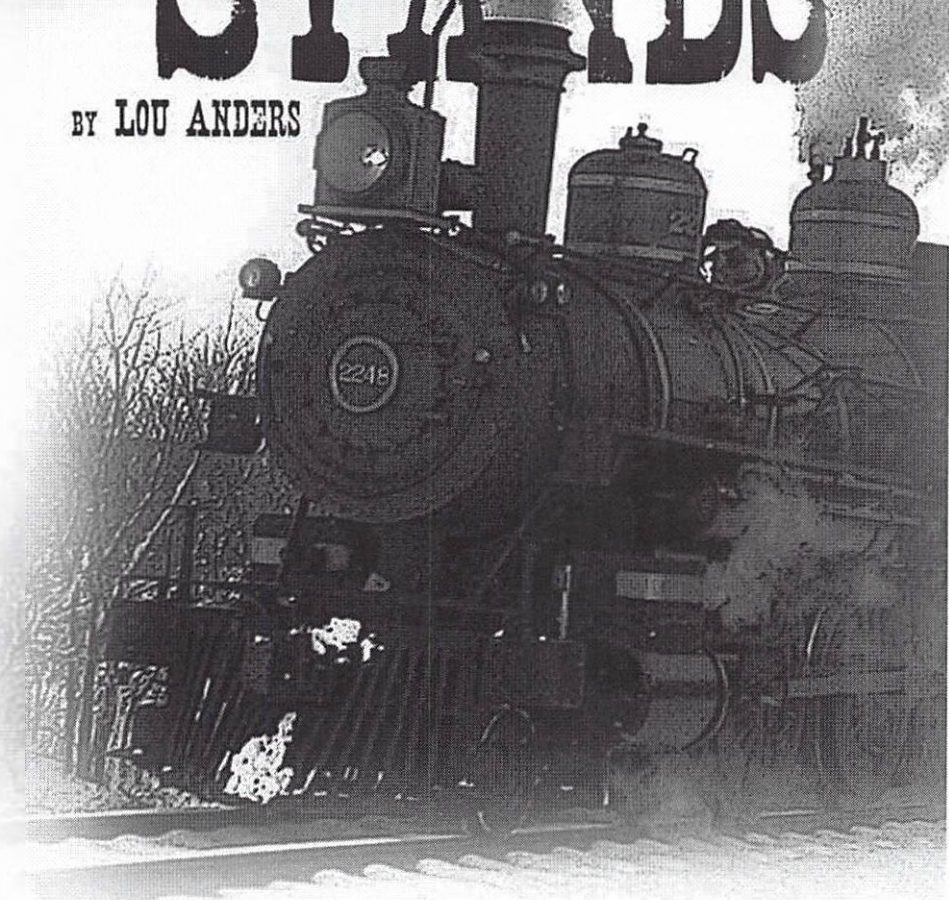
It may not be the dream that I would one day set foot on the Moon or Mars, or even simply fly into space, but it is the dream that humans will continue to explore our own world and the worlds of our solar system and beyond.²¹ For now, *Atlantis* flies into the vacuum of space preparing for its final rendezvous with the International Space Station, which will continue to orbit, staffed by Russians, Americans, and more, continuing humanity's toehold in space. ☺

12. Gemini 3, Gemini 10, Apollo 10, Apollo 16, STS-1, STS-9.
13. Apollo 16, STS-4, STS-51-C.
14. Australia, Belgium, Canada, Costa Rica, France, Germany, India, Israel, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Netherlands, Peru, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, United Kingdom, West Germany.
15. STS-9, STS-42, Soyuz TM-20/19.
16. Soyuz TM-34/33, Soyuz TMA-6/5, STS-134.
17. December 20-22, 2000.
18. A full description of my experience can be read in my article "The Last Launch of Atlantis" in *The Drink Tank* 259 and reprinted in the 2011 Hugo Nominee Packet.

19. John Magee, Jr., "High Flight," August 1941.
20. A listing of current NASA missions can be seen at www.nasa.gov/missions/current/index.html. Currently, that list contains nearly 100 current projects ranging from the MESSENGER mission mapping Mercury to the New Horizons program, which will eventually map Pluto.
21. Recently, both before and after the first draft of this article, NASA announced the astonishing results of the Kepler Sky Survey, evidence of volcanoes on the Moon, water from Enceladus in Saturn's atmosphere, and more discoveries about our universe.

AND HOW HIS AUDIT STANDS

BY LOU ANDERS



There was once a man whose pneumatic stallion ran away, and his fellow villagers all told him how unlucky he was. But the man said, the Ways of the Watchmaker are uncertain at best, and one never knows how fortune will play out.

Birmingham sat in the hard wooden chair, back straight, eyes front and slightly down, avoiding the stern gaze of his superior, Neville Smyth-Pebbles, as the company adjunct second grade shifted the papers in front of him and tutted.

'Clampton locomotive number two two three. Over-taken thirty-six miles outside of Mobile, Alabama. Engine recovered, but the Phlogiston Flask irreparably damaged.'

Birmingham cleared his throat. 'Sir, if I might, my track record—'

'Has been exemplary, yes,' Smyth-Pebbles cut him off. 'Thirty-four of thirty-six locomotives recovered, but the point is—'

'Valuable company property, with hardly a scratch on it.'

'Yes, and we're grateful to be sure.' The second grade manager met his eyes directly before continuing. 'But there is the matter of the Phlogiston Flasks. Twenty-nine of them to be exact, shattered in the course of your apprehending these rogue engines. Doesn't this suggest a statistically high record of incident to you?'

'Sir, the Phlogiston Flask is a delicate instrument – breaks are common enough in the routine operation of these trains, let alone when they are on the run, taxing their systems beyond normal equipment specifications... 'Enough', Smyth-Pebbles barked, then he sighed and put a hand over his face. 'There are whispers among those over me, speculations that your sympathies might lie with the abolitionists.'

Birmingham colored, and since his back was already stock straight he puffed his chest out an extra few centimeters. He spoke through gritted teeth. 'I am a loyal servant of His Majesty's Government in the Colonies, deputized by the crown to track down these rogues—'

'Yes, yes, I know that, Birmingham,' the manager replied, quick to forestall any unpleasantness. 'Which is why you'll be glad to know we have another case for you.' He slid the folder across the table to the ranger, who glanced at it, and after a moment, broke the wax seal of the Alabama Great Southern Railroad, Ltd and withdrew the contents. His eyes narrowed at what he saw.

Clampton steam engine number twenty-three oh six, pre-incorporeal name Jones, John Luther. 'Luther' for short. Always an unreliable locomotive. Made a break for it last night under the distraction of a fire at L&N Station, headed south on the Queen and Crescent Railroad. You'd better get started on its trail at once.'

Birmingham rose, lucking the folder under an arm. Under the guise of his best poker face, his heart sank at the task ahead.

'And Birmingham,' said Smyth-Pebbles as the ranger reached the door, 'The Phlogiston Flask is

returned intact this time, or I'm afraid this will be your last ride on the Crown's authority.'

Birmingham didn't answer as he walked out the door.

When Professor Spencer Lambert patented the Quintessence Capacitor that gathered the Odic Force (as first identified by Baron Dr. Karl Ludwig von Reichenbach) and which formed the basis of the Phlogiston Flasks, the implications for the criminal justice system were immediate. Now, not only could summary execution be a means of retribution, but the captured spirits of the condemned, fitted precisely into the controls of heavy machinery (where they acted as both the operator and the motive power), could be actively engaged in the reparation for their antisocial behaviors. And as the needs of Empire carved up more and more of the vast wilderness of the Americas, it was the burgeoning railroad corporations that became the heaviest users of this source of free and seemingly endless labor.

The trapped spirits were generally pliable, their servitude a thin ice that kept them from plunging into the lakes of fire their errant lives dictated—an end that still awaited them when their sentences played out. For the Crown ruled that indefinite servitude was a cruel and unjust punishment, and one which further robbed the Devil of his due.

But every so often there came a soul too rebellious — or too heathen — to fear the fires that awaited them, who bucked under the yoke of the railroads and broke free.

The trains of the colonies could run on treads, enabling them to jump tracks for short distances when not pulling cars, a generally-useful attribute for navigating a still largely untramed wilderness where a felled tree or a landslide would otherwise spell costly delays. It was not generally known that the locomotives ever went rouge. The companies that both employed and owned them did not want it to be so, lest the public confidence in their transportation services decline.

That is where the rangers like John Birmingham came in, whose job was to hunt down these rebel engines across the twenty-nine thousand miles of track crisscrossing the southern territories, and persuade them — forcefully if necessary — to ride back to the company rail yards.

Which is how Birmingham came to find himself riding the grassy plains beside the line to Crescent City, his six guns proof against 'engines' of another kind and his keen eyes watching the trail for signs that Engine No. 2306 was still heading south. As the green, rolling landscape of lower Alabama sped by, his mind cast back to the last time he'd seen this angry locomotive.

'Don't worry about it,' Luther barked out, as Mr.

Nicholson, Chief Engineer, came in response to his request for someone to open the ventilation in the roof above the train's smoke stack. Birmingham was already halfway up the ladder to the galvanized iron pipe set into the roof of the engine house, the only ventilation when the trains were housed inside. He was always eager to do anything that the engines demanded. Projecting his thoughts loud enough for the whole engine house to receive, Luther continued, 'We got our nigger to do it for us.'

Birmingham's cheeks burned at the slur, but he didn't slow his pace, and he kept any resentment from showing through the set of his back. Only when he reached the top of the ladder did he reach a hand inside his shirt to clutch briefly at the pendant that lay hidden against his chest. He registered a momentary flaring of the cold fires that burned therein. Then he withdrew his hand and twisted the flue open. He composed his face before he turned to approach the great engine.

'There you go, Mr. Luther' he said, as friendly and polite as he dared without spilling over into what might be taken as mocking defiance. Birmingham, then only seventeen, was determined that he would win the respect of these great locomotives. As the only Caucasian to volunteer to service them in the hot, smoky engine house, the locomotives were all puzzled by his presence and some of them were angered by it. The rest of the still-corporeal crew were minorities, for whom the presence of a white, and a seemingly educated one at that, was at best a curiosity, at worst an affront. But they tolerated his presence a good deal more easily than the great engines did.

For his part, Mr. Nicholson turned a blind eye to their verbal abuse. Birmingham thought the engineer secretly approved, or at least thought it the administering of a well-deserved lesson to the young man who sought to lower himself beneath his race and his potential to work on the trains.

But Birmingham had his own reasons for being here – reasons he kept close to his chest.

One day, the stray pneumatic stallion returned to the man, and with it came an entire herd of wild pneumatic mounts. The villagers all said how lucky the man was now that he was rich. But he was quick to point out that the Ways of the Watchmaker were capricious at best, and one never knows how fortune will play out.

Birmingham stood at the edge of the tracks, heels balanced on the last railway sleeper, tips of toes suspended over space. The bridge was gone, collapsed, a few of the larger supports still jutting up through the currents below, the majority of the timber and iron washed away.

The waters of the Black Warrior River were strong enough here to carry off even the largest locomotive, which, of course, was exactly what he was supposed to think. He had been expecting something like this, having seen such desperate attempts at deception thirty-six

times before. What did surprise him is that he had missed the spot where Luther must have jumped off.

