

TIGHTBEAM

272

MAY 2015

The Springboard of Ideas

INSIDE:

Tons of Reviews

NEW FICTION by

Jeannie Warner

Flash Fiction Contest #1

Candle, Key, Moon

TIGHTBEAM

The Springboard of Ideas

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Writers write, right?

This issue of Tightbeam is chock full of text, so much so, that we had almost no room for art. Even so, I tried to squeeze in as much as possible here and there.

This issue is dominated by a mega-sized reviews section that takes on books, comics and a few classic genre and genre-adjacent films. If you want to join in on the fun of writing reviews, the instructions are on page 13.

This month's featured work is an original work of short fiction by Jeannie Warner, who has graced this publication quite a few times with her prose.

I believe you'll find her *Not the End of the World* to be both wry, insightful, off-kilter, and thoroughly enjoyable.

New this month is the first of what I hope to be a continuing feature, a flash fiction challenge open to all. The rules are simple: incorporate three elements chosen by the readers of our Facebook page, keep it between 50 and 500 words, and the setting must be science fiction, fantasy or supernatural compatible.

This inaugural best-of entries (presented in to particular order) start on page 7. Your invite to enter the next contest is on page 11.

—*David Speakman, Editor*



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32

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"Scimitar"
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NOT THE END OF THE WORLD



The milk clumped its way out of the carton into my coffee, and I didn't need to sniff to know it had gone bad. With a sigh, I dumped the cup out into the sink and started the Keurig up to make a fresh cup. Apparently I'll be drinking it black today, which is fine for purists but it comes as a real blow to my preference for coffee-flavored milk. After a night of uneasy sleep with shadowy dreams of flames and screaming, I had really been looking forward to a proper cup of coffee.

I pulled the trashcan out from beneath the sink and opened the fridge. Sure enough, the smell inside was nasty, so I filled the can with all the fruit and leftovers that had gone off last night. I let the fridge fall closed and headed outside with the garbage bag to dump it. It was an otherwise beautiful Tuesday morning in fall, and the garbage trucks would be arriving in the next hour. A mess caught my eye, and I stopped outside

at the garbage cans to pause and look about the yard. What I saw made me sigh.

Still clad in my robe and slippers, I fetched a broom and dustpan to clean up all the little piles of small dead birds that had fallen in the night around the house under the tree and power lines. My yard waste can was now full, but that was partially due to the week's pizza boxes, included there since someone told me cardboard was compostable and my regular waste can was always full.

You're stalling, I told myself. Back in my room I flopped onto the bed and dialed up my aunt. "Hey Aunt Nikki. It's Chris."

"Hey Chris! You're up early today, what's wrong?"

"All my milk is sour," I said.

She was silent for a few seconds. Then, "I'll call you back."

"No, I'll just hold on. I have some things to do to get ready for work anyway."

"Okay."

She was gone for a few minutes, and I put my phone on speaker and mute before dropping on my bedside table. I then made my bed, sprinkled the windowsill with cinnamon for the day's battle against the latest ant invasion, and in general got myself dressed and ready for work. She returned as I was slipping my feet into shoes. "Your uncle is gone. I'm afraid..."

I grabbed up the phone and thumbed off mute. "Yeah, that's what I figured. I'm so sorry. Are you okay?"

"It was coming for a long while. I suppose I'm almost relieved. His pain is over now."

I nodded slowly. "I'm glad for that. Um...do you want to call dad?"

"Not really. Not at this hour. I'll send him a text and let him know what's going on. You don't mind not coming to the funeral?" She sounded a touch anxious.

"No, I hate funerals. It'd be weird, anyway." There was a rushing sound of wind and wings from outside.

"Look, I love you lots, but I have to go do the thing. Give Julie and Alexandra a hug from me, okay? How is the happy bride-to-be anyway?" I picked up my laptop bag and shouldered it with my free hand. "Tell her I want pictures from the secret elopement."

My aunt laughed, the sound of it strained but reluctantly amused. "The Elvis chapel promises lots of wedding pictures with the King."

"Awesome. Hey, I have to go. I'm...sorry about Uncle Bill."

"Don't worry about it, love. You've got enough challenges today. Good luck from all of us!"

"Thanks! Love you." I hung up, slipped my phone into my pack, and headed out the back door. With my backpack on one shoulder, I started wrestling the first trash can toward the curb.

He stood there in my driveway, wings spread wide and up like a vision in a stained glass window, sword in one hand. I could only look on his face for a moment. He was beautiful and terrible, just as my Uncle Bill had described. His voice was like trumpets and warm whiskey. "Anti-Christ! Unclean! Stand and prepare for battle, beast! The end of times is at hand!"

I responded as mildly as I could, trying to cover my nerves. "I don't think the end is at hand. But the trash trucks will be here soon. Do you want to give me a hand with this?" I maneuvered the trash can around where He stood, wheeling it out to the curb in front of my house.

The angel looked lost for a moment, turning to always face me. "You! You... We must fight!"

"Must we? I have two more bins. Come on. The yard waste is particularly full and nasty." I went back and deliberately picked the smaller garbage can to drag to the curb. I tilted my head meaningfully between the angel and the large green yard waste receptacle. He didn't follow my meaning or my look, apparently.

I got the second bin in line with the first, paused, and looked back at the Angel and his sword. It was a short, business-like brute of a thing. I pondered. A gladius. I think that's a gladius. I spread my empty hands slowly. "I'm unarmed. If you count the garbage can as a weapon I think I could shove it at you, but I think it would void our contract with the city to destroy it."

The sword lifted to point at my face and dropped again. "You are the Anti-Christ. I know you are - I can feel you burning under my skin. The sixth-

"Look, I know the family curse. Some Greek yahoo curses his buddy, my ancestor, and then angels show up every generation when it passes on." I grimaced at the notion as much as the residual garbage can ick on my fingers, and wiped my hands on my thighs. "Try this on. What if I don't want to fight? What if I absolutely do not want the end of times? I have a cousin getting married this coming

weekend, and I'm going to play hockey Sunday night."

"Married?" The sword's point hovered above the driveway. I relaxed fractionally inside. It was going just like my Uncle told me it had for him; stories he told me when I was a little girl. Stories his father told him, the sixth child born of each generation.

"Yup. My cousin is marrying a nice Catholic boy. The groom's mother is beside herself so they're eloping. You would not believe the guilt trips that woman keeps trying. We can't convince her it's not the end of the world." I move the final bin into position.

This isn't the end of the world." The angel gets it at last. "I will be back when it is the end of all things."

"I'll text!" I promise. But He's gone and I'm late for work. Life goes on for another generation. *

===

Jeannie Warner is a writer based in Sunnyvale, California.



N3F Fan Flash Fiction #1

Rules:

1. Between 5 and 500 words
2. Must include the following three elements: a candle, a key, the moon
3. Setting should be science fiction, supernatural, or fantasy compatible.
4. Emailed entries to Davodd@gmail.com by May 10, 2015, with "Flash Fiction" in the subject line. Only the best entries are published in Tightbeam.

Rules for N3F Fan Flash Fiction #2 are at the end of this article.

EIRLYS

by Graham & Wolf MacFadden

Eirlys sat cross-legged in the cool grass. Moonlight cast deep shadows, making doppelgangers of the trees. It glinted off the key she held – a large bronze key gone dark with age. Someone had tied a ribbon of black velvet on the key's wide bow. That ribbon had turned to tatters in the years since, until only a fragment remained. A fat white candle stood before Eirlys, its base secured in a silver holder.

Eirlys looked up. The Moon had reached its apex. Out came the matches. A single strike against the box produced a flame, and she lit the candle, then shook out the match. The stink of sulphur pierced the night air.

Under her breath she began to utter words that had not been heard for a century or more. A wind stirred.

