



**TIGHTBEAM #279**

**TIGHTBEAM** is produced on a bi-monthly basis by the **N3F –The National Fantasy Fan Federation**, a world-wide club for fans of science fiction/fantasy and related subjects. Copies are sent electronically direct to all current members, and copies are also posted, somewhat later, on the [efanzines.com](http://efanzines.com) web site thru the generous courtesy of webmaster Bill Burns.

This is issue **#279** and is edited by Bob Jennings. Letters of comment are solicited from everyone reading this; also, reviews of books read, movies seen, and convention experiences recently attended, and any other fannish material that would be of interest to our members is also requested. Please contact Bob Jennings at—

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You may learn more about the N3F by going to our website at **n3f.org**

cover illustration by Steve Stiles

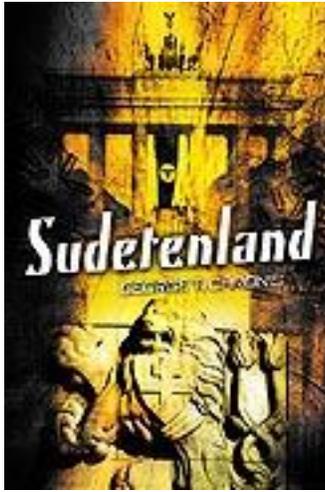
## LETTERS

*As you can see, this fanzine has allocated space for letters of comment received from our readers. Unfortunately this time round no letters were received. Please help us correct that situation by sending in your comments on this issue. A page of pixels is a terrible thing to waste.*

**DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE IS  
20 SEPTEMBER 2017**



# BOOKS



**Sudetenland by George T. Chronis, with Cover design by Adrius Guscia; 746 pages; CreateSpace Independent Publishing; 2014; available in prices ranging from \$0 to \$20 depending on source and format.**

This was George Chronis's first novel; it is an alternative history set in central Europe in 1938. The focus of events is the Czechoslovak crisis and the partition of Czechoslovakia by the British, French, and Germans that led up to the outbreak of World War Two. Many of the characters, such as Chamberlain, Hitler, and Benes, are perfectly real people. As we work through the lower levels of the Czechoslovak military, it would take someone with more historical knowledge than I to say who is real and who the author needed to create. We encounter a series of diplomats, military officers, and military intelligence officers. Even French Major Charles de Gaulle makes a pass-through, lecturing on the utility of tank forces. Relative to reality, he is more than a bit enthusiastic about the subject.

A second set of characters are the half-dozen news reporters who wander about doing coverage. So far as I can determine most of them are not real. The first person we meet is Ros Talmage, that rare avis of 1930s journalism, a female reporter. Her boss sends her to Europe, apparently to cover Paris fashions and whatever else she finds in her spare time. She ends up in many of the right places at the right times. There are other reporters from other nations, Sanderson, Endicott, and others, one of whom appears – to all his colleagues – to be quite smitten with Talmadge, and vice versa. However, this is the 1930s, and she is an American, so the two never do anything except affect disinterest in each other. Central Europe is not like America.

One of the other reporters is amazingly good at being in the right place at the right time. He does not, however, at any point introduce himself as 'my actual name is James, James Bond' but that would not be surprising.

Alternative history novels have a range of accuracies, from the Gingrich-Forstchen Gettysburg series down to the not-to-be-named author who referenced ancient carpets woven by Norsemen from strips of linoleum. So far as I can tell, this novel is very much at the top end, especially in his research on the actual capabilities of the 1938 German and Czech armies. At the front, we see the historical time line evolving. We see considerable detail on people now long forgotten, notably the German Henleinists creating disorder in the Sudetenland.

At some point, woven in so subtly that I didn't notice it, history diverges and war breaks out. The Czechs are facing the German army of 1938. In 1938 German military preparedness and training were weak. Almost all the German tanks are the models 1, 2, and 3, which ranged from significantly to laughably inferior to the Czechoslovakian army's tanks, especially the T38. German munitions production was at best just beginning. In this novel first the French and then the Russians keep their treaty commitments. I shall not present a spoiler, indicating the plot result, but a sequel is planned, arising from an extremely different 1939.

The writing and editing are first-rate. Events keep progressing. When the armies collide, there is fine detail on the strengths and weaknesses of each side, in what appears to be a plausible manner.