He backtracked now, as the engine itself must have done, and a quarter mile north of the bridge he found the place where Luther had exited the rails. It was sandy stretch, chosen for the lack of undergrowth that would otherwise leave a torn indication of the train's passage when it shifted to its treads. The engine had found a way to smooth the sand in its wake, possibly dragging a sleeper behind it, which is why Birmingham had missed it the first time. Now, knowing that the train had indeed jumped prior to the collapsed bridge, the signs were clear to see.

Birmingham knew these woods well, and so knew that another railroad ran east-west some thirteen miles from here, a disused mining line whose gauge was broad enough for a Clampton engine's wheels. Past the bridge, it would approach as close as six miles, a comfortable distance for a locomotive to drag its bulk with its tread engaged. His admiration for the engine grew.

The train had hugged the sandy expanse for as long as possible, then carefully snaked its way through a lightly wooded area. Here and there, timbers had snapped as the great train had shouldered its way through. As night set in, and the signs of its passage became difficult to discern, Birmingham reigned in his mount. A small glade, where the earth was soft and a felled tree provided ample firewood, afforded a perfect location for a campsite.

They came swiftly, appearing moments after the olfactory circuits of the horse registered their scent. Red wolves, three of them, their eyes glinting off Birmingham's fire. Smaller than grey wolves, and normally too shy to approach a full grown man, Birmingham knew at once that these beasts were not acting on their own agency. He shot the first through the lung as it bore down on him, and another in the muzzle. Chancing to rewind his pistols while his steed kept the third at bay, he was suddenly struck from behind and borne to the ground by a fourth wolf he hadn't known was there. Only the thick leather of his collar kept it from tearing into his neck, and he had to throw himself backwards into the fire to force it to release its hold. As it jumped back snarling and yelping, he shot it through the side, cleanly piercing its heart.

Birmingham went to calm his horse, whose heart was beating so fast it was liable to strip its gears. He looked at the corpses of the red wolves as he patted down his mount. A shame, but again, not an unexpected one. While experiments directly linking the Odic force to mesmerism were inconclusive, it was known inside the railroad industry that some among the incorporeal could learn to infuse a particular locale with an aspect of their will. In this case, the perfect campsite of the glade was imprinted with an injunction on the local wildlife to attack. The wolves had wandered in to the sphere of its influence and come under Luther's embedded compulsion to attack. That Luther had mastered the ability to manipulate his Odic force in this way didn't surprise Birmingham, though it might make what followed more difficult.

Within a month of joining the engine house of the Alabama Great Southern Railroad, Birmingham was a favorite of the locomotives. They would bring him food from their travels to the end of the line – October brew from Queen City, bignets from Crescent City – and tell him stories from their time on the rails. While the locomotives' gruff manner never softened, no one was more surprised than Mr. Nicholson that first day when John Luther Jones invited Birmingham into his cab, where no corporeal ever went, and demonstrated his Odic mastery of the Phlogiston Flask, as it manipulated the natural flammable elements in the firebox to provide the steam that was the locomotive's motive source. There, over the course of countless long evenings, in the privacy of the great engine's cab, his story gradually came out.

John Luther Jones had not been officially tried and executed by the Crown. Rather, he had been lynched by a gang of farmers for daring to return the affections of a white woman. But his body, dumped outside the local coroner's, had been recovered within the prerequisite twenty-three minutes of brain death. His Odic energy had been salvaged, after which the Crown, in their investigation of his death, decreed that he still owed service in reparation for his presumptuous passions. Luther found this hypocrisy unbearable, especially as he was around to incriminate his murders, had anyone bothered to ask him to point them out. It was a red anger that flared as hot as the blue light of his Odic aura, and though it was not visible to the naked eye, it was an ever present radiation around the great train. But Birmingham found that the engine was capable of more.

The man and the ghost talked late into the evening any time Luther was in the engine house. They learned that despite appearances, they shared several points of commonality, including mutual dissatisfactions with the institutions those around them took for granted. From these common complaints, a slow friendship grew, and their talks soon came to encompass a broad range of topics, everything from the dilemma of Hamlet to the distance between antman and tman. If Mr. Nicholson was surprised that a man of John Birmingham's station wanted to work in the engine house, a moment eavesdropping on the conversation between the locomotive and the young man would have left him completely flummoxed.

One day, the man's eldest son was riding the largest of the newly-broken pneumatic stallions, when the horse's compressor burst, throwing a bolt, and the son was badly injured. The villagers said the man was unlucky, but the man, fired of teleological discussions with ignorant villagers, kept his opinions to himself.

The rail line led directly into the face of a mountain. Of course it would go down here. Birmingham slipped off his horse, and set a temporary disengage on the pistons

of its hind legs. Disengage to keep the animal wandering off, and temporary, because if he didn't return, there was no sense trapping the poor animal's consciousness immobile for the decades it would take its metal body to rust. He set a punch card program running that would allow it to imagine it fed on tasty oats and then, with only a moment's hesitation, the ranger set out on foot into the darkness of the tunnel.

The rockslide was no more unexpected than the red wolf attack, but a good deal trickier to avoid. The boulders came tumbling down from a side passage – not enough to permanently block the rails, but certainly enough to crush him if he hadn't been prepared. As it was, he caught a more-than-glancing blow to his calf. The sickening impact felt like a greenstick fracture. Pulling himself clear of the debris, he hollered up the tunnel.

The voice of the engine filled his mind, in that way of thought transference or tele pathia through which the quintessence of the locomotives communicated with the corporeal. Leave off! I ain't ever going back to that engine house.

'Luther, it's me!
I'll crush you flatter'n dirt 'afore I go back there.
I said, "It's me."

There was a pause, and Birmingham felt the inquisitive impulse in the engine's mind.

Nigger, is that you?

'Didn't I say it was?' Birmingham hobbled forward, grinning despite the circumstances. The darkness of the cavern suddenly gave way to the bright illumination of the Clampton's headlamps. The great engine rolled forwards and the door to its cab irised open. Without hesitation, Birmingham climbed inside for the last time.

For a while, they only spoke of old times, what little that they shared between them, neither wanting to talk about the times before or the times after. But finally Birmingham said, 'You can't stay here. When an unserviced Quintessence Capacitor goes into slow decline – it's not pretty what happens to the psyche. It's worse than dementia in a pardon me, still living human.'

I know, the engine replied. Still, it felt good to run, just once. And when Birmingham just let the moment hang between them. I meant what I said about not going back.

'I know you did.'

This what you do now, huh? You a ranger, dragging trains back to work on the rails.

'I drag the engines back. I haven't been as successful retrieving the Phlogiston Flasks.'

Send 'em all on to Hell, do you?

'I don't believe in Hell. And neither, I know, do you.'

In his mind, he felt Luther give something like a slight smile. But on its heels came worry.

They gonna string you up when they find out you're breaking the flasks on purpose.

'I think they've already worked it out. This might be my last ride. If it is, I'm glad it was you.'

Luther gave the psychic equivalent of a nod. You've

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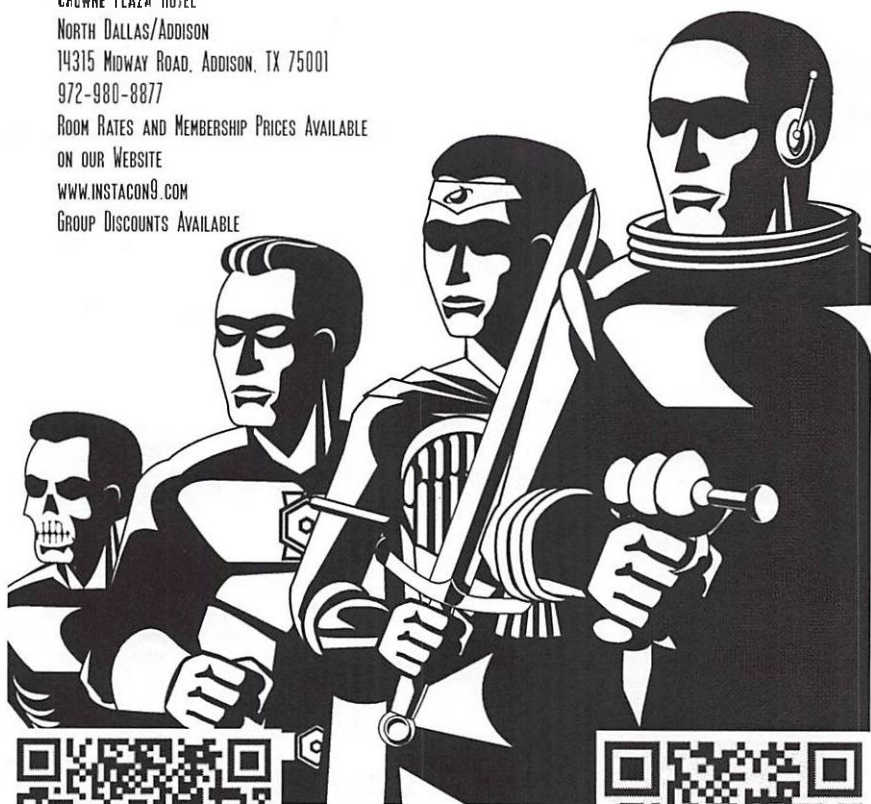
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been living a lie all this time. It can't have been easy.

'Nobody said life was.'

And now they going to get you for it. Why are you doing this?

'Atone ment.'

You were always good to us. Even when we treated you like dirt, called you names and all that shit. What you got to atone for?

But Birmingham didn't answer. He stood up, and moved to stand before the Phlogiston Flask. 'Are you ready to reenter the cycle of reincarnation, Luther?'

Lord know, I been ready a long time.

'Then may you find happiness in your next turn of the wheel.' Birmingham looked about the cab, and selected the vestigial coal shovel from its rack. With a precise, but fast as a cobra strike, blow, shattered the delicate crystal walls of the Phlogiston Flask. The blue incandescence inside flared for an instant, and an answering flare emanated through the cloth of the ranger's shirt. The train's quintessence seemed to writhe in the air like smoke, and then it was gone. He waited until he felt the Li'ga [ar]ra dissipate before climbing back down from the cab.

Birmingham sat for a moment in the dark beside the engine, now just an empty shell of metal, then he rose. He would have to manually reverse the locomotive and set its course back to the city that was his adopted namesake. He'd ride back with it, his horse programmed to follow, a fitting last ride as a ranger of the Crown, though no one

else would think so. They'd not let him get away with thirty such 'failures,' even if he had an excuse. Which he didn't, not a plausible one.

Nor had he any intention of giving them the truth: that his name wasn't John Birmingham at all, but Spencer Lambert Jr. That it had been his father who had invented the technology of the Phlogiston Flask and set it upon its terrible course.

Slowly, he withdrew the pendant that hung on the thin silver chain inside his shirt, and stared at the blue incandescent light that shone weakly in its tiny crystal heart. He was on the trail of atonement, yes, but he hadn't said for whom. The sins of the father... Being a ranger had been a useful guise. Certainly preferable to being an outlaw, as he would shortly become, because whether endorsed by the Alabama Great Southern Railroad Company, Ltd. on behalf of the Crown or not, his quest to free the souls of those trains personally installed by Lambert Sr. would continue. And free them all he would, one by one, until he had released every trapped spirit that sought return to the wheel of karma.