Eirlys's heart beat faster, her voice rising, and the wind with it. The candle flickered, refused to die. The key glimmered, first catching light, then creating it: a blue-white glow illuminated Eirlys's hands and arms, her shirt, her legs. An owl called once, and fell silent. The key grew warm, then hot, turning Eirlys's palm to fire. She gritted her teeth and continued the

chant, struggling to make herself heard above the wind's cry. Her gold and brown hair came loose and flew about her face, lashing her cheeks.

Colour and definition blinked out in a flash so brilliant it hurt. Eirlys fell back into the grass, her head hitting a small stone; it would bruise later. The candle winked out.

For several moments Eirlys lay there, working on simply breathing. She felt nothing but pain, a deep and lancing ache that started in her centre and radiated out to the tips of her



extremities. When this began to ebb and her lungs drew air without protest, she sat up.

Across the fallen candle, a pair of eyes watched her.

She froze. Reflexively, her fingers closed the tighter about the key – which, she was glad to note, had cooled. If the spell had worked, she was safe. If not . . .

“Liulfr.” A bare whisper. She cleared her throat, tried again: “Liulfr.”

The creature across from her shifted. It blinked once, twice.

“Liulfr.” The third time held the charm. If the spell had worked.

A whine, the moving of lupine feet. The eyes lowered several inches. Eirlys blinked, her eyes trying to adjust; after a minute, she could just make him out: a large black wolf with a brush of white on one paw, lying serenely as you please, head up, ears alert, eyes on her.

Eirlys smiled. If she had her way, his eyes would remain on her for a long time to come. Long enough for her to get even with that bitch Anise, long enough to get rid of her con-niving aunts and her two-timing ex-girlfriend.

Long enough to do some damage. She reached out to the wolf, let

him lick her fingers.

There was a new bitch in town.

THE MOON WAS A WAXEN CANDLE

by Owen Lorion

The moon has a waxen candle, that glows all through the night.

But the wax, it wanes, and through the month, it gives a lesser light.

And so the moon must lock up tight, and leave his Stygian shore

To trundle down to earth and find an open grocery store.

He buys his candles there, enough for through the night to see

The way back to his starry home, and enter with his key.

Each month he shops a different store, his dignity impugned,

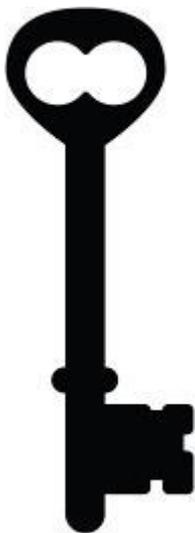
No store will let him enter twice – not after they've been mooned!

THE BEAN

by Mike Simon

Jim didn't start calling it “the bean” until after it sprouted, and that was just some impromptu marketing. It'd need some zing for people to come from miles away to see the massive black tower that ascended into the clouds. The folks had taken to calling it the beanstalk.

It was more like an elevator. Whenever someone walked in the door, the thing lit up like a candle, and then luminance from the base shot a bolt of light straight up. Almost anyone could go in, which was why



he had been guarding the damn door since last night. He smelled like it, too.

It's not like it had a key, so he couldn't lock up and go home for even a few minutes.

He wasn't even sure he could legally charge for it. It wasn't his property.

The old gas station had poisoned the ground, and the owner of the mini-mall had cordoned it off in hopes that someone would buy and clean it up.

Until then, a chain link fence was supposed to keep everyone out. Near as Jim could tell, that fence was in low earth orbit. A couple of people who'd gone in had said that they could see it floating out there, somewhere between the top of the tower and the moon.

It was hard for them to remember details through the euphoria though. That's how it got them. That's how it had gotten Jim, too. An overwhelming sense of well-being. What was it doing?

Jim had never been beckoned before, but that's the closest word he knew to what'd happened. He was scared shitless at first. He saw the bean crash a twenty foot groove into his lawn.

He planned it all out. First he'd shit his pants, maybe pee a little, then he'd run back inside and burn one til the end of the world. Maybe while staring at his ex's picture the whole time, the way he liked to do.

It didn't happen like that. The bean rolled right up to him and he stopped being afraid long enough to pick it up; then he felt fucking awesome.

Next thing, he was walking to the 7/11 like he was high. The bean throbbed while he browsed for hot pockets. It sort of...what? Told him? Suggested that he throw it over the fence? Whatever, he threw it, and then it seemed to drink up all the gas smell, and then jam itself into the sky...

Then the door opened. He felt so good about it, he walked right in. For a second, everything lit up, and then there he was: floating there in space staring at the stars. Overwhelmed. Overjoyed. Five minutes of wonder.

When he set foot back on solid ground, he wanted nothing more but to possess it. And that's when he suddenly, and irrevocably knew: He would never be able to go back in.

He'd never feel that joy again. It's what kept the owner of the mall out, too. And the mayor. And everyone else who wanted it more than they loved it.

But it didn't keep Tina out. She went in, went up, came back down, and then went again. She just smiled and giggled each time.

Sometimes she'd go with other people who came. Sometimes she went alone again.

He wanted nothing more than to feel that high with her again, and stare at her the whole time. The way

he liked to do. She just smiled at him when she came out. Sighed. Giggled a little, and then went back in. And he let her. Over and over, for free, just to hear the music in her voice.

So he picked up a busted folding chair and started charging people. It was easy. They wanted to go in so badly. The beanstalk took care of that. When she was done, he would use that money to get her back. But if she didn't, if she wouldn't take him back, he would make her want that stalk as much as he did.



TYLYN

by Graham & Wolf MacFadden

Tylyn emerged from the cleansing cycle freshly buffed, exfoliated, and heat-dried. Moonlight slipped into his cabin: Extisis IV, smallest but brightest of Ilengyn's satellites. Low lighting accentuated the curves of the room's furnishings, and while Tylyn found the effect pleasant, he needed an open flame for the ritual. To that end,

he withdrew a candle and lighter from the cupboard, lit the former, and placed the latter back on the shelf. He took the candle to the bedside table, turned out the last of the electric lights, and settled comfortably on the edge of the bed.

"Music," he intoned. "Meditation Sequence Three." Soft bells began chiming, accompanied here and there by strings. When the sound of rain entered the sequence, Tylyn closed his eyes and focused on his breathing: in, out, in, out, as transient as time.

Thoughts came to mind. Tylyn let them drift past, acknowledging them but not dwelling on them. Some returned; others went into the aether and stayed there.

He knew the vision for what it was the instant it arrived. Brighter and clearer than his normal thoughts, it was also in black and white: the image of a card, its corners rounded, strange writing on its surface. It had a broad grey line down its length.

An electronic key. Not all the species used such – certainly not his own kind, who preferred peering into a retina scanner, and not the gahlen, who opened their doors with a drop of blood. Of those who used electronic keys, there were none whose script matched that of the card in the vision.

A new species, perhaps? Tylyn focused harder on the vision, hoping to catch some small detail which would

illuminate matters; but no: the vision blurred, and he mentally withdrew his scrutiny. He should know by now that force was a hindrance, not an aid, to visions.

He allowed himself to relax, and focused once again on his breathing. In, out, in, out.

The vision resurfaced. The key became clear, and he saw now that a hand held it, a hand with five fingers (rather than his own six) and white skin. At least, the skin appeared white in the colourless aspect of the vision. Tylyn knew of no creature with white skin (or five fingers, for that matter), so it must indeed be a new

species.

He could glean no further information, it seemed. Reluctantly, Tylyn withdrew his focus, sat a moment simply being, and opened his eyes.

Then it struck him, a cold dread so real it made the fur on the top of his head stand up. He couldn't shake it; he sat shivering in the candlelight, certain the feeling had something to do with his vision.

And of another thing he was now certain: whatever and whoever this new species was, it meant one thing for him.