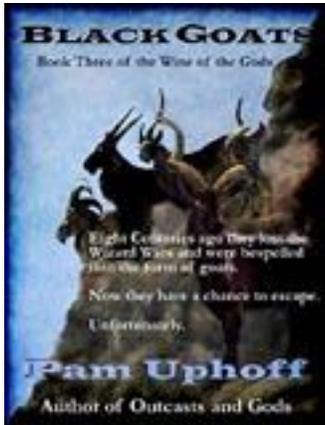
**---review by George Phillies**



### **Corefires by Colin Cantwell**

The title refers to the center of our galaxy, which in this novel contains portals to other galaxies. It is set in the far, far future when humanity has spread out into the galaxy, and we are just starting to explore the center. The Corefires are tended by a species called the Rad:na, who have kept their existence a secret from human beings although humans have occasionally sighted them and call their ship “The Flying Dutchman”. I found it to be quite interesting, but found that the plot lines did not really end but just stop without warning, so this novel does not stand by itself. Presumably there will be a sequel, and I recommend waiting until it comes out before purchasing a copy.

---review by Tom Feller



### **Black Goats by Pam Uphoff (Wine of the Gods Book 3); e-book format, \$2.99 to 0 dollars**

Last week I reviewed a fantasy full of sex that was, to say the least, less than a success. This week I will make up for it with a whole-hearted recommendation of Pam Uphoff’s Black Goats. Really, this whole series is excellent.

Oh, and in keeping with the theme of the week, here are the first lines of the book: “Picking rocks was only fun for the first half-hour. Pity it was such a good way to practice magic.”

Pam blends fantasy and science fiction for fantastic fiction. Her world is well-developed both culturally and geographically, and peopled with characters who come to life. The Sheep Man, the old gods, and the goats, who are revealed to be cruel wizards trapped by a spell hundreds of years before. There’s plenty of sex in this book, and not all of it consensual. But Pam carries it off, developing a story where the conflict is between magic and mundanes who no longer remember that the tiny population of magic users dwells in the village of Ash.

The dark part of this fantasy comes with the escape of the Goats, who find power enough to break their magic chains and escape the Sheep Man, who is revealed to the Tyrant King Nihilicity, possibly the most powerful wizard to ever exist in their world, even if he has spent 800 years as a shepherd with moronic-level intelligence. Desperate to rein the goats in, witches, wizards and their horses leave Ash to track down and kill the Black Goats.

The lighter side of the fantasy tale is the creation of the Wine of the Gods, a substance chock full of spells for healing, fertility, aphrodisiac, and things the gods don’t even remember throwing into the potent brew while they were being happily drunk on more normal wine. Unleashed on the world, the self-sustaining spell mixture will take over any other wine it is poured into – even a few drops. While it will heal pretty much anything, it also makes the partaker, well, let’s just say there are orgies herein. Again, she carries it off very well, expertly implying without showing gory details. This tale is more about the people, their world, and how the Goats and the Wine affect it, than it is about the sex.

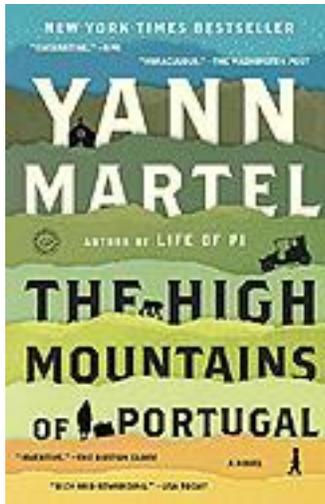
Obviously, this is not a book for young adults. And it might not be for some adults, either. But I think you will enjoy her series... and if you haven’t started it yet, I recommend beginning with Outcasts and Gods, which is more science fiction than fantasy, and is a superb story of genetic engineering and consequences.

---review by Cedar Sanderson

### **The High Mountains of Portugal by Yann Martel; 368 pages; prices from \$15.99, discounted most places, e-book version available (but not at much of a savings)**

The title refers to an area of Portugal which is not really mountainous, although it is a remote part of the country at the various times this novel is set. The novel is divided into three sections with three interconnected stories, or four if you count excerpts of a diary of a 17<sup>th</sup> Century Portuguese priest who ministered to slaves in Portuguese Angola. The diary is quoted in part one.

In 1904, a young widower named Tomas discovers this diary, which mentions an unusual crucifix that Tomas believes resides in a church in the “High Mountains” area. He sets out to find it in an early automobile,



---review by Tom Feller

for which he has only minimal training. One of his eccentricities is that he almost always walks backwards as a way of objecting to the Universe.

In part two, set during New Year's Eve of 1938, Doctor Eusebio Lozora, a Portuguese pathologist, is working in his laboratory when he is visited first by his wife and then by a widow with the corpse of her husband in a suitcase. A character in the first part, the widow asks him to perform an autopsy. This section contains fantasy elements, although the novel as a whole is so weird that they feel normal.