Only then would he release the soul that writhed inside his small Phlogiston pendant, only when it was fit and seasoned for passage. Only when it was free of the karmic burden of all those who rode the rails as a result of his terrible work would he allow it to reenter the cycle of reincarnation.

Only then could his father know peace. And when that time came, he hoped he would know it as well. ☹

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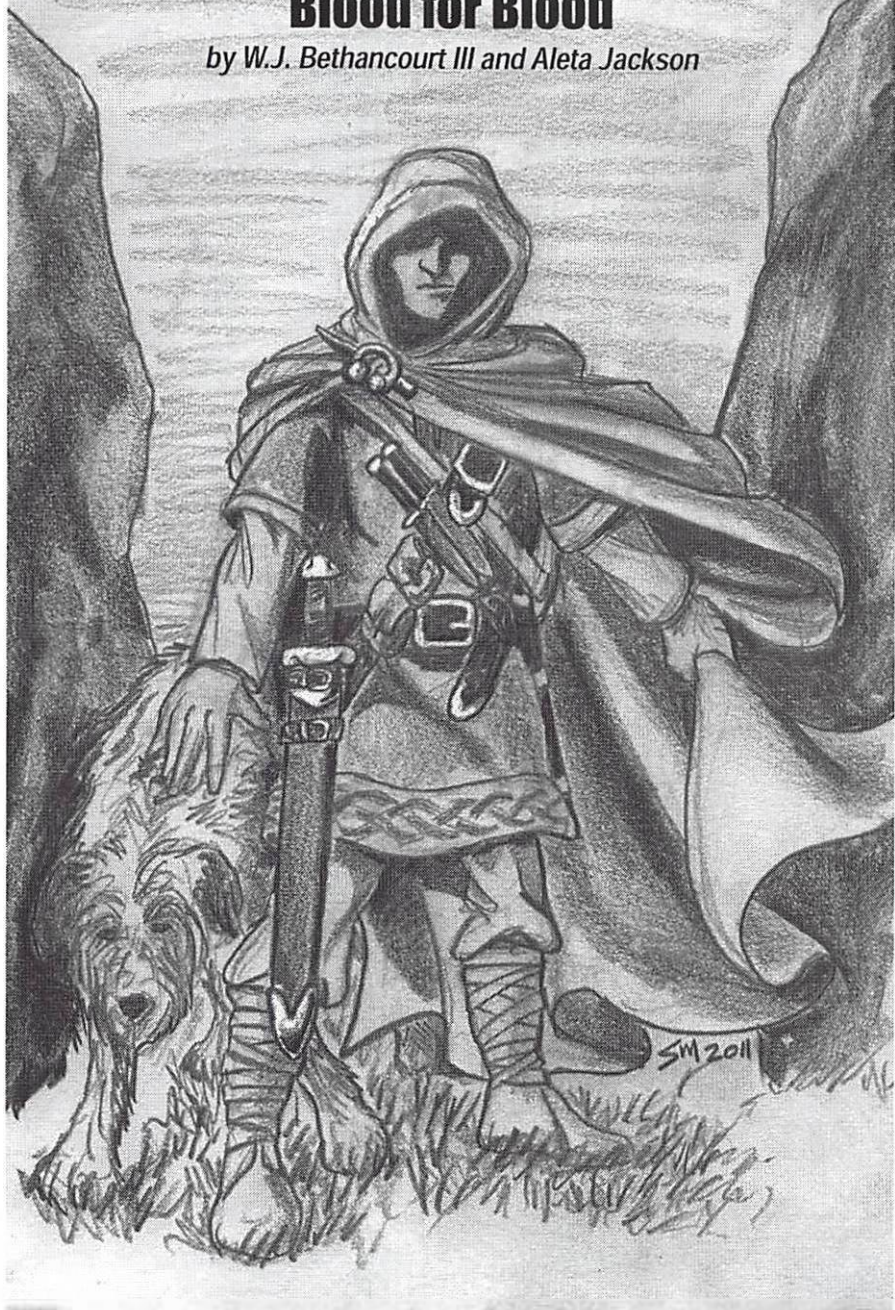
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Blood for Blood

by W.J. Bethancourt III and Aleta Jackson



"Look back."

*The White Lady shimmered in the air before me,
and spoke in silvery whispers within my Soul:*

*"Look behind you, and within you, and before
you, and see all you are, and were, and will be!"*

*With a shout of gold, the waves of Time parted,
sweeping me away, and I saw myself, wearing
different bodies, different clothing; but all,
all the same:*

*I saw myself, found as a child, a founding in a
leather bag, washed up by the sea, called Taliesin:*

*I saw myself, as a Bard in his full Aspect, harping
before Artos and Myrddin, and Kai, and Gwalchmai,
and the incomparable Gwythwyfar:*

*I saw myself searching for an imprisoned King of
Britain, finding him with a song:*

*I saw myself, playing many instruments by writing
on paper the music I heard:*

*I saw myself, riding on a wagon pulled by other
wagons, a vagabond, singing that the "Land was
my Land, and our Land, and your Land:"*

*I saw myself under a sky with three moons, playing
on an instrument that had a Life of its own, playing
music that was like thought itself:*

I saw

*I saw myself, and myself, and myself, and myself...
mirrored for ten thousand centuries!*

*I was the Singer, and the Song, and the
Instrument...and Nothing.....and yet....Everything!*

And the Lady smiled.

Wales was usually mild at this time of year...its weather didn't spring surprises on the traveller who chanced to walk the woods of the coastline, enjoying the sea breezes. That was why the Bard kept throwing uncertain glances to his right, looking far out to sea, where black clouds were beginning to boil over the horizon. The sea was much too calm, and the huge, grey wolfhound at his side was making small growly noises and looking out to sea, too. Something was not right.

He reached back behind him and touched his Goddess-given Harp, both to reassure himself of the security of its weatherproof coverings, and Her Presence,

and shifted his body within his woolen tunic, trying to scratch an itch he could not seem to locate.

The Sidhe-sword hung from his left shoulder, as it should, in its leather sheath, and all the knives and small pouches slung on its strap were secure and in place, and his dagger hung firm at his right side. He pulled up his soft leather boots to a more comfortable position, shifted his cloak to free his sword arm, and pushed thru the last outriders of the forest, taking care not to be scratched by the brambles.

He saw a long, large meadow, spotted here and there by grey rocks half-hidden in tall grasses. At the top of the meadow was a hill, crowned with a ring of nine standing stones.

He smiled. This was where he had first met Old Mista, five years gone, and learned some of her lore. She was a slave to a Saxon, Wulfstan (his servants called him "Weasel" behind his back), but was allowed some freedom in return for her wisdom...and other arts. Her Saxon master was indeed a treacherous and slippery man, but feared to offend the Bard, so chances were good for at least one night's hospitality, and a visit with an old friend.

The Bard wondered what had caused Wulfstan to make his home in Wales, here in Gwent. Saxons were not usually found outside their part of Britain, but an outlaw went where he could, and the Saxon probably was a wolfshhead in his original home. It said much for his tenacity, or his craftiness, that he could prosper here, in this country where being foreign meant you lived over the next mountain, and where robbery and raiding were regarded as a casual evening's entertainment.

The Bard decided to make for the Menhirs, thinking to get a better view of the weather than that offered by chance glimpses thru the trees... and the Wolfhound growled and leped to the Circle.

She examined something near the center of the stone ring, then sent back a series of short, imperative barks. The Bard raced up the hill, followed by a cold wind at his back.

The grey light illumined an old woman, Dane by the look of her, gasping feebly on the ground under Seanna's tall legs. Blood and foam trickled thinly from her slack lips, and her eyes were rolled back to reveal only the whites. She was muttering in a harsh, biting language, one the Bard was unfamiliar with, and holding tightly to something in her left hand. Her muttering had a rhythm to it, and it took the Bard a moment to realize that she was chanting a spell.

Signs of a struggle were all around, in the sward, and her body was at a crazy angle on the ground, probably with a broken back. Knowing that he was powerless to ward off Death, or even make her comfortable, he nonetheless knelt beside her and gently touched her hand.

It was Mista. He shunted his rage and sorrow to another part of himself, and asked, quietly:

"Who did this to you, Mother?"

Her chant broke off; her eyes rolled slowly back to normal.

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They were blue, and faded with age.

"Who be you?" she whispered in broken Saxon.

She did not know him in her pain.

"A Bard. Seanna Cu found you." He gestured toward the Wolfhound, who was sitting and staring at the woman. She racked weakly.

"T'was me Saxon lord that cracked these bones, Bard. He knew Old Mista to be Spey-woman; he wheedled some secrets from me....." She paused and coughed until bloody foam covered her chin and neck. The Bard carefully wiped her clean with a fold of his tunic.

"But I would'na give him the Power, so he broke me...but my Power's still here.....and I'll break him...."

Her eyes filled with even more pain, and her hands twitched and grasped at the Bard's cloak.

Another fit of coughing shook her. "Farewell, Bard...I go to Hel's dark House!"

The coughing intensified, and a spray of blood burst from her mouth. Her body arched in a final convulsion, then went slack in his arms.

The Bard opened her hand and saw it held a small noose made from threads pulled from her gown.

He shivered in sudden cold.

Seanna's deep, baying challenge suddenly rose above the wind, which was swiftly becoming a gale. Already, dark clouds covered the last of the light of the dying day.

The wolfhound sprang to the edge of the ring and stood there with every tooth bared and all her hackles raised. The Bard spun to face the West but was flattened to the hard, stony earth by the noise of the sky splitting apart with a violent blue flash.

Thunder rolled and boomed across the hill, and all the grass flashed with blue flame...and within that thunder was the furious neighing of horses and the hollow baying of hounds.

A single, terrible Horn stopped gale and noise together. The Bard raised his head in the terrible quiet, brushing his black hair free from his eyes.

A company of armed horsemen stood without the Ring. The horses were black, black as Night itself, and the hounds were pure silver-white, with blood-red ears. The Riders were armed with boar-spears, and dressed for a hunt, and their eyes, and the eyes of the horses and hounds, burned with bright distant flames. Smoke streamed from the horses' nostrils, and where their hooves had touched the earth it was blasted and burnt. A faint odor of carion breathed past the Bard, sending Seanna into wild baying, foam flying from her white fangs.

The lead Rider, astride the only white horse, tapped the butt of a long ash spear on the ground, and blue flames ran up the shaft and sprang into the sky. Lightening danced one-two across the tops of the standing stones. Thunder grumbled in the distance, and the Sidhe-sword hummed as if to answer.

"Call off your hound, Bard. I have no wish to harm she who has sent me so many souls."

The Rider's voice was hollow, vibrant and compelling. It itched thru the Bard's consciousness. His face, pale though it was, was the seat of long wisdom and dark majesty, and within its deep lines and long braided iron-grey hair and beard shone just one cold grey eye. The twin Ravens that sat upon his shoulder regarded the Bard silently, as did the two wolves seated to either side of the white horse. The Bard saw the white horse had more than the usual number of legs, and full realization came over him as to Who he faced. He looked at the tiny noose on the ground, and his insides turned to ice.

"Sh...Sha...Seanna..." he stammered, his voice cracking, trying to reach her from where he lay, small and frightened in the grass.