Trouble. *

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Join the fun:

N3F Fan Flash Fiction #2

N3F Fan Flash Fiction #2 - Do you have what it takes?

The elements were chosen by Tightbeam readers on the N3F Facebook Page: [facebook.com/groups/n3flist](https://www.facebook.com/groups/n3flist) - where voting for contest #3 (October 2015) is underway now. Feel free to join in on the vote and suggest your own ideas.

Rules:

- 1. Between 5 and 500 words***
- 2. Must include the following three elements: time travel, a curse, crippling phobia***
- 3. Setting should be science fiction, supernatural, or fantasy compatible.***
- 4. Emailed entries to Davodd@gmail.com by July 15 2015, at 11:59 p.m. Pacific Time, with "Flash Fiction" in the subject line. Only the best entries are published in Tightbeam. All submissions will be posted on the N3F.org website.***

2015 N3F Amateur Short Story

Contest Rules & Entry Form

1. This contest is open to all amateur writers in the field, regardless of whether they're members of the National Fantasy Fan Federation. For the purposes of this contest, we define an amateur as someone who has sold no more than two (2) stories to professional science fiction or fantasy publications.
2. Stories entered in the contest must be original, unpublished, not longer than 8,500 words in length—and must be related to the science fiction, fantasy, or similar genres in the opinion of the judge.
3. Send all manuscripts to the contest manager: Jefferson Swycaffer, P. O. Box 15373, San Diego, CA 92175-5373; abontides@gmail.com. Emails with the story attached in word format are preferred. Paper manuscripts are acceptable. All entries must be received or postmarked no later than Dec. 31, 2015.
4. Manuscripts on paper should be typed, single sided on 8 1/2"-by-11" white paper, double spaced, with pages numbered. The name of the author should not appear anywhere on the manuscript to ensure impartial judging. Photocopies are acceptable, if they are of good quality. Computer printouts must be legible.
5. Email entries will be accepted. Send to Jefferson P. Swycaffer at abontides@gmail.com. No guarantee can be made of email receipt. Privacy and property rights will be absolutely respected. No one other than the Short Story Judge will ever see the submission. The name of the author should not appear anywhere in the manuscript to ensure impartial judging.
6. Contestants can enter up to three stories. Enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE) if you would like your story returned at the end of the contest. Stories will not be returned without an SASE. Do not send your only copy in case of accidental loss. We are not responsible for lost manuscripts.
7. There are no entry fees.
8. Cash prizes totaling \$100 will be awarded as follows: First prize is \$50, second \$30, and third \$20. Honorable mentions and semi-finalists will receive a certificate of award.
9. The Short Story Judge is a published science fiction professional, and also a loving fan of the sf and fantasy genres. All comments and critiques are solely the Short Story Judge's opinion, but he promises to be constructive and polite.
10. The NSF may want to publish an electronic book including top entries from one or more years of publication. You will not be contacted about this until after the contest is over and prizes have been awarded. If we want to publish your story, you will have to sign over to us first world serial rights. Your willingness to do sign over rights cannot affect whether or not you win the contest. Royalties will be divided evenly between all contest entrants once publishing costs are covered. Winners will be notified as soon as the judging is completed. Announcements and notifications of winning entries will be made in March 2016. Please take your time and submit your best work. You can resubmit stories previously entered. All entries will be kept confidential and will be judged fairly and anonymously. The deadline for all entries is Dec. 31, 2015. Good luck!

(Detach or photocopy. Must accompany all entries.)

TB 272

Mail to:

Jefferson Swycaffer, P. O. Box 15373, San Diego, CA 92175-5373 or email **abontides@gmail.com**

Title of story (for identification): _____

Author's name and address: _____

Author's email address: _____

I have read the above rules for the 2013 N3F Amateur Short Story Contest, and I agree to them.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

RE: The Review Section

Editor: Heath Row (HR).

Contributors: Owen K. Lorion (OL); Steven Rose, Jr. (SR); Heath Row (HR); and R-Lauraine Tutihasi (RLT).

Books

8G, by Debbie Kump (World Castle Publishing, 2013)

This is a sequel to *7G*, which I previously reviewed in *Tightbeam* #268 (November 2013). In this book we discover that the disaster depicted in *7G* was not quite universal.

Small groups of people survived; this book tells their stories. Personally, I found the book less compelling than the previous one. Several groups of people are followed, so there is no central focus. However, it is definitely worth reading if you've read the original book.

(RLT)

The Age Atomic, by Adam Christopher (Angry Robot, 2013)

For almost 30 years, science fiction literature has seen the rise of punk. It started with cyberpunk in the mid-1980s, which resulted in steampunk in the latter part of the decade, and then many lesser-known punk subgenres such as splatterpunk (which is more of a horror subgenre), biopunk, dieselpunk,

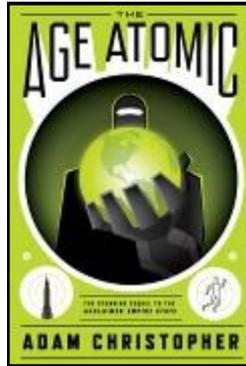
and atompunk. While cyberpunk speculates a cyberculture of the future, steam-, bio-, diesel- and atompunk speculate culture and society through alternative histories and time streams. They re-imagine certain periods in history using elements of today's society, science, and technology. They also speculate retro futures, and so imagine futures that are more directly derived from particular eras.

Steampunk does this with 19th century Victorian society, dieselpunk with society of the 1910s through the '40s, and atompunk with mid-1940s to mid-1960s society (though it can be debated that it covers a longer period). While steampunk imagines history with today's computer technology powered by steam as opposed to electricity, silicon, or transistors, dieselpunk does this with early 20th century industrial motorized technology and atompunk with atomic science and cold war politics. Atompunk re-imagines history with robots, mad scientists, and ray guns along with today's speculation of parallel universes, alternative histories, and even the Internet and social media to a degree. It also involves many of today's social issues at a suggestive or superimposed level. British author Adam Christopher's novel, *The Age Atomic*, utilizes many of those elements well, even though its quality of writing isn't the best.



The Age Atomic is a sequel to Christopher's *Empire State*, which I haven't read but wouldn't mind doing so. My reason for reading *Age Atomic* first is because it takes place in the 1950s, while *Empire State* is set in the '40s; *Age Atomic* is more reminiscent of the atomic sf drive-in movie culture that I love. But because *Age Atomic* was so good as far as story goes and because it is a result of the previous novel, I would be willing to read *Empire State* and learn more the background story for *Age Atomic*.

Although *Age Atomic* starts with a brief scene in the late '40s, it speeds up to 1954 and introduces Rad Bradley, a detective who is on an assignment investigating a mysterious scientist called "The King of 125th Avenue." At this point, we are in a New York City of a parallel universe in which that city's name is the Empire State. There has been an over-freeze of the city which was caused by the closing of the portal (called the "Fissure") between that universe and our own. The over-freeze adds to the novel's apocalyptic theme along with an oncoming armageddon. The freeze also suggests today's concern with climate change and global warming. The armageddon is a war between the King's army of robots he creates from real people and those of a leader in the New York of our own universe: Evelyn McHale of the radical organization, Atoms for



Peace (don't let the last word in this name fool you!) The twist here isn't only that McHale is a feminist character that breaks 1950s status quo, but also that she is the ghost of a young woman who committed suicide by jumping off the Empire State Building. Rad discovers that a fellow detective, Jennifer Jones, is looking for her missing brother suspected of having been abducted by the King. The two eventually

meet up with Captain Carson who had also been missing and last seen piloting his airship, who in turn meets up with his double of our own dimension's New York, Captain Nimrod. Those four—with many other characters—team up to put a stop to the oncoming robotic war that threatens to destroy all human existence in both dimensions.