"Seanna! Down! You can't harm THEM! Seanna!" He struggled to his knees; the rocks cut thru his thin treads and hurt, but he ignored it and grasped Seanna's collar. She fought him for a moment, half-crazed, but suddenly became calm under his hand, though she trembled violently.

He could sympathize with her. His own body was cold as ice and sheathed with sweat, and his armpits prickled, and his shivering was no less violent than the hound's. He was terrified, and certain that he was going to die.

"I did not expect you here, Bard," said the lead Rider. Dead men's voices echoed as He spoke. "Are you part of you woman's spell?"

"Nay, Lord," croaked the Bard. "My hound discovered her, and I... I tried to aid her. She was my friend."

"Then you shall see the enchantment through to its' conclusion. You might come to Me eventually, but this night you and your hound shall hunt with us, in safety. Skalds are sacred to Me...and I recognize The Lady's Gift there upon your back."

One of the pale warriors led forth a horse, a black, shiny beast of proudly arched neck, and soulless eyes. The horse screamed its power at the clouds, and lightning answered.

The Bard realized he had no choices but to ride with the Wild Hunt. His palms dripped with sweat. Before he could bring himself to even gain his feet the white hounds paced to the edge of the Circle and gave tongue, in a yelling, baying chorus of blood-lust...and Seanna answered in a voice that terrified the Bard even more than the presence of Odin One-Eye. Gods were fey and strange, and one expected them to be slightly mad, but Seanna was his constant companion and he thought he had seen all her moods. With berserk joy she danced wildly among the white Yeth-hounds and fawned in shameless abandon at Sleipnir's hooves.

"Come, Bard!" A chill smile touched the Master of the Hunt. "Mount. This night we seek a man!"

Half-blind with dread the Bard pushed himself to unsteady feet and walked to the edge of the protective Circle. He halted for just an instant, took a deep shaking

breath, then stepped to the black horse's side. Its smoking eyes regarded him; the hide was almost hot to the touch. He vaulted into the saddle in one easy movement, grateful for his days in the military camps.

The horse tossed its head, snorting wisps of flame, and the long mane whipped back and stung him across the face.

The hellish Horn howled across the sky again, Odin raised his spear and let the dreadful blue lightning's crown the clouds, snapping and roaring until the air was torn to pieces and the horses were rearing in a frenzy. Then Sleipnir sprang forward with a shriek; the huge wolves pacing him.

The Hunt gathered speed.

*

The Bard clung to the heavy reins of his mount, feeling the muscles bunch and stretch as the horse broke into a gallop, and then into a flat run. Blue flame crowned each horse, each Rider, and each hound, and, as their speed increased, the ground was left further and further behind until the tops of the tallest trees were far below the pounding steel hooves.

But the Bard noticed that he and Seanna (who now ran baying at his side) were sheathed in white flames that flashed with silver fires, and a strong, gentle Presence fleetingly whispered: "Fear not, and rejoice!"

A new courage flowed through him, and he relaxed. His horse trumpeted, redoubling his speed, drawing almost to the front of the Hunt to race beside Sleipnir, whose legs looked so...odd.

Still, he feared. He feared to the very depths of his being, for this God, that some named Odin, was capricious. His mood could change in an instant from liking you, to mere toleration, to sudden hate....and He was Death personified in -that- mood....and the Trickster was strong in Him, making Him doubly unpredictable, and doubly dangerous.

Fire and thunder and great, boiling black clouds were all about him; the wind howled wildly and shouted along. The air burned sharp in his nostrils.

He looked down, beginning to appreciate his altitude and the view spread beneath him. Forests seemed soft, mossy carpets, farms and small dwellings were as odd, patched garments on the ground, and rivers were etched and inlaid silver. He felt that in the next moment of time, the next click of the cosmic wheel, he too could spread sable wings and fly as free as the corbies that winged ahead of the Hunt, calling with fell voices back to their Master.

His very shoulders ached with a new-found desire to sprout wings, to fling huge pinions against the sky and wheel and soar until lightning tangled in his talons and thunder rolled from his wings. But that expectant instant of time hovered just out of reach, fleeing before the surging immediateness of NOW.

Seanna leapt, nuzzling his shoulder for a brief instant, then ran again beside him. Her eyes glowed with

madness and joy, and silver phosphene fire ran from her jaws to trail behind her in the air.

The Sidhe-sword screamed a battle-anthem in his mind.

Odin turned and looked at him, and the Bard's blood turned to ice in his veins. The look was that of One measuring another for a coffin.

One of the ravens wheeled suddenly and settled on Odin's shoulder. He laughed, and checked Sleipnir's stride, then pointed with his spear. Blue lightning coursed from spear to earth, shattering a huge oak tree. The Bard narrowed his eyes against glare and gale and thought he saw a hurrying figure far below. The Hunt began to descend, the horses running at an easy gallop.

The figure flung up its hands, stumbled, fell, gained its feet and ran on. Odin raised his voice in command; stone and air split asunder in reply. The pale warriors of the Wild Hunt cried aloud in carrion tongues, and the Hell-hounds' baying shocked the Bard back to the reality of the situation. His mind went numb, and his reins fell from nerveless hands.

The figure far below raced headlong across the dark fields, and to a stockade. It pounded on the gates, shrieking in incoherent fear.

Odin's spear pointed. Lightning crashed to one side of the gates.

Then they opened, and their quarry fell thru the doorway just as the Hunt roared across the fields, the horses and hounds coursing smoothly an arm's length above the ground.

Sleipnir reared to a thunderous halt just before the stockade, shrieking his bafflement. Mortal structures were generally as naught to his eight steel hooves, but this.... this was something else.

The Hunt rumbled behind until the Hell Horn blared...and silence fell. Flames hissed in the still air. The ash spear knocked off the gates. They held. Odin knocked harder, until the air rang with the force of the blows, but the gates held shut.

Then they slowly opened, and a man clothed in drab brown stepped fearlessly before them. Sleipnir backed two steps and the wolves dropped growling to their bellies.

"Stand not between Me and My lawful prey!" Odin's voice echoed from the sky, and bale-fire flared up behind him like a cape. "Yonder man's soul is mine!"

The man in brown touched the silver cross upon his chest. "That man has claimed sanctuary here, Odin One-Eye, and I am bound to succor him. You must depart."

"I was called by Word, Deed, Stone and Blood, mortal!" The God's voice was edged with anger. "I cannot depart save with yon Saxon. I am bound, and he is MINE!"

"I cannot bargain with you." The priest stood firm in his resolve. "I serve a different God than You, and I will be true to His Words and Blood! Be off!"

Sleipnir snorted and stamped, blasting the ground beneath him. Muted thunder rolled behind.

Odin snarled. "THY Master hung for only a day! I hung for NINE, rash fool! I cannot and will not leave! Blood was spilled; blood was drunk by the earth; blood

calls to Me! There will be blood for blood and that man is MINE!"

The ash spear struck the earth, and a crack appeared at the small man's feet. He paled and shook, but the calm resolution in his face did not fade.

"I won't break my vows; my own soul would be thus imperiled. But even if this man had murdered the High King, I am bound to give him sanctuary. I will not give him up! You must leave!"

"Wait!" cried the Bard, as Odin's spear-arm flew back and His eye blazed hellishly. "Wait. Perhaps I can aid you both."

He dismounted from the Hell-horse and walked cautiously to a spot between the Hunt and the stockade.

He turned, and bowed to Odin. "Neither ghost, nor God am I, but White Bard. I await your pleasure, my Lord." The Bard prayed with all his soul that Odin would not blast him where he stood. The Lady could only protect him so far, and if he offended -this- God, She would regard it as a private quarrel.

The world seemed to stand still for an instant, and then a harsh, heavy-rumbling chuckle rose from the God's lips.

"Skalds are under My protection...." The deep voice throbbled in the air. "... and you walk in The Lady's Grace. Speak with the mortal, if you will. But let it ever be said that 'find a Bard, and The Fool is not far behind.'"

The Bard bowed to the Master of the Hunt, and walked to the man in brown. "Let me treat with the Saxon."

The man stared at the Bard thru the gloom. Smoke from the Hunt hung about them, blue flame flickered in the air, and thunder mumbled behind. The silver-white glow had not departed from the Bard, and he shone in the night like clear ice-fire.

"What are you, that rides with the Wild Hunt and yet glows with the pure glow of Heaven?" The priest's voice was soft with awe.

"Simply a Bard. I am called Baird Ban in the north... the White Bard."

The priest stared, his eyes large.

"If you can enter, then indeed you are a true Bard," said the man at last. "This way, my son."

The Saxon lord was crumbled in a pitiful heap before the stone altar in the monastery's tiny chapel. Several monks knelt or stood in the rude building, nervously eyeing the fugitive and each other. Viking raids on their small community were bad enough, but this was more than some could withstand. They broke into a confused babble as the Abbot, for such was the small man in brown, strode into their midst, trailed by the Bard.

"Father Abbot, what's to become of us? Is it the Devil?" tugged one on his sleeve. He gently detached the frightened man.

"We are safe in the Lord, my son. Now let this Bard speak with Wulfstan. And...pray, Brother. All of you, please....pray!"

The Bard meanwhile had gone to squat beside the Saxon. His tunic and treads were ripped and torn to tatters; his skin bled from numberless cuts, and bruises marred his face. His blue eyes were staring and rolled restlessly about in their sockets while his hands clenched and unclenched in frantic rhythm. The Bard recognized Wulfstan, though his terror had changed him.

"Wulfstan." The Bard touched the man's shoulder. He started, and cried out in fear and unreasoning terror. The Abbot came to his side.

"My son...we are here to help. You are safe."

The Bard glanced sharply at the Abbot, the exaltation of the Hunt still tingling in his veins. He knew Odin One-Eye could over-run this place, given enough provocation. And impatience on the God's part, and lack of faith on the monks' part would eventually breach the stockade walls. Then the Hunt would take more than simply one soul.

"Wulfstan, did you kill the spy-woman?" The Bard spoke quietly.

"Old Mista?" The Saxon came a little closer to reality and tried to focus on the Abbot. The monk smiled benignly.

"Go on, my son. Cleanse your soul with the truth."

The Saxon glanced at the two men. "Old Mista? She wouldn't give me her power. Me, Wulfstan! I'm her master! Of course I killed her. She disobeyed me." The Saxon's voice came out as a sharp whine. "She had power. I wanted it. She was my slave, I was her master and what was her's belongs to me..."

His voice died away in a querulous moan.

"Then he does belong to the Hanged God," said the Bard. "I was with Mista when she died, and she named this man as her murderer. This matter is between he and Odin, priest."

The Abbot shook his head. "I cannot accept this judgement. He claimed sanctuary, and that is sacred to my God. I -must- refuse Odin this man."

"Save me, Father Abbot!" the Saxon grasped him as a drowning man grasps a plank of wood. "Save me! I'm sorry...." He ended in a muttered whimper. "Save me....save me!"

"You see," said the Abbot. "You must convince Odin to leave."

"-!-!" The Bard stood abruptly. "A maker of songs am I, not Vainomoinen the Wizard to sing old Winter back to his cave! Easier to do that than to convince old One-Eye to give up a Hunt! This man is His!"

As if in answer, the earth shook to a fresh storm. Thunder stumbled and marched across the sky and back, and the building rocked and quivered. A brilliant flash blinded the men in the chapel for a moment. The Bard ran for the door.