Elements of film noir, 1950s science fiction, today's science fiction involving parallel universes and alternative histories, and even certain modern computer tech terms make *Age Atomic* the atompunk story that it is. Even the New York of our own universe, referred to as the "Origin" in this novel and also as a template for the Empire State (the "Pocket"), is an alternative history within itself by the very nature of the plot: the doorway between the Origin dimension and the Pocket dimension which, needless to say, recreates history.

The other alternative history is the New York of the Pocket (the

Empire State) described as “an imperfect duplicate of New York”, hence the term “template” applied to the New York of our own universe and suggesting today’s software technology. Other suggestions of today’s computer technology are ones referring to internet and social media. An example of this is a scene where two of the King’s robots, referred to as “Ratings . . . chattered excitedly, their shared words piling over each other. . . .” Terms such as “ratings,” “chattered,” and “shared” suggest Net and social media concepts such as rating tools on websites, chat boxes, and the sharing of posts. Similar to what steampunk does with Victorian society and technology, *Age Atomic is an intelligent example of what atompunk does with the cold war era’s society and technology to criticize our own internet/social media era.*

Besides the superimposing of the two periods’ technologies, there’s also the superimposing of their social issues. A disaster scene in which an airship crashes into a sky rise suggests our own 21st century’s 9-11. Similarly, the 1950s communist scare, especially through the threat of Atoms for Peace, compares with the concerns of today’s homeland security act which grew from 9-11 and the War on Terrorism. Returning to the novel’s analogies of internet technology, the politics over control of the Fissure—a connection between universes like internet is a connection between computers—compares with today’s battle be-

tween net neutrality and corporate net control.

While the characters in *Age Atomic* tend to be somewhat typical, this is probably intentional to fit the novel’s pulp fiction nostalgia. The novel reads like a detective noir as well as an sf horror tale and even an epic sf adventure movie serial of the 1940s. Rad is the main detective who investigates a robot war scheme and searches for a missing person in connection with it. He is depicted as film noir’s and pulp fiction’s detectives are: a private eye type with his own office and agency. Along with this, the story contains themes of film noir’s interplay of darks and lights but also of gothic horror, which is a genre that merged with science fiction elements in horror films of the 1930s and ‘40s. These elements can be found in the book’s mad scientist laboratory scenes. Rad’s young friend, Kane Fortuna, is a comic book super-hero type character—he wears a rocket-propelled uniform consisting of a helmet mask and cape. Jennifer is depicted as a film noir/pulp female character in that she is in the victimized position at times, a damsel in distress, but she is also a stronger feminist type: she carries a gun like Rad, but a high-tech one that wards off the robots. Also, as indicated earlier, she is a professional investigator like Rad.

Christopher’s writing style is done well in that it goes with the theme of pulp nostalgia and so is more straight forward than interpretive. However, aside from a clever

plot, the writing quality needs improvement. There is wordiness in some parts. There are some grammatical and mechanical errors which may be simply due to misprints and/or typos. Although these aren't constant, there are a lot considering most other novels written by well-known authors such as Orson Scott Card, Harlan Ellison, Ursula Le Guin, and William Gibson.

What's most noticeable is the epilogues. That's right, there appear to be two of them at the end of the book, which is very rare for a novel of any sort, and it is not indicated that the second one is an alternative ending and so that can confuse a reader a bit. Either this was a heading misprint due to poor editing (as in final proof reading) or it was intentional since the ending switches between the two dimensions and so an epilogue was needed for each dimension's ending scene. But couldn't Christopher simply put both these scenes in one epilogue and just divide it into two parts?

A couple chapters before the first epilogue, the resolution to the mystery, even though it makes sense and concludes the story well, is done in too speechy a manner and seems a bit rushed. This is done through one character, Nimrod, who explains answers to the questions that the story poses earlier. However, both the final chapters and two epilogues bring a satisfactory ending even if it is a somewhat dark and ironic one that leaves the novel open for another sequel.

While the writing quality of Ad-

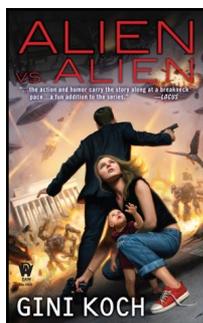
am Christopher's *Age Atomic* can be better, the conventions of atompunk that consist of elements of our own time and that of the atomic era's are used cleverly to tell a great story. In doing this, Christopher reflects our own era's problems while showing a desire for a more innocent, more simple age and how it dealt with its own social and political fears. He brings back elements of a past speculative culture while yet relating them to our own time which is what alternative history subgenres such as steampunk, dieselpunk and, of course, atompunk do. Those criticize science and technology's impact on society, science and technology that hasn't occurred yet such as mass robot wars and discovering doorways to other universes. That criticism should be the minimum that all good science fiction does, regardless of subgenre. (SR)

Alien vs. Alien, by Gini Koch
(DAW, 2012)

I've read two other books in the series of *Alien* novels written by this author. That I keep reading is a testimonial to the entertainment value of the books. These are

not deeply philosophical works but are great light entertainment with an equal mix of mystery, adventure, and humour.

In this book Jeff and Kitty Katt-Martini and the rest of the Ameri-



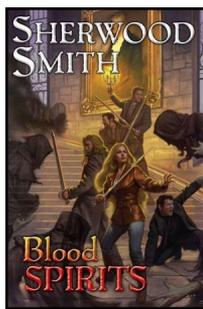
can Centaurion Diplomatic Corps become involved in intrigue when they try to pass some routine security exams. It turns out the security questions have been tampered with. The question is by whom and why. There are also some doctored photos sent to key Washington personnel, and no one knows the source. The diplomatic corps are all on high alert. As the climax approaches, key personnel fall off the radar. An alien invasion is expected, but the details are anyone's guess.

An excellent light read. (RLT)

***Blood Spirits*, by Sherwood Smith (DAW, 2011)**

I met Sherwood Smith a number of years ago at conventions, but this is the first of her works that I've read. I've apparently come into the middle of the Dobrenica series, but that did not keep me from enjoying the book. Dobrenica is the name of the mythical country in Europe where most of the action takes place. Other than that and the fantasy elements, the book takes place in contemporary times. The protagonist, Kim, is almost as unfamiliar with Dobrenica as the readers; so we learn the country's peculiar traditions along with her.

Years ago, her grandmother had left Dobrenica for reasons that are eventually disclosed in the book. She had not bothered to in-

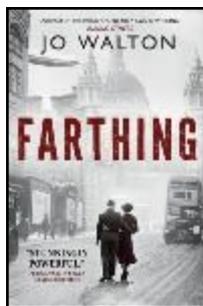


form all the members of her family about her background. Kim had been to Dobrenica in the first book of the series, but there are still many things she doesn't know about the country and her family.