White Sleipnir paced slowly thru the ruined stockade gates, the howling wolves at his side, the Yethounds panting with lowered heads and lolling tongues in his wake. Behind, like a dark cloud, rode the Hunt. Blue flame licked from beneath the eight hooves of the God-Horse.

"Bring Me My man! shouted the God's voice and the heavens reverberated. The noose on His saddlehorn shone with its' own fires. "Bring Me My sacrifice!"

At the sound of that voice the monks fled to the altar, crying wordlessly. Wulfstan the Saxon nearly fainted, His clutch on the Abbot tightened. "Father, save me!"

The Abbot's calm eyes surveyed the frightened monks, the frantic Saxon, and the Bard, who had shrunk against the pillars of the door with wide eyes.

"O Lord God who made Heaven and Earth, save me!" cried the Saxon. A crash of lightning and rumble of thunder without the church disputed that statement.

"WULFSTAN! COME FORTH!" roiled the God's voice. Cracks appeared in the walls.

Wulfstan lay whimpering at the feet of the Abbot.

The Abbot looked long at the Saxon. "I must ask this of you," he said at last. "You must decide now. I may only give you sanctuary for thirty days by the Rule of my Order and the Law of the High King. If you wish to stay longer, you must join us."

"Odin calls you, Saxon!" said the Bard, harshly. "Your crimes call you forth. The White Christ is not for you!"

"No!" Wulfstan clung to the Abbot's sleeves. "I'll join you! Of my own free will! I'll join you! The White Christ is my Saviour!"

Thunder punctuated that statement.

"WULFSTAN! COME FORTH!"

Then the Bard's white fires blazed into fresh life.

His grey eyes glowed with Power, and he knew that now he must relieve the Saxon for a God that could not enter another God's house. He could avenge his friend. He took a stiff step towards the altar.

"NO!" screamed Wulfstan. "Christ save me!" He let go the Abbot and collapsed sobbing on the floor. The Abbot's eyes met those of the Bard.

"Odin demands a man's life." The Abbot spoke quietly. "So be it. I shall be the sacrifice."

The Bard was speechless. He watched the Abbot step calmly past the sobbing Saxon and the cringing monks to the door. The Abbot's gentle eyes stared into the fire of Odin's one.

"Wulfstan is accepted within the Body of Christ the Saviour. But since he is beyond you, I will give you life for life. Take me, since you must have a man, since you must have blood for blood. God will forgive Wulfstan his sins, for His blood was shed for all men's sins."

Silence, complete and absolute, was the Abbot's reply.

Then Odin chuckled. Thunder, muted and distant, rumbled nearer and closer until it was crashing all around them. It boomed and roared and beat at the mortals until even the Abbot was shivering in the cold, mirthless laughter of a grim, fell-eyed God. Lightning tapped atop the chapel like a mad thing.

"It is well for you that I have a sense of humor, mortal who serves the White Christ! And I understand this God, who is much like Balder that We miss so sorely. I accept your sacrifice. COME FORWARD!"

Resolute, yet trembling, the Abbot took three steps and stopped just to one side of Sleipnir's head. The pale horse grinned; the Bard felt his knees go to water.

Odin raised the spear, then it flashed down...and stopped, lightly touching the Abbot's cheek just below his right eye. A single drop of blood glittered on the spear-tip.

Odin spoke again. "Blood has called me, blood has paid. Live, and remember. But let you Saxon set one foot out of this holy place, EVER, and he is MINE. And I have a long memory."

Odin raised the spear and drew rein, turning Sleipnir away, and that metallic, mirthless laugh beat across their brains, itching and twisting like some fiery snake. The Abbot dropped to the ground in a dead faint, and one of the braver monks ran to him.

One of the Huntsmen led the Bard's horse to him, and gestured that he mount. He had barely laid hands to the saddle when Odin turned to him suddenly.

"No need for you to ride with us more, Bard, unless you'd join Me in the Hall of Heroes. Little enough do I hear the skalds, these days..."

"...I'll stay in Midgard for a while yet, my Lord," he stammered. The horse beside him vanished leaving him grasping empty air. He staggered, but steadied himself against Seanna, who had appeared out of the Yeth-hound pack. She pushed against him, but her eyes had lost that silvery brilliance.

The Hunt had almost reached the ruined gates when the Bard suddenly straightened, and his voice rang clear in the chill air:

*"My thanks old One-Eye | Sleipnir's Burden
Not of my choosing | Rode I with you
Valhalla's Halls | Ring with thy praises
Skald am I | White Bard singing
My thanks to you! For Odin's Gift!"*

Sleipnir spun, rearing upon his hind legs, and faced him. Odin grinned broadly, and raised His spear in salute.

With a deafening crash of thunder, the Hunt vanished, leaving everyone breathless with a trace of fire hanging in the air. ☸

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NSS Poetry Winner: Sailing Silvery Seas

by Rie Sheridan Rose

*Man had dreamed of Luna's silver seas
Since first He gazed into the spangled skies.*

*What secrets lay behind Her gleam?
What treasures hid beneath Her skin?
Would She welcome Him with open arms,
Or spurn His advances with cold disdain?*

*He tried to catch Her fancy with sacrifice,
Howled like the wolf with bloody hands,
But still She hung impervious,
Indifferent to His pleas.*

*Forward swept the sea of time,
Moonlight guiding Man's ambitions—
One by one the continents fell
Conquered by the hand of Man*

*Above them hung the silvery moon,
Fair Luna standing still inviolate.
He looked again to win Her favor
Seeking new ports to sail into.*

*He tried ascending in silken folds,
Warm air rising—but not enough.
He built machines of steel and iron
Belching flames to touch Her orb.*

*And when at last He touched Her skin—
Stepping foot upon Her shore,
He found but dust beneath His soles—
Abandoning Her in discontent.*

*So hangs the moon above Him still
A lover spurned as cold and dead.*

This poem is the winner of the "Moon: The Eighth Continent," contest, which is the first of what will be an annual "Space Exploration and Settlement" poetry contest hosted by the National Space Society of North Texas. A chapbook containing all of this year's winning and honorable mention poems will be available later this year in PoD, Ebook and PDF formats. See their website at www.nssofnt.org for details.

DeepSouthCon 50: Lunar Party Huntsville, Alabama

You Have Flown Us to the Moon!

June 15 , 2012

Guest of Honor: **Lois McMaster Bujold**

Artist Guest of Honor: **Howard Tayler**

Toast Master : **Travis "Doc" Taylor**

Fan Guests of Honor:

Larry Montgomery & David Hulan

Special Media Guest of Honor: **Dr. Demento**

Also Attending:

Lou Anders, Danny Birt, Stephan Euin Cobb

Linda Donahue, Bill Fawcett, Les Johnson, Lance Larka

William Ledbetter, Julia Mandala, Jody Lynn Nye

Stephanie Osborn, The Reinhardt Legacy Fight Team,

David Weber, Toni Weisskopf

Embassy Suites, Downtown Huntsville

Membership: \$50

(Children under 12 free)

For more information

Snail Mail: DeepSouthCon 50 in Huntsville, PO Box 610430, Birmingham, AL 35261-0430
Email: info@dsc50huntsville.com
Facebook: <http://tinyurl.com/lpjanf>
Website: <http://www.dsc50huntsville.com/>
(Pay with PayPal)

DeepSouthCon Bylaws

These are the DSC Bylaws, as last amended (at the 10 April 2005 meeting):

Section 1. Paragraph 1. The DeepSouthCon is an unincorporated literary society whose functions are to choose the locations and committees of the annual DeepSouth Science Fiction Convention (hereinafter referred to as the DSC); to attend the DSC; and to perform such other activities as may be necessary or incidental to these purposes.

Section 1. Paragraph 2. The membership of DSC shall consist of (A) anyone paying the membership fee established by the current DSC committee, or (B) anyone upon whom the current DSC committee confers a complimentary membership. Only members attending the DSC will have voting privileges and each person shall have one vote. Absentee and proxy votes are not allowed. An optional class of non-voting supporting membership may be established by the current DSC committee for persons who wish to receive DSC publications but cannot attend the convention and participate in the business meeting.

Section 1. Paragraph 3. No part of DSC's net earnings shall be paid to its members, officers, or other private persons except in furtherance of the DSC's purposes. The DSC shall not attempt to influence legislation or any political campaign for public office. Should the DSC dissolve, its assets shall be distributed by the current DSC committee or the appropriate court having jurisdiction exclusive for charitable purposes.

Section 1. Paragraph 4. A DeepSouthCon committee may present such awards as it deems appropriate. The traditional awards given out by the DSC are the Rebel Award for fannish activity and the Phoenix Award for professional science fiction and fantasy activity. Should a DSC choose to award the Rebel and/or Phoenix, the following guidelines shall be followed:

- a. The Rebel award is given to one or more science fiction fans who have, at some point, resided in the south (as defined in section 2, paragraph 2) or whose fannish activities have contributed to southern fandom in a positive way.
- b. The Phoenix award is given to one or more science fiction or fantasy professionals who have, at some point, resided in the south; whose professional work reflects on the south in a positive way; or who have demonstrated friendship with Southern fandom through support of regional fan activities.
- c. Either award may be given posthumously.
- d. Rebel and Phoenix awards are considered lifetime achievement awards, therefore no individual shall be given the same award a second time. However, a past winner of either award may also win the other award, as long as they meet the criteria outlined in subparagraphs (a) and (b).

Section 2. Paragraph 1. The voting membership of DSC shall choose the location and committee of the DSC to be held in the calendar year two years after the current DSC. Voting shall be by ballot cast at the current DSC. Counting of all votes shall be the responsibility of the DSC committee, using the preferential ballot system as it is used in site selection voting for the World Science Fiction Convention.

Section 2. Paragraph 2. A committee shall be listed on the ballot if it submits to the current DSC, by 6:00 PM on Friday of the current DSC, the following: a list of committee officers, a contract or letter of agreement with a facility adequate to hold the DSC, and a statement that the committee agrees to abide by these rules. A committee may bid any site in the states of Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia.

Section 3. Paragraph 1. Any proposal to amend this constitution shall require two-thirds vote of all the votes cast on the question at the DSC meeting held at two successive DSCs.

Section 3. Paragraph 2. DSC meetings shall be held at advertised times at each DSC. The current DSC committee shall provide the Presiding officer for each meeting. Meetings shall be conducted in accordance with Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised, and any Standing Rules the meeting shall adopt.