The book is basically a mystery with fantasy trappings. The characters are very easy to identify with, and the action moves along apace. I found it enjoyable. (RLT)

***Farthing*, by Jo Walton (Tor, 2013)**

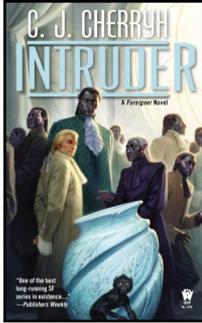
This reprint of the novel by the award-winning author of *Among Others* is quite different than Walton's earlier book. The only similarity between the two is that they are both fantasies. This book is set in an alternate world in which the British come to an agreement with Adolf Hitler and Charles Lindbergh is the president of the United States. That is enough to send shivers up and down my spine. The book starts out innocuously enough. The Farthing Set, a powerful coalition in Britain, are having a party for friends and family. One of the daughters, Lucy, has married a Jew. When they receive their invitation, the couple is afraid they won't fit in with the others, but they attend because it is a family thing. Unfortunately, there is a murder during the weekend. An inspector from Scotland Yard comes to head the investigation. *He is thorough and unbiased. As the investigation continues, things*



become murky and uncertain. I'll say no more to avoid spoiling the story—which is excellently written and reveals the depravity of the human race. (RLT)

Intruder, by C. J. Cherryh (DAW, 2013)

This novel is the first book in the fifth trilogy—the 13th book—in the Foreigner series. Regardless, it can be enjoyed as a stand-alone book. I have not read any of the other books in the series. The main character is a Terran representative living on the planet of the atevi, who are dark-skinned humanoids. Their culture is very different from that of the Terrans, and that is the main basis of the plot. Bren Cameron has developed relationships with many of the natives. I found the atevi culture to be somewhat reminiscent of Japanese culture, with which I am somewhat familiar. On the other hand, the atevi are not homogeneous. There are many factions. Cherryh's writing style is a bit dense, but the effort to read the book is well worthwhile. (RLT)



Jack Cloudie, by Stephen Hunt (HarperCollins, 2011)

Magebane, by Lee Arthur Chane (DAW, 2011)

Vamparazzi, by Laura Resnick (DAW, 2011)

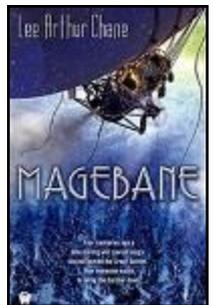
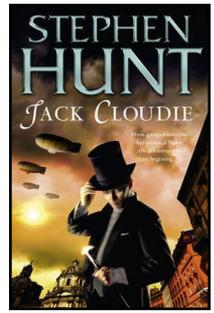
I've been sent several books to

read and review, and I'm going to cover three of them together here. The reason I'm doing so is that individually, I don't have much to say about them.

They were good enough that I read them all cover to cover, but none of them really impressed me that much. Certainly better than anything I could write, but that's faint praise. As time passers and time wasters, they were all good, but none were outstanding. If you have a craving for steampunk-fantasy (Jack and Mage) or urban fantasy (Vamp), you might well like them better than I did.

A brief synopsis of Jack and Mage: A young reformed thief from a Victorian society travels with his mentor(s) by a newly-developed inflated aircraft across a barrier to a foreign country where magic of some sort is practiced. He pairs up with a youth in the magic land, and they get involved in palace intrigue, prevent an evil minister from taking over the country and declaring war against the Victorian land, and eventually return home. There's a lot more to them than that, several hundred readable pages worth, but that sums them both up.

Jack is the fifth book in its milieu, but as far as I can tell has no



other connection to the other four.

Vamp, on the other hand, is the fourth book in a series, and while it stands alone, there are enough allusions to events from the previous books that I was very aware that the cast had more history together than I saw in this tale.

The story: The heroine is an actress, doing a play about vampires. The lead actor might be an actual vampire. A real vampire is stalking the city. Vampire groupies complicate matters. A centuries-old vampire hunters cult gets involved. Her boyfriend might be a werewolf. All mixed together in a fair-to-middling murder mystery. Add in the events carried over from the previous volumes, and suspension of disbelief was occasionally difficult. Still, a readable book, if not much to write home—or for a zine—about. (OL)

Shadows of the New Sun: Stories in Honor of Gene Wolfe, edited by J. E. Mooney and Bill Fawcett (Tor, 2013)

This anthology in honor of Gene Wolfe also includes two stories by the honoree, which begin and end the book. Altogether, there are 19 stories. They vary from fair to excellent, and



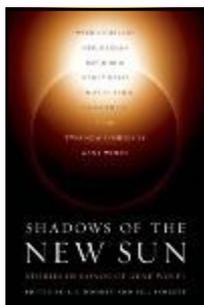
which a reader prefers probably depends in part on the taste of the reader. I tried to judge the stories based on their similarity to Wolfe's own writing, of which I am quite a fan. The two stories that impressed me most were "The Sea of Memory" by Wolfe himself and "Tunes from Limbo, but I Digress" by Judi Rohrig, a writer I've never read before. They seemed to be most reminiscent of the New Sun books. Wolfe has written in various styles, and it might be that some of the writers were emulating those stories. I won't list all the stories, but others I found to be outstanding included "Ashes" by Steven Savile, another writer new to me; "Rhubarb and Beets" by Todd McCaffrey; and "The Dreams of the Sea" by Jody Lynn Nye. The book will definitely appeal to readers who enjoy Wolfe's works. (RLT)

Throne of the Crescent Moon, by Saladin Ahmed (DAW, 2013)

This is book one of The Crescent Moon Kingdoms series. The second and third books in the series are still in the works. The second book is almost done according to the author's blog.

This first book definitely reads like a standalone book, though, so I wouldn't worry about not being able to read the others yet.

This is a book of fantasy that takes more after the One Thousand and One Nights than other works of



fantasy that I've read. I've read a substantial part of the classic work. This novel doesn't share the overly flowery style of the Burton translation. Unfortunately I don't read any Arabic. This is a long way of saying that this novel is as readable as any other.

Other than the Middle Eastern style trappings, this novel could be described as a group of do-gooders trying to defeat some very ancient evil beings. There are many ups and downs. At the end of the novel, they seem to have succeeded. However, I would be glad to read future volumes. The fact that sequels are planned probably means there are other evil beings out there. (RLT)

Transformed, by Debbie Kump
(World Castle Publishing, 2011)

Debbie Kump has written several books for young adult readers.

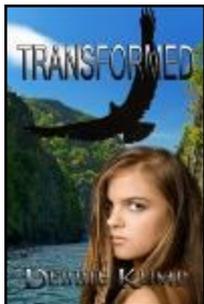
This one is about a girl named Jessica who wakes up one morning in the shape of a hawk.

Shades of Franz Kafka! Not that bad, actually. For one thing, she can still talk. It takes

her most of the day to learn how to manoeuvre around with wings and talons instead of arms and legs.

Think about dogs slip sliding around on smooth floors but much worse. Then, of course, she's worried what her mother would think.

It turns out not to be as bad as she imagines. She was born into a



family of changelings, but her mother had thought Jessica was too old to transform. The biggest problem is that Jessica can't seem to change back. Her mother calls for help, and another changeling comes to take her to a training island in the middle of the ocean. Since Jessica can't change back, she has to fly all the way. She learns to feed on fish, since it takes more than a day to make the trip. On the island there are a number of people like her who change into various animals. The only difference is that they can control when they change. It takes her longer than she expected to learn this control. When she finally masters it, the other people on the island want her to stay; but she wanted to return home. There are challenges to be faced.

This is an exciting growing up story of a different kind. The ending leaves things open for possible sequels. (RLT)

Comic Books

The following reviews previously appeared in a slightly different form in Dollar Box Dilettant, an apazine published for the comic book apa Kapa-Alpha.

The Amazing Spider-Man #1
(Marvel, June 2014)

I knew it! I knew Peter Parker would return! Not that anyone was thinking otherwise, I'm sure, but I've been pleased with how the whole Doc Ock thing turned out. Not only was *The Superior Spider-*

Man much, much better than it could have been, but *The Superior Foes of Spider-Man* also shows promise (I've yet to read it but have picked up the first collection). Regardless, it's good indeed to have Peter Parker back. This first issue of the new series, however, is practically a throwaway. It's impressive in its page count



(and cover price), but most of it is ho-hum sideline stuff rather than meat and potatoes. There are some promising bits: Anna Maria Marconi, the escape of Black Cat (a favorite since her first appearance), and the Peter David Spider-Man 2099 piece. But otherwise, it's goofy, cartoony stuff that might be fun for some but doesn't seem to really matter. We shall see how the new series proceeds!