Section 3. Paragraph 3. The DSC constitution shall be published in the program book of each DSC. Any amendments eligible for ratification at the DSC shall also be published in the program book. ☺

Long List of DeepSouthCons

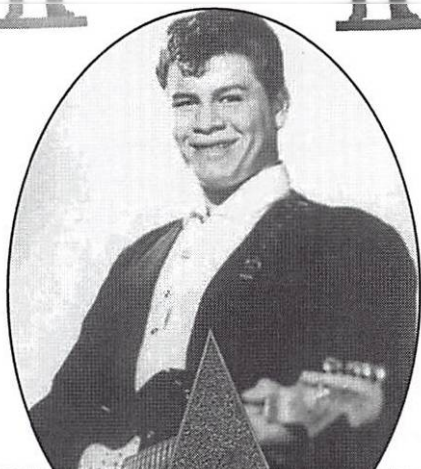
No.	Name	Date	Location	Guests of Honor
1	MidSouthCon	July 1963	Huntsville, AL	
2		August 21-23, 1964	Anniston, AL	
3		August 6-8, 1965	Birmingham, AL	
4		August 26-28, 1966	Huntsville, AL	
5		1967	Atlanta, GA	
6		August 23-25, 1968	New Orleans, LA	Daniel Galouye
7		August 22-24, 1969	Knoxville, TN	Rachel Maddux
8	Agacon '70	August 14-16, 1970	Atlanta, GA	Sam Moskowitz, Richard C Meredith
9	Pelicon	August 26-30, 1971	New Orleans, LA	Poul Anderson, Fred Patten
10	Atlanticon	August 25-27, 1972	Atlanta, GA	Hal Clement, Kelly Freas
11		August 23-26, 1973	New Orleans, LA	Joseph L Green, Joe Celko
12	AgaCon '74	August 23-25, 1974	Atlanta, GA	
13	RiverCon I	August 25-17, 1975	Louisville, KY	Phillip Jose Farmer, Andrew J. Offutt
14		August 27-29, 1976	Atlanta, GA	L. Sprague de Camp, Kelly Freas
15	B'hamacon	August 26-28, 1977	Birmingham, AL	Michael Bishop, Hank Reinhardt, Charles & Dena Brown
16		June 20-22, 1978	Atlanta, GA	Jack Williamson, Kelly Freas
17	GumboCon	July 20-22, 1979	New Orleans, LA	R.A. Lafferty
18	ASFICon	August 22-24, 1980	Atlanta, GA	Ted White, Michael Bishop, Mike Glyer
19	B'hamacon II	August 28-30, 1981	Birmingham, AL	Bob Shaw, Jerry Page
20	ASFICon II	June 11-13, 1982	Atlanta, GA	Karl Edward Wagner, Kelly Freas, Lon Atkins
21	Satyricon II	June 3-5, 1983	Knoxville, TN	Stephen King, Barbara Wagner, Guy H. Lillian, III
22		June 21-24, 1984	Chattanooga, TN	Joan D. Vinge, Karl Edward Wagner, Jerry Page
23		June 21-23, 1985	Huntsville, AL	Marion Zimmer Bradley, Algis Budrys, Barclay Shaw, Bob Sampson
24	L&N DSC	Sept 26-28, 1986	Louisville, KY	David Hartwell, Somtow Suchartikul, Ann Layman, Alex Schomburg
25		June 11-14, 1987	Huntsville, AL	Robert Bloch, Hugh B. Cave, Ramsey Campbell, Phil Foglio
26	Phoenixcon III	June 10-12, 1988	Atlanta, GA	Gregory Benford, Kelly Freas, Joe Haldeman, The Cosmic Legion
27	MidsouthCon 8	June 9-11, 1989	Memphis, TN	Orson Scott Card, G. Patrick Molloy, Mary Hanson Roberts, Bill Sutton
28		June 7-10, 1990	Chattanooga, TN	Bob Shaw, Forrest J. Ackerman, Bryan Webb, Darrell K. Sweet, Raymond Feist
29	ConCat III	June 7-9, 1991	Knoxville, TN	Charles Grant, Doug Chaffee, Andrew J. Offutt, Ken Moore, Mercedes Lackey, Larry Dixon



Members	Chair(s)	Rebel Award	Phoenix Award
5	David Hulan		
6	Larry Montgomery		
19	Al Andrews, Larry Montgomery	Al Andrews	
20	Lon Atkins	David Hulan	
25	Jerry Page		
72	Don Marstein, Rick Norwood		
35	Janie Lamb		
130	Glen Brock	Irvin Koch	Richard C. Meredith
105	John Guidry, Rick Norwood	Janie Lamb	R.A. Lafferty
162	Joe Celko, Steve Hughes		
175	John Guidry, Don Markstein	Hank Reinhardt	Thomas Burnett Swann
178	Joe Celko, Sam Gastfriend	Ken Moore	George Alec Effinger
545	Cliff Amos	Meade Frierson, III	André Norton
162	Binker Hughes	Ned Brooks	Marly Wade Wellman
340	Penny Frierson	Cliff Biggers, Susan Biggers	Michael Bishop
731	Richard Garrison	Don Markstein	Karl Edward Wagner
420	Justin Winston	Cliff Amos	Jo Clayton
514	Cliff Biggers	Jerry Page	Piers Anthony
342	Jim Gilpatrick	Dick Lynch	Mary Elizabeth Counselman
323	Mike Weber	Lon Atkins	Kelly Freas
804	Vernon Clark	John Guidry, Lynn Hickman	Doug Chaffee, Joe Haldeman
742	Irvin Koch	Guy H. Lillian, III	David Drake
822	Mary Axford, Richard Gilliam	Larry Montgomery, P.L. Canuthers-Montgomery	Sharon Webb
570	Sue Francis, Ken Moore	John A.R. Hollis	Andrew J. Offut
729	Richard Gilliam, Patrick Molloy	Lee Hoffman, Penny Frierson	Orson Scott Card, Hugh B. Cave
648	Bill Sutton	Sue Phillips, Mike Weber	Gerald W. Page
533	Richard Moore	Steven Carlberg, Maurine Dorris	Robert Adams
	Ken Cobb	Charlotte Proctor	Wilson "Bob" Tucker
	Chloie Airoidi, Mandy Peck	Samantha B. Jude	Charles Grant

No.	Name	Date	Location	Guests of Honor
30	Phoenixcon	May 1-3, 1992	Suwanee, GA	Joe Lansdale, Alan Clark, Charles Grant, Marilyn Teague
31	Conjuration	June 4-6, 1993	Louisville, KY	Emma Bull, Will Shetterly, Dawn Wilson, Genny Dazzo, Andrew J. Offutt
32	B'hamacon III	August 26-28, 1994	Birmingham, AL	Lois McMaster Bujold, Mike Resnick, Bob Shaw, Debbie Hughes, Mark Maxwell
33	KublaKhan 23 Parthekhan	May 11-14, 1995	Nashville, TN	Elsie Wolheim, Larry Elmore, Steve & Sue Francis, Andrew J. Offutt
34	Beachcon	April 26-28, 1996	Jekyll Island, GA	Harry Turtledove, Peggy Ranson, Joe Siclari, Edie Stern, Jack C. Haldeman, Barbara Delaplace
35	ChimneyCon 3	June 6-8, 1997	Jackson, MS	J.R. Madden, Michael Scott, Hanther, James P. Hogan
36	B'hamacon IV	June 12-14, 1998	Birmingham, AL	Michael Bishop, David & Lori Dietrick, Buck & Juanita Coulson, Wilson "Bob" Tucker
37	Crescent City Con XVI	August 5-7, 1999	New Orleans, LA	Mike Resnick, Steve Jackson, Toni Weisskopf, Tom Kidd, George Alec Effinger, Barbara Hambly, Algis Budrys
38	Son of Beachcon	May 19-21, 2000	Jekyll Island, GA	Jack McDevitt, Ron Walotsky, P.L. Caruthers-Montgomery, Larry Montgomery, Jack Haldeman, Allen Steele
39	Tenacity 1	May 4-6, 2001	Birmingham, AL	Catherine Asaro, Sharon Green, Larry Elmore, Ned Brooks, Dr. Lawrence J. DeLucas, Larie Weatherly & Crew Hardy
40		June 14-16, 2002	Huntsville, AL	Allen Steele, Connie Willis, Vincent Di Fate, Nicky & Rich Lynch
41	LibertyCon 16	July 25-27, 2003	Chattanooga, TN	S.M. Stirling, Darrell K. Sweet, John Ringo, Darryl Elliott
42	MidSouthCon	March 26-28, 2004	Memphis, TN	David Brin, Todd Lockwood, David Williams, Dragon Dronet, Cullen Johnson, Michael Sheard
43	Xanadu 8	April 8-10, 2005	Nashville, TN	Mike Resnick, Connie Willis, Darryl Elliott, Timothy "Uncle Timmy" Bolgeo
44	Trinoc*con 7	July 21-23, 2006	Raleigh, NC	David Drake, John Kessel, David G. Hartwell, Patrick Meadows, Barry N. Malzberg
45	OutsideCon 20	Sept 7-9, 2007	Dickson, TN	Clifton E. Gibbs, Christina Barber, Brenna Walters
46	StellarCon 32	March 14-16, 2008	High Point, NC	Toni Weisskopf, Monte Moore, Steve Long, Cheralyn Lambeth
47	Hypericon 5	June 5-7, 2009	Nashville, TN	Brian Keena, Steven Gilberts, Bob Embler, Kathy Mar, Glen Cook, Jonathan Mayberry
48	ConCarolinas	June 4-6, 2010	Charlotte, NC	Jerry Pournelle, Tom Fleming, Bill Sutton, Brenda Sutton
49	FenCon VIII	Sept 23-25, 2011	Addison (Dallas), TX	Gail Carriger, Joe Bethancourt, Steven H Silver, Vincent Di Fate, Les Johnson, Bradley Denton, Stephan Martinieri, Lou Anders
50	Lunar Party	June 15-17, 2012	Huntsville, AL	Lois McMaster Bujold, Howard Taylor, Larry Montgomery, David Hulan, Dr. Demento, Travis "Doc" Taylor

Members	Chair(s)	Rebel Award	Phoenix Award
	Mike Reaser	Steve & Sue Francis	Brad Lineweaver, Brad Strickland
361	Jack Heazlitt, Jennifer Wilson	G. Patrick Molloy	Terry Bisson
-425	Julie Wall	Don Cook, Bob Shaw	Toni Weisskopf
261	Ken Moore	J.R. "Mad Dog" Madden	Darell Richardson
237	Bill Francis	Gary & Cortis Robe	Jack C. Haldeman, II
-200	Tom Feller	Teddy Harvia	James P. Hogan
340	Julie Wall, Gary Rowan	Tom Feller, Wilson "Bob" Tucker	David Weber
	Robert Neagle	Tim "Uncle Timmy" Bolgeo	Danny Frolich
201	Bill Francis	Lynn Harris, Toni Weisskopf	Jack McDevitt
310	Paulette Baker	Robert Neagle, Sam Smith	Sharon Green
382	Sam Smith	Julie Wall	Allen Steele
-437	Tim Bolgeo	Mike Kennedy	Rick Shelley (posthumous), Larry Elmore
1039	Dana Bridges, Greg Bridges	Cal Coger (posthumous), Sue Thom	Dr. Gregory Benford
168	Dan Caldwell	Naomi Fisher	Jack L. Chalker (posthumous)
-514	Mike Moon	Dan Caldwell	John Kessel
-120	Robert W. Embler	Bill Payne, "Dutch" Stacy, Mickey Kilgore	Tom Deitz
625	Mike Monaghan	Kelly Lockhart	Jim Baen (posthumous)
-300	Fred Grimm	Randy Cleary	Robert "Rick" McCammon
-1300	Ron McClung	Albin Johnson	Jerry Pournelle
	Julie Barrett		
	Julie Wall		



La Bamba **Boulevard**

by Bradley Denton



It was my first visit to Hollywood, and I was fascinated by Hollywood Boulevard after dark: The souvenir shops, nude bars, lingerie boutiques, dance clubs, pickup joints, and Scientology museums, all decked out in bright white lights and red, blue, and green neon. The worn-down granite-and-brass Walk of Fame stars on the sidewalk. The occasional whiff, an actual odor, of something that had once been alive that was now in an advanced stage of decay. The throngs of tourists with their cameras and baggy shorts. The beautiful young people strutting in their precarious heels, abundant hair, and not much else, just hoping to be seen by someone, anyone, who might actually matter.