The Amazing Spider-Man #2 (Marvel, July 2014): Thankfully, #2 is meat and potatoes. This new phase of the Parker-Marconi relationship could be interesting, the disgruntled Electro is awesome, Spidey's return to the Avengers is awesome, and this is a great follow-up to a thick but lackluster first issue. I do have a question, though. What is the appeal of Humberto Ramos's artwork? He seems popular given that he's been on the book on and off since 2010, but his work just doesn't speak to me. It feels overly cartoony and not too heroic. But maybe it's just not my

style. (HR)

Captain America #1 (Marvel, January 2013)

Not new per se, but new to me, and sitting on my reading pile since it came out. I honestly don't know why it took me so long to pick this up. John Romita, Jr., is a long-time favorite artist of mine, and this book's artwork, while a little too



clean, is excellent. But it's Rick Remender's story that makes this series so wonderful. After a flashback to Steve Rogers's childhood, a rescue, and a meeting with a S.H.I.E.L.D. liaison, Cap is thrown into... Dimension Z and the clutches of Arnim Zola. Soon, Cap is out of Zola's grip and in the alien wilderness with a rescued child.

Captain America #2 (Marvel, February 2013): A year passes, and Cap grows a beard—making him look a little bit like Thor, now that you mention it. After another flashback, there's an encounter with some mutated monsters in the wastelands, as well as a struggle against the hostile environment itself, before another unfortunate capture.

Captain America #3 (Marvel, March 2013): Turns out that the Phrox, the group that captured Cap and the rescued child Ian, whom he's effectively adopted as his son, don't like Zola either, and they join forces for awhile. The Zola flash-

back is interesting, but the Rogers flashback—six pages this time—is even better. And the ending to the issue is quite a cliffhanger.

Captain America #4

(Marvel, April 2013): 11 more years pass, and Cap's still trapped in Dimension Z, surviving the hostile environment with his sidekick—ahem, son—Ian. There's a seven-page Rogers flashback in this issue, and Ian is reunited with his "true" father, the Zola essence embedded in Cap's chest. The series continues to explore individual choices to be good or less than good, the impact of parents and role models, and other themes.

Captain America #5 (Marvel, May 2013): Cap and Ian continue to fight for survival among the mutants, finally meeting Ian's older sister. Zola returns to reclaim his son, and Cap decides to fight for him himself, asserting himself as Ian's father. There isn't a single flashback in this issue, suggesting that the weighing of choices and options is over—and that the only course of action is in the present. These first five issues have been collected in the book *Captain America, Vol. 1: Castaway in Dimension Z, Book 1*.

Captain America #6 (Marvel, June 2013): Siblings discuss the role of goodness in the fight for survival. Cap returns to reclaim Ian. There is a three-panel flashback in this issue that considers the question, "What madness inspires a man to hold power and not use it?" Later in the issue, that very power is, in fact, used.

Captain America #7 (Marvel, July 2013): This is the last issue in the run that has sat in my reading pile for far too long. It's a doozy. People have a change of heart, Zolandia turns out to be a battle station, and Ian turns on Cap like some sort of Damian Wayne wannabe. I think I'll have to pick up *Captain America, Vol. 2: Castaway in Dimension Z, Book 2*, which collects #6-10 of this series, for the end of the storyline. It's the best Captain America book I've read in quite awhile. (HR)

Elfquest: The Final Quest #1

(Dark Horse, January 2014)

I remember being disappointed by the *Elfquest*:

Wavedancers mini-series in the early 1990s and haven't given much thought to the work of Wendy and Richard Pini—other than the occasional nostalgic "Where are they now?" musing—



since then, but I was thrilled to see this on the stands. They're still making comics! This first issue feels like a rather abrupt plunge back into their world, which might be somewhat daunting for newcomers, but if you like *Elfquest* in general, chances are you'll like this. It'll certainly inspire me to dig out my collections of the original series to remind myself of the back story. Kudos to the Pinis for including a letter column from the get go.

Elfquest: The Final Quest #3

(Dark Horse, May 2014): Somehow, I missed #2. I've ordered it from one of my local shops, Dream World, but I couldn't wait for it to come in before reading this third issue. Given that I've missed an issue, I still feel like a fish out of water returning to the storyline, and I can't really tell how this is developing yet. I'll have a better sense once I've read all three. Regardless, this is interesting enough to pick up the next issue—rather than wait for the perhaps inevitable collection. Welcome back to the stands, you two.

Elfquest: The Final Quest #4

(Dark Horse, July 2014): Human leader Angrif Djun demonstrates his black powder pistol to Ember in a most graphic fashion, dispatching the erstwhile time traveler Ardan Djarum. Pursued by Rathol, Teir takes a fall, prompting Ember to interrupt the process of recognition and call for assistance. 20 pages of story, a two-page lettercol, and a six-page preview of The Complete Elfquest Volume 1.

Elfquest: The Final Quest #5

(Dark Horse, September 2014): While I continue to enjoy this series and Elfquest generally, I'm a little put off by the coloring and computer graphics effects used in this new title. Yes, we have more modern production technologies available, but what I remember and appreciate most about the Pinis's earlier work was the strong character design and story—I'd have to check my back issues whether the comic was even colored. (The Complete Elfquest Volume 1 is certainly not!)

This issue, as busy as it is, is still worth reading. Ember, bound, sends for help to save Teir from drowning, causing Teir to be reunited—in a way—with his mother. The tribemates mobilized by Ember rescue her from her human tormentors. Reunited, familial relationships are realized, the process of recognition is forestalled, and the group continues upward in search of the safe place built by humans. 20 pages of story, a two-page lettercol, and a six-page preview of Elfquest Gallery Edition. (HR)

Elfquest: The Final Quest #2

(Dark Horse, March 2014)

Now we're talking. Having filled in the gap mentioned above, this new series from Wendy and Richard Pini is reading a little more rationally. Targeting the human leader, Angrif, and the invaders' catapults, the tribe leads an incursion with elfin warrior Krim and aging human hunter Lehrigen at the lead. After reaching their goal, the two fall, Krim and Lehrigen sharing a brief moment of appreciation. Teir and Ember *recognize each other*, *Mender dispatches Lodok and his personal guard*, and *Ember is captured*. 20 pages of story, a two-page lettercol, and a four-page behind-the-scenes look at script, pencils, inks, and colors. (HR)

Grendel Vs. The Shadow #1

(Dark Horse, September 2014)

Can it be true that the last time Matt Wagner's comic saw print in serial form was seven years ago in the 2007 *Grendel: Behold the Dev-*

//? Too long in between, good sir. Wagner remains in my mind one of comics great artisans—joining Scott McCloud, Dave Sim, and Jeff Smith—and I was a little surprised to



hear that Pulp Fiction only ordered enough of this book for pull boxes. Grendel is a comic for the ages. A comic of the future. I can only hope that, just as Grendel has gone through different incarnations, when Wagner is done, others pick up the torch. Grendel is immortal.

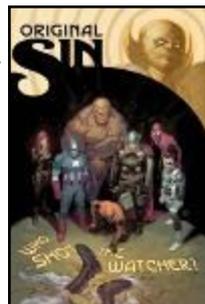
So, apparently, is the Shadow. Bearing the Dynamite imprint logo but not sharing publication credit, this comic piggybacks on the current Shadow license holder. Interestingly, the modern-day pages in the story are printed in black and white (and red), while the time-traveling portion is in full color. A nice about face! Opening a sacred burial urn procured from treasure hunters, Hunter Rose is catapulted into the past, the early '30s.

There, he takes advantage of organized crime in New York City, targeting weaker crime families, and attracting the attention of the Shadow. One of the most interesting aspects of the comic, however, is the character Sofia Valenti, 23 years old, the daughter of Don Carlo, and a potential paramour for Rose. Grendel is Grendel, and Wagner does the Shadow justice by way of Howard Chaykin. Thank you! 48 pages of story. (I had to

buy #2 on eBay; that's how understocked this comic was in my area. For shame, store owners!) (HR)

Original Sin #1 (Marvel, July 2014)

I'm trying to buy very few, if not no new comics these days, choosing instead to scour the dollar boxes for whatever Bronze Age gems and independent oddities I can find. There are a few exceptions; the new Original Sin event book is one. While I'm totally ignoring the crossover books—unlike I did with Infinity, which predated my newfound focus on dollar boxes—I am fascinated by the main miniseries, which is expected to run eight issues. My first exposure to The Watcher might have been in the first series of What If, although my 42nd edition of the Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide doesn't indicate such appearances (I haven't checked whether those survived in my collection—there appear to have been a couple of ill-planned purges over the years as I assess the state of my short boxes today). So I'm concerned about the events that are unfolding so far. The Watcher's passing is something that should not have happened—unthinkable, even—but it bodes well as a mystery yarn. The crime inspires the return of a long-time favorite whom I've missed in recent years, and Mike Deodata's spread featuring



the corpse reminds me of the Mr. Fantastic's burying of Galactus's corpse. Big stuff! Sentient Mindless Ones are a sad, sad thing. All in all, a solid kick-off for an intriguing storyline. I'm not familiar with the writing of Jason Aaron. If he can handle this scale consistently, he might be someone to follow, similar to Jonathan Hickman.

Original Sin #2 (Marvel, July 2014): And a solid second issue! Shorter this time around, but still full of intriguing possibilities and combinations. A subterranean graveyard for monsters, Nick Fury and Betty, Dr. Strange and the Punisher (oddest pairing in quite some time?) "far beyond the realms of man," more and more and more Mindless Ones, and a somewhat—but somehow just shy of—goofy reveal of who the Watcher's killer is. I feel like Dr. Strange is getting positioned for a return of some sort; it wouldn't be a bad thing for him to have his own book again.

Original Sin #3 (Marvel, August 2014) Mr. Orb releases the secrets of the eye of the Watcher, unleashing (as you might imagine) all sorts of mayhem. The Punisher and Dr. Strange (Hello, movie in 2016!) continue to investigate inter-planar assassinations. Nick Fury, with the eye and Mr. Orb in custody, waits for the Avengers to arrive. They soon find the corpse of Ego, the Living Planet. (Holy crow, true believers.) 22 pages of story, six pages of advertisements, 17 pages of house ads.

Original Sin #4 (Marvel, August 2014): Nick Fury headless—

thanks to Bucky!—folks jockey for possession of the Watcher's eye and Mr. Orb. 20 pages of story, four and a half pages of advertisements, four and a half pages of house ads.

Original Sin #5 (September 2014): After all these years, is this the first time Nick Fury's origin story has been told, or is this all retcon and reboot? Frankly—while I do want the oldtimers to tell me what Fury-related back issues to buy—I don't really care: This idea for the purpose of Fury and SHIELD is amazing. 20 pages of story, four pages of advertisements, 13 pages of house ads.

Original Sin #6 (September 2014): Mr. Midas, perhaps the architect of all this, starts to crack up (Ben Grimm-style, anyone?). Fury and his clones protect the world, Mr. Orb is interrogated, and another eye appears. 20 pages of story, five pages of advertisements, four pages of house ads.

Original Sin #7 (October 2014): Heroes continue to mistake Fury for the villain, the true killer of the Watcher is revealed, Thor drops his hammer, and more watchers arrive. 20 pages of story, five pages of advertisements, four pages of house ads. (HR)

Movies

Demolition Man

When I learned about the 2012 *Judge Dredd* movie directed by Pete Travis, *Dredd*, I commented on Facebook that I needed to return to the 1995 film *Judge Dredd*.

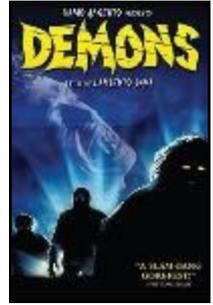


Todd Allen quickly commented that this 1993 movie is a better Judge Dredd flick than Judge Dredd. Also starring Sylvester Stallone, it's not explicitly based on Dredd, but there are similarities.

Opening in a darkly violent 1996 Los Angeles, the movie pits Stallone's law enforcer John Spartan against a criminal hooligan played by Wesley Snipes, Simon Phoenix. Sentenced to a cryogenic prison, the two are revived in a pacifist, crime-free 2032, one to wreak criminal havoc, the other to track him down. ("We're police officers! We're not trained to handle this kind of violence!") Spartan encounters a subterranean group of freedom fighters and learns that all is not as it seems. The resulting action takes place in a Santa Barbara-Los Angeles-San Diego metroplex, and the movie includes many LA-area locations: the 2nd Street tunnel, the Hollywood sign, the Pacific Design Center, and Irvine. Not really a Dredd movie, but fun regardless. I still don't know what those three seashells are used for. Warner Bros., Oct. 7, 1993. Directed by Marco Brambilla; written by Peter Lenkov, Robert Reneau, and Daniel Waters; starring Sylvester Stallone, Wesley Snipes, Sandra Bullock, Nigel Hawthorne, and Benjamin Bratt. (HR)

Demons

Produced by Dario Argento—Lamberto Bava worked as his assistant director on *Inferno* (also reviewed this issue)—this relatively slick film is pretty limited in its



scope. Attendees of a horror movie in an old cinema turn into demons one by one as the supernatural in the movie they're watching—a film in which teenagers discover the tomb of Nostradamus—spills from the silver screen into the theater seats. The result is a sequence of chases and deaths, with ample gore and special effects as the people transform. It is unclear why the transformations happen—there's the hint of the theater being cursed, or this having happened previously—and the ending is somewhat cryptic: Did the transformations occur outside the theater as well (a la *Night of the Living Dead*)? In any event, it's a fun ride just to watch the chases, deaths, and transformations. *Demons* doesn't aspire to be more than it is, and it's quite happy as it is, thank you very much. DACFILM Rome, May 30, 1986. Directed by Lamberto Bava; written by Lamberto Bava; starring Urbano Barberini, Natasha Hovey, Karl Zinny, Fiore Argento, and Paola Cozzo. (HR)

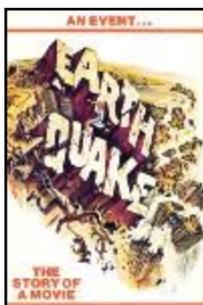
Earthquake

This big-budget disaster picture with a ton of star power doesn't

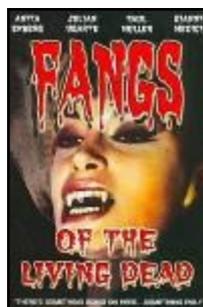
show much of its titular tremors until about halfway through. The lead in is devoted to several smaller shakes and character establishment: Charlton Heston's henpecked engineer, his aspiring actress lover and pill-popping wife, the low-rent stuntman, and various law enforcement officers. Once things get rattling properly—starting during a frame-melting screening of a Clint Eastwood movie and lasting for about 10 minutes—the rest of the flick is every Los Angeleno's nightmare—or wet dream. Rooms start a-rocking, previously seen street scenes a-crumble, and it all falls down. "Turn off the gas!" Even the evacuation scenes are pulse-quickening, with nods to other disaster flicks like *The Towering Inferno* (also made in 1974) and *The Poseidon Adventure* (1972). The rest is collateral damage and cleanup. "Take off your pantyhose, dammit!" Until the Hollywood Dam breaks, that is. Universal Pictures, Nov. 15, 1974. Directed by Mark Robson; written by George Fox and Mario Puzo; starring Charlton Heston, Ava Gardner, George Kennedy, Lorne Greene, Genevieve Bujold, Victoria Principal, and Walter Matthau (as Walter Matuschanskayasky). (HR)