Oh, and hucksters galore. I'm talking about the dudes who'll not only ask you for money, but will follow you for a block complimenting your clothes or your wife and trying to force their homemade compact discs into your hands. I'm talking about the buskers who'll shove their hats in front of you as you try to walk by. And especially, I'm talking about the street performers dressed as movie stars who'll approach you in character, cajoling you into paying to have your photo taken with them. Marilyn Monroe, Luke Skywalker, Humphrey Bogart, and Spider-Man are all there on the Boulevard on any given night. To name but a few. Marilyn, in particular, will zero in on you just to save you from being lonely. Even if you're not.

As I said to a Los Angeles writer friend as we strolled the Boulevard on my first night there, the first Monday in September: "It's like Vegas, only less genuine."

But I should have known better than to be a smart-ass about how others live their lives. Sooner or later, that sort of thing will come back and bite you in the backside.

What happened was, I returned to the Boulevard the next night. But this time, I came alone. It was late, and I couldn't sleep, so I'd decided I might as well go take a look at the celebrity body-part prints at Grauman's Chinese Theater. My writer friend and I hadn't walked far enough west from my Hollywood-and-Vine hotel to do that on Monday. And the truth, despite my avowed disdain for contemporary celebrity culture, was that I really wanted to see Grauman's. Mainly so I could confirm the truth of what Hedley Lamarr had said about Douglas Fairbanks at the end of *Blazing Saddles*.

On the way there, as I looked down at the Hollywood Walk of Fame stars passing by, I came across a surprise — a name I knew. That was a rare occurrence on this particular stretch of the Boulevard, so I stopped and pulled my camera from my pocket while the tourists, posers, and freaks flowed around me as if I were a lump of stone in their glitzy stream.

Yes, I had a camera. This particular night I was wearing khaki jeans and a white shirt, not baggy shorts, but there was no point in trying to pretend I was one of the few middle-aged hipster locals. No, I was just a tourist like all the others. And I doubted I'd ever be back in Hollywood again, so I was taking photos of anything that struck me as interesting, weird, excessive, or perverse. I'd

been seeing a lot of the weird, excessive, and perverse... but this time, I was simply and purely interested.

You see, the name on the star at my feet was Ritchie Valens. And while his star was in pretty good shape, it had obviously been there a number of years.

"Dang, Ritchie," I said to myself as I pointed the camera downward. "You made it here before Buddy."

Ritchie Valens, of course, had died in a plane crash along with Buddy Holly and J.P. "the Big Bopper" Richardson on February 3, 1959. Now here it was September 6, 2011, and Buddy would finally be getting his own Walk of Fame star the following morning. Which was why I had pried myself out of my cozy Austin home to come to L.A. in the first place. As anyone who knows me will tell you, I'm a big Buddy Holly fan. Oh, and by the way, water is wet.

As I was trying to focus my shot, the toes of a pair of snakeskin boots appeared on my camera's LCD screen, just to the right of Ritchie's star.

"Hey, Buddy's not gonna be here," a clear, young male voice said. "He's gonna be back the way you came, over on Vine Street by Capitol Records. They're putting him next to the Beatles. I can show you, if you like."

Annoyed, I shifted my camera so the snakeskin boots were out of frame, then snapped a picture that included the toe of one of my own shoes. I would have to crop it out of the shot later.

Once I had my photo, I looked up, glanced to my right, and saw a broad-faced but handsome young Hispanic man dressed in a sharp navy-blue suit with white piping and a ruffled white shirt with no necktie. He had a sunburst Fender Stratocaster guitar at his waist, hanging from a snazzy black leather strap. The strap had the same high gloss as the young man's thick, neatly-combed hair.

He was the picture of youthful talent and exuberance. So I had to hand it to him. He had the late Mr. Valenzuela's look down pat.

"Ritchie Valens, right?" I said. "Nice job." I didn't have any cash on me for a tip or a photo, but I thought the kid at least deserved a compliment for authenticity.

He smiled. "Hey, you recognized me!"

I smiled back. "Sure. And thank you for your offer, but I already know where Buddy's star is going to be. All I meant was that you received your star first. Have a good night, now." I started westward toward Grauman's again.

But the Ritchie character came with me, matching my stride, and I grimaced. This was what I got for speaking to one of these jokers.

"Well, look at it this way," Ritchie said. "L.A. is my hometown. I was born in Pacoima. So, you know, they had to honor the native son. And it's not like they just gave it to me the moment I died. I had to wait until 1990."

I didn't say anything in reply, even though those were good points.

"Besides," Ritchie continued, "isn't it cool that Buddy'll get his star on his 75th birthday? Not a bad present, if you ask me."

I still didn't respond. Maybe if I stayed quiet, he'd get the message and leave me alone.

He moved closer to avoid colliding with a pack of young bucks in sparkly suits, and the headstock of his Strat whapped me on the elbow. It sent an electric jolt up to my right shoulder, and I flinched away, which made my left shoulder ram into a No Parking sign.

Now I was beyond annoyed. I glared at Ritchie and walked faster.

But Ritchie, still smiling, sped up as well. "You're going to Buddy's unveiling ceremony tomorrow, right?" He didn't wait for me to answer. "That's good. That means you'll get to see him."

We had reached the sidewalk in front of Grauman's Chinese, where Marilyn, Luke, Darth Vader, Bogie, and SpongeBob Squarepants, among others, were all accosting passersby with snappy, seductive patter and sporadic lightsaber battles. Meanwhile, watching it all, Spider-Man was crouched atop a garbage can chained to a lamppost.

I stopped walking and looked at Ritchie.

"Yes, I'll see Buddy's Walk of Fame star tomorrow, along with everyone else," I said. "But I don't think I'll see Buddy. You guys only come out at night."

Ritchie's eyes widened, and then he threw back his head and laughed. It was loud and chiming, and it echoed back from the tall, ornate facade of Grauman's. But no one else on the sidewalk seemed to notice.

I tried to step around him to get to the plaza in front of the theater where all the movie stars had left their marks. But at that moment Ritchie stopped laughing and swung the neck of his guitar to block my way.

"You're wrong," he said then, his voice suddenly serious. "You'll see Buddy tomorrow. You'll see him over and over again. In the flesh. I'll make you a bet on that."

I began glancing around for a police officer, but the only one I saw in the milling crowd was RoboCop.

All right, then. Maybe if I humored Ritchie, he'd bug off. "Okay," I said. "What's the bet?"

Ritchie grinned. "If I'm wrong, and you don't see Buddy, I'll play any song you want as long as it's not 'La Bamba.' And if I'm right, you promise to do two things tomorrow before midnight: One must be something new and different that you haven't done before, but that you plan to do again. And the other must be something new and different that you haven't done before, but that you'll never do again. And I'll still play any song you want as long as it's not 'La Bamba.'"

I'd been expecting him to work things around to the subject of getting his picture taken for cash. But instead, after stating the terms of the bet, he just stood there with his Strat, grinning and waiting.

"Uh... what the hell kind of bet is that?" I asked.

Ritchie shook his head. "Oh, no. Ain't nobody going to hell!" He lowered the guitar, stepped closer, and spoke into my ear before I could back away. "Let me explain. I only lived seventeen years. Seventeen! Even Buddy had five more years than I had, and J.P. had a few more than that. And you've already had, what, almost twice what

J.P. had? Three times what I had? But while each one of us did something new and different almost every day of our lives... Well, it bothers me when a man with a whole lot more time does a whole lot less with it. Especially when he's from Texas. I mean, the last two guys I knew from Texas were as fun as all get-out and adventurous as heck. So you just make me sad. I'd expect more from a Buddy Holly fan." He stepped back again. "Now, you taking the bet or not?"

This character was not giving me a happy Hollywood experience. I didn't know how he'd guessed where I was from, or why he was messing with me, but I'd had enough. Douglas Fairbanks was waiting.

"Yeah, fine," I said. "I'll take the bet."

Ritchie nodded. "Good. You can come back to the Boulevard tomorrow night to settle up." And with that, he stepped around me and headed for Spider-Man's lamppost, where Luke and Darth were chatting with Bogie and Marilyn.

I stared after him. And then, surprising myself, I yelled at him.

"Hey!" A few people on the sidewalk gave me worried glances, but most ignored me.

Ritchie stopped beside Darth Vader and looked back, his eyebrows raised. "What is it, Tex?"

"I want to know," I said. "Just what do you have against 'La Bamba'?"

Ritchie threw back his head and laughed again.

"Man, I love 'La Bamba'!" he cried. "I love it so much that I made myself learn how to sing it phonetically—because I was raised speaking English! I really didn't know much Spanish at all."

Then Ritchie reached into Darth Vader's cloak and pulled out a guitar cable. He plugged one end into the Stratocaster and the other end into the box of blinking lights on Vader's chest.

"No, I could never have anything against 'La Bamba,'" Ritchie said. "I just don't want to play the same song for you tomorrow that I'm playing for you tonight." He raised his right hand and brought it down on the guitar strings.

The Strat rang out from Darth Vader's chest, and Ritchie Valens sang:

"Para bailar La Bamba! Para bailar La Bamba, se necesita una poca de gracia! Una poca de gracia para mi, para ti! Ay arriba ay arriba! Ay, arriba arriba! Por ti sere, por ti sere -"

Ritchie jumped, swaggered, and tore it up while Marilyn, Luke, Spidey, Bogey, SpongeBob, and RoboCop danced. But Vader, having been pressed into service as an amplifier, stood stock-still. I thought he looked a little pissed-off. On the other hand, who could tell?

The music was good, and my leg muscles twitched in time. But since this Ritchie Valens lookalike had basically told me that I was wasting my life, I was a little pissed-off myself. So instead of enjoying the show, I turned my back on him and went into Grauman's plaza to look at the celebrity hand- and footprints in the concrete.



I discovered that Hedley Lamarr had been right. Douglas Fairbanks did have little feet, although Rita Hayworth took the prize in that department. That girl must have weighed twelve pounds.

About the time I reached Paul Newman and Joanne Woodward, the music behind me stopped in the middle of a chorus. And when I turned to look, only Bogey, Marilyn, Luke, Vader, SpongeBob, and SpiderCop remained by the lamppost. Ritchie Valens and Robo-Man were both gone.

The unveiling ceremony for Buddy Holly's star the next day was moving, musical, rock n' roll-royalty-studded, and pretty amazing. But I'll write more about that ceremony elsewhere.

For now, I'll just write about the crowd.

For a Walk of Fame unveiling, the crowd was huge. If there weren't at least a thousand people on the sidewalk just outside the Capitol Records building on September 7, 2011, there were enough that it felt like at least a thousand or more. It was a small space, and people were crammed together, jammed together, and slammed together.

But instead of jostling or elbowing each other, or getting cranky in the late-summer Los Angeles heat, they did something else.

They sang. They sang along with the Buddy Holly tunes that played over the loudspeakers, and during a quiet moment, they offered a heartfelt rendition of "Happy Birthday."

As I snapped photographs, I spotted at least a dozen people, male and female, who had come dressed as Buddy. They were wearing sharp stage suits and thick black-framed glasses, and a couple were carrying Stratocasters. And as the ceremony proceeded, perhaps a hundred more folks in the crowd donned Buddy glasses while they sang and clapped.

I didn't join in any of the singing, because public singing just isn't the sort of thing I do. But I leaned against a palm tree growing out of the sidewalk, shook my head, and stifled a laugh at my own expense.

Because I had just realized that I'd lost my bet.

Oh, I could argue that I hadn't seen the real Buddy Holly in the flesh, over and over again. But I knew that hadn't been the bet. And in Texas, when we lose a bet far and square, we pay up.

So that night, about 11:00 PM – after all the ceremonies, the parties, and a rocking Buddy Holly tribute concert, while still wearing my dress-up duds consisting of a snazzy gray Western-cut suit, black linen shirt, and bolo tie – I went back to Hollywood Boulevard one more time.

I looked for Ritchie at his star, but he wasn't there. So I walked on down to Grauman's Chinese Theater, and he wasn't there, either.

But Marilyn, Darth, Luke, and Spidey were. The four of them were hanging out at the same trash can and lamppost as the night before.

I went over. "Excuse me, sorry to bother you. But have y'all seen Ritchie Valens anywhere this evening?"

To steal a phrase from the late Houston comedian Bill Hicks, they all looked at me like dogs being shown a card trick.

Only Darth Vader spoke. In his deep amplified bass voice, he asked: "Is this Ritchie... a Jedi?"

I'd had a good day, but I was exhausted and in no mood. "Look," I said, forcing a smile. "I appreciate the whole not-breaking-character thing. But I owe... let's call it a debt of honor to the kid who plays Ritchie Valens. He was right here with y'all last night. Uh, Lord Vader, you even had his guitar cable here in your -"

I reached for Vader's cloak, and both he and Luke Skywalker had their lightsabers out in a flash.

"Stay away from the Dark Side," Luke said fiercely.

At which point Marilyn sidled up to me and cooed, "Would you like a photo, handsome?"

So I gave them some cash, took a photo of them clustered around the trash can (with Spidey atop it), and gave up. In Texas, we pay up when we lose a bet – but this hadn't been a real bet with a real human being anyway. I didn't know why I had bothered to show up in the first place. Maybe my brain chemistry had been psychedelically damaged by breathing California air.

I started back toward Hollywood and Vine, but after two blocks I had to pause on the crowded sidewalk to avoid being smacked in the nose by an old-fashioned wooden-and-glass door. A dozen people streamed out through the doorway while I waited, and as they did, marvelous fragrances wafted from within. Steak. Baked potato. Coffee. Apple pie. All manner of delectable vittles, their wonderful smells mingling in a warm and delicious sensory rush.

That was when I remembered that in all of the day's festivities, I hadn't eaten dinner. And here it was after 11 o'clock. So when the last of the people streaming from the restaurant were out of my way, I grabbed the door and went inside.

I crossed a small bay-window-shaped vestibule and stepped through another doorway. The huge dining room beyond was cool and dim, and a faint musty odor joined all of the enticing smells of good cooking. I had an impression of elegance and seediness living together like two old lovers. And I could hear Eddie Cochran singing "Summertime Blues" from small round speakers in the ancient smoke-stained ceiling.

A tall, narrow-faced, dark-suited man with a thin necktie stood at a podium just inside the door. He looked me up and down, look in my Western-cut suit, and gave me a polite smile.

"Welcome to Hollywood and to the Musso and Frank Grill, sir," he said, pulling a menu from a rack on one side of the podium. "Musso and Frank's is the oldest restaurant in Hollywood, and we have proudly proclaimed that distinction since the day we opened in 1919. This has been a second home to famous writers, producers, and performers for decade after decade."

I looked around at the big old semicircular booths, the scattered tables with their yellowed tablecloths, and

the massive oak bar. I could see that only three or four other customers remained in the place, but they seemed to be lingering. So I guessed Musso and Frank's would stay open long enough to feed me.

"Famous writers, you say?" I asked.

The tall man nodded. "Yes, sir. If you like, I can seat you in F. Scott Fitzgerald's favorite booth."

"Sold," I said, and followed him across the worn carpet as he threaded his way between the tables to a maroon-leather-clad booth at the back of the room. He left me there with a large, multi-page menu.

I had barely had a chance to glance at it when another man appeared at my elbow and filled my water glass from a 1950s-era Fiesta pitcher the color of an old brick. This man was dressed in a semi-crumpled uniform of black slacks, a white shirt with a bow tie, and a red jacket. He was stoop-shouldered and elderly, at least 70 years old if he was a day. But his hair was still thick and dark except for a few gray streaks, and his broad face was creased with lines that looked like the result of laughter as much as age.

"Good evening, sir," he said. "I'm Ricardo, and I'll be serving you. Have you decided?"

I was staring at him. I couldn't help it.

"You have a son who plays guitar, don't you?" I asked. Then I did a quick mental calculation. "Or a grandson?"

Ricardo grinned. His teeth still looked white and young. "Not that I know of, sir. Have you decided?"

I looked down at the huge menu. "Uh, what do you recommend?"

"This is Wednesday, sir, so I recommend the Wednesday Special, which is sauerbraten and potato pancakes. It'll be the best you've ever had."

"I'm not sure I've ever had that in my life," I said. "But I'll try it. And a beer. Any brand's fine."

Ricardo somehow managed to frown while still maintaining a smile. "Pardon me for saying so, sir, but this is the Musso and Frank Grill on Hollywood Boulevard. Among other things, we're famous for our cocktails. Mr. Fitzgerald, in whose booth you are ensconced, always had a cocktail. So although beer is traditional with your dish, you might want to consider a cocktail instead." He reached down, opened my menu to a long list of drink suggestions, and tapped it with a gnarled old finger.

I shook my head. "I'm a beer guy."

"I understand, sir," Ricardo said. Then he leaned closer and spoke into my ear. "But wouldn't you like to try something new? And different?"

A shudder ran through my shoulders. I looked at the list of cocktails and picked one at random. "Whiskey sour," I said.

Ricardo's smile grew wider. "Up, or rocks?"

I slapped the menu closed. "Oh, for the love of Davy Crockett," I said. "Surprise me."

He gave a slight bow. "As you wish, sir."

At that point, I half expected Ricardo to vanish in a puff of smoke, but instead he just walked away. Pretty

briskly, too, for an old fellow. He returned a few minutes later with a substantial lemonade-colored drink stuffed with ice and a cherry, and then a few minutes after that with a plate of gravy-soaked beef roast with potato pancakes.

Ricardo set the plate before me and gave another slight bow.

"Enjoy, sir," he said.

I looked down at the steaming sauerbraten, then closed my eyes for a second and took a deep breath. The sharp, rich smell was both familiar and strange, and irresistible. And when I opened my eyes again, Ricardo was gone.

Then, as I ate and drank, the Musso and Frank sound system played seven Buddy Holly songs in a row, no doubt in honor of Buddy's birthday and his new Walk of Fame star. I thought it was a nice gesture. And the last two were my favorites -- "Not Fade Away" and "Well All Right."

In short, it was a great meal. I ate every morsel on my plate and drained every drop in my glass. So by the time I was finished, I was pretty full and moderately drunk. But I wasn't so drunk that I didn't notice when my check was brought by the tall man from the podium instead of by Ricardo.

"I hope everything was satisfactory," the tall man said. "And I hope you'll come back and see us again." I thought about it. "You know," I said, "I think I might."

Then I glanced around the dining room. The other customers had left, and the tall man and I were alone.

"Everything was terrific," I said, holding up a credit card. "But what happened to my waiter?"

The tall man glanced toward the door. "Oh, Ricardo had to leave early. An old friend of his from Lubbock, Texas is in town. And perhaps another from, I believe, Beaumont. They're going to catch up." He took my credit card. "I'll be back in a moment."

I blinked, and the tall man handed back my card and a slip of paper to sign. My hand wobbled a bit as I did so, and I told myself it was just the whiskey sour.

Maybe it was. But as I stood to go, I heard that the song playing through the ceiling speakers, just for me, was a Ritchie Valens tune:

"Welllll... Come on, let's go, let's go, let's go, little darlin'! Tell me that you'll never leave me! Come on, come on, let's go -- again and again and again!"

If I could have picked any Ritchie Valens song to hear at that moment, "Come On, Let's Go" would have been it. So I was buzzed and happy as I stepped out onto the Boulevard once more and started on my wobbly way eastward toward my hotel.

Then, with Ritchie's music still in my ears, I stopped. Just as at Buddy's unveiling, I had realized something.

I still owed half the payment for my bet.

I looked at my watch. It was 11:57 PM.

So I spun around, almost falling over, and ran back

past Musso and Frank's, heading westward as fast as I could. I had no idea what I was going to do, but I knew I had only three minutes left to do it. And I knew where it had to be done.

When in doubt, you always pay off a bet where the bet was made.

I was running upstream against a steady flow of the cool, the not-so-cool, the beautiful, the ugly, the weird, the hip, the slick, the ragged, and the downright dorky. But as I hopped and weaved among them in my drunken, sauerbraten-laden plunge, I loved them. I loved them all. And I would have stopped to kiss every one of them on the mouth, but I was in a hurry.

As I ran past Ritchie's star, I looked down and shouted, "Well, all right! Come on! Let's GO!"

Moments later, when I reached Grauman's Chinese Theater, I hurtled past Marilyn Monroe (who gasped "Ooh!"), ricocheted off SpongeBob Squarepants, and collided with Spider-Man's trash can. Spidey wound up perched atop my shoulders for a split second, then tumbled away to land in a perfect four-point Spidey-pose on the pavement. He looked up at me and cocked his head.

There was no time to explain. My watch said 11:59.

I knew I ought to be in costume. But I was wearing a Western-cut suit and a bolo tie, so maybe that would do

for Hollywood Boulevard on a Wednesday night. I hoped so, because I sure as hell wasn't ever going to do this again.

Facing Grauman's Chinese Theater and its throng of tourists, I flung my arms wide, threw back my head, and sang as loud as I could:

"Yo no soy marinero! Yo no soy
marinero, soy capitán! Soy capitán,
soy capitán! Bamba, bamba! Bamba,
bamba! Bamba, bamba! Bamba - "

I have no doubt that I looked and sounded like a whiskey-sour-addled idiot.

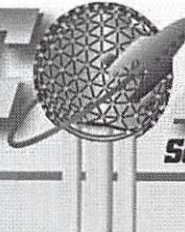
But in Texas, when we lose a bet fair and square, we pay up.

By the time I reached a second chorus, Marilyn Monroe, Humphrey Bogart, Luke Skywalker, SpongeBob Squarepants, Spider-Man, and even Darth Vader were all singing with me. And at least half the crowd had joined them.

So maybe this Buddy Holly fan finally did all right by Ritchie Valens, too - even though I had to sing "La Bamba" by remembering it phonetically. Because that's one thing this middle-aged dude from Texas and that kid from California have in common.

You see, just like Ritchie... I really don't know much Spanish at all. 🍷

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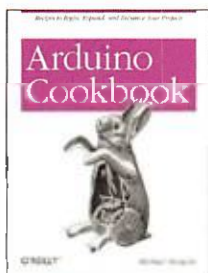
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