Fangs of the Living Dead

Originally released in Italy as Malenka: La Nipote del Vampiro,



this movie tells a story of inheritance, possible reincarnation, witchcraft, and vampirism. It was released in the United States in 1973 as part of the Orgy of the Living Dead triple bill, which also featured *Revenge of the Living Dead* and *Curse of the Living Dead*. The acting's not great, the locations aren't breathtaking or overly moody, and the vampires are surprisingly subtle. The movie includes a couple of borderline erotic moments, a whipping scene, one cool sequence running down a tunnel, a catfight, and a dramatic decomposition. Otherwise, the movie's a snooze. Triton Filmindustria, July 23, 1969. Directed by Amando de Ossorio; written by Amando de Ossorio; starring Anita Ekberg, John Hamilton, Diana Lorys, Rosanna Yanni, and Guy Roberts. (HR)



Friday the 13th

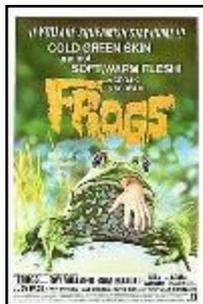
Every time I see this movie, it's like the first time all over again. Even though AMC's named it the third greatest horror movie franchise, I forget so, so many details in between viewings. I forget that Kevin Bacon is in it. I forget that Jason Voorhees, while present and visible, isn't the killer. And I forget how much fun it is to watch



this classic example of the teenage slasher movie. Tom Savini's special effects are excellent, and what eventually became genre clichés are merely ingredients here. It's got it all: remote summer camp, thunderstorm, too-old actors in teenage roles, teenage dalliances and moral commentary, and a string of murders, as well as a hint of the supernatural. Paramount Pictures, May 9, 1980. Directed by Sean S. Cunningham; written by Sean S. Cunningham; starring Betsy Palmer, Adrienne King, Jeannine Taylor, Robbi Morgan, Kevin Bacon, and Harry Crosby. (HR)

Frogs

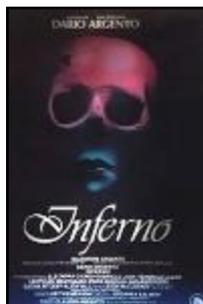
More science fiction than horror, this is an ecological cautionary tale in which the titular frogs provide semi-threatening suspense as the residents of a relatively polluted—the family runs a paper company— island die one by one while nature tries to reclaim the built environment. Not as well crafted as *The Birds*, the message is the same. Unfortunately, the movie's pace is a little slow, and most of the family members are unlikable, so you don't feel too bad that the island's animal denizens are picking them off. There are some arty shots, and some of the actors—Milland, Elliott—are pretty solid. Worth watching for eco-horror fans and AIP completists. American International, March 10, 1972. Directed by



George McCowan; written by Robert Hutchison and Robert Brees; starring Ray Milland, Sam Elliott, Joan Van Ark, Adam Roarke, and Judy Pace. (HR)

Inferno

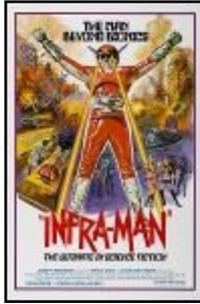
I saw this at Cinefamily as part of their Video Nasties Celebration. Filmed in Rome and New York City, it's the story of the architect Varel-li, the "Three Mothers," and the houses he built for them. The heroine, living in the house in New York, built for Mater Tenebrarum, begins to suspect the provenance of the building. Her brother responds to her call for help, traveling from a music school in Rome, where a classmate also begins to delve into the mystery. The movie is largely confusing, if interestingly shot, and while the ideas behind the film are intriguing, they're not presented strongly enough to hold the plot together. Regardless, the movie is wonderful and worth seeing -- if not just for the scene in which the heroine dives into a water-filled chamber she discovers in the basement... all to recover a dropped earring. Keith Emerson's score is also worth experiencing. *The Overlook Film Encyclopedia: Horror* considers this followup to *Suspiria* a disappointment, but I think it's an excellent movie in its own right, comparisons aside. Produzioni Intersound, April 2,



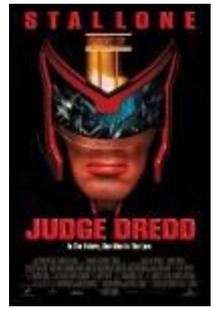
1980. Directed by Dario Argento; written by Dario Argento; starring Leigh McCloskey, Irene Miracle, Eleonora Giorgi, Daria Nicolodi, and Sacha Pitoeff. (HR)

Infra-Man

Also titled *Super Infranman*, this is a fine, early example of Hong Kong-bred tokusatsu such as Ultraman and Kamen Rider. Princess Dragon Mom shows up with her entourage of Octopus Man, Beetle Man, and others. Solar-powered Infra-Man proceeds to save the day, via unrelenting Power Rangers-style chop socky. The costumes are over the top and the acting histrionic, but the wire dancing and kung fu is excellent. Chien-Lung Wang, also known as Bruce Lee, went on to play Bruce Lee-like characters in a number of movies. Fun and frivolous, but perhaps the worst movie I've seen in awhile. Shaw Brothers, 1975. Directed by Shan Hua; written by Kuang Ni; starring Li Hsui-Hsien, Terry Liu, Wang Hsieh, Man-Tzu Yuan, Wen-wei Lin, and Chien-Lung Wang. (HR)



comic books published in the UK—which I learned about in 1987 thanks to the thrash metal band Anthrax. Stallone makes a passable Dredd, although I imagined him less guttural and more stoic. A mere 38 minutes in, Dredd is found guilty of a crime he didn't commit and then has to unravel the mystery and clear his good name. The urban locations and set designs for Mega City One combine elements of 2000 AD, Max Headroom, and Blade Runner, and the A.B.C. Warrior robot is awesome. The encounter with the Angel gang in the Cursed Earth is too easily resolved, Schneider's character is extremely irritating, and the denouement felt rushed. All in all, not a horrible introduction to the ideas behind Judge Dredd, but perhaps not entirely satisfying for fans. The Cure song during the credits is a pleasant surprise. Hollywood Pictures, June 30, 1995. Directed by Danny Cannon; written by William Wisher and Steven E. de Souza; starring Sylvester Stallone, Armand Assante, Rob Schneider, Jurgen Prochnow, and Max von Sydow. (HR)



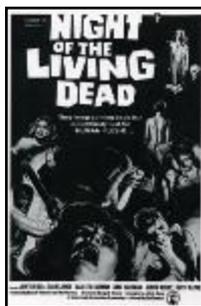
Judge Dredd

Like *Demolition Man* above, this dystopian law enforcement movie set in 2139 A.D. stars Stallone and Rob Schneider. Unlike its 1993 predecessor, however, it is clearly based on the Judge Dredd

Night of the Living Dead

When I was 11, I bought the GoodTimes VHS release of *Night of the Living Dead* with my allowance money at Kmart. My dad was complicit, but my mom was disap-

proving, so I hid it in a desk drawer and snuck peeks when my folks weren't home. To recognize the death of Samuel William Hinzman in 2012—of which I was aware but didn't really read much about until I spent some time with Famous Monsters of Filmland #261—I watched the movie again for the first time in years. It holds up amazingly well. Shot for slightly more than \$100,000 near Pittsburgh, the movie ruffled the feathers of public morality and revived the American zombie movie. What impresses me the most is how



mundane the movie is, how every day its horror. If you've never seen it, rent or buy it immediately; this is required viewing. And if you have already seen it,

watch it again. Image Ten, Oct. 1, 1968. Directed by George A. Romero; written by John A. Russo and George A. Romero; starring Judith O'Dea, Duane Jones, Karl Hardman, Keith Wayne, and Judith Ridley. (HR) *



HORROR MOVIE NIGHT



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