Part three is set in the 1980s. In 1981, Peter Tovy, a Canadian senator who was born in the "High Mountain" area but emigrated to Canada with his family when he was two years old, retires to his ancestral village. A widower as well, he is accompanied by a companion: a chimpanzee named Odo. (There is no mention of *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*.) I thought the third part was the best of the three and found Tomas's struggles with the automobile in the first part to be rather tiresome. On the other hand, my wife thought the Tomas's misadventures with the car to be hysterically funny. Regardless, this is a fine novel.



**WITCHFIRE BURNING** by Ellie Ferguson; 274 pages; primarily an e-book at \$0 to \$5.99

So it's been a while since I put up a book review. Mostly, that's because I haven't really been reading much. You can see my ramblings about that over at the [Mad Genius Club](#) this morning. But when my friend and fellow author put out her latest book, *Witchfire Burning*, I knew I had to make time. It's not just because she's my friend, and has been a huge help to my writing career, it's that she's a darn good storyteller.

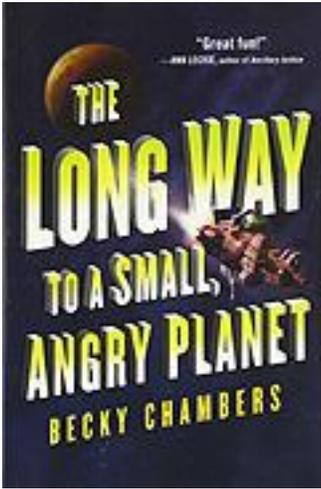
I'm not quite to the point where I'd buy her grocery list (although it would be fun to swap recipe ideas) but I will buy all of her fiction under her various pen names. Amanda, like most of us in this Indie author world, writes in many genres, and this book is under the name Ellie Ferguson. It just so happens that *Witchfire* is a paranormal romance, which I normally wouldn't touch with a ten foot pole. On the other hand, I've read her paranormal romances and plain romances in the past, and I trust her to deliver a good story without the tropes that genre is prone to.

She delivers in this story, as usual. A young woman returning reluctantly to a small town full of bittersweet memories, with her young daughter in tow. So far, so normal. But the reasons she left, and the big reason she's running back, seeking help, that's where her world diverges from ours into one where magic is real. Magic is also dangerous, and when a young child manifests it, it could risk everything. And if that's not enough, when the main character gets back into town, her mother is gone and her childhood home is sentient and talking to her. Not that she didn't know it was sort-of-alive. The talking is new.

Amanda pulls you into the story with action, and delivers more action, interspersed with a down-to-earth romance. She handles the parenting part very well, deftly weaving the child into the story without falling into the plot moppet trap. It's a fun, light read, and perfect for a few hours of escapism to relax your mind before you have to come back to our mundane world. Readers of her other books may recognize the setting, first introduced in the romantic holiday novel *Slay Bells Ring*. If you like your romantic entanglements lightly tangled, with a splash of peril, a soupcon of conflict, but no over dramatics, then this book is for you.

Happy Reading!

---review by Cedar Sanderson

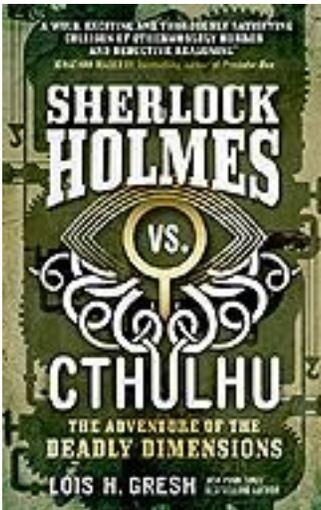


**The Long Way to a Small, Angry Planet by Becky Chambers; 464 pages; Harper-Voyager; Trade Paperback; \$15.99; e-book available**

This space opera is set several centuries in the future after humanity has spread out to the stars and joined an interstellar civilization called the Galactic Commons. It is such an advanced civilization that there is a lot of bureaucracy. Rosemary Harper, who was born and grew up on Mars, joins the crew of the wormhole tunneler *Wayfarer* as a clerk so that Ashby, the captain and fellow human, does not have to fill out forms. Other members of the crew include Sissix (the ship's affectionate reptilian pilot), Kizzy (its human mechanical engineer), Lovey (an artificial intelligence), Corbin (its abrasive human fuel engineer), Ohan (non-human navigator), Dr. Chef (a non-human who doubles as the ship's cook and medic), and Jenks (its human computer engineer).

The plot, what there is of one, mostly involves the captain accepting a high risk/high reward contract, although they take their time getting to there. The novel's leisurely pace actually works in its favor, because of the engaging characters they meet and the interesting worlds they visit, such as Sissix's home world. Data dumps are kept to an absolute minimum, although you learn, for instance, that the Earth's environment was so severely damaged that humans had to leave and their departure became known as the Exodus. It was a very enjoyable read.

---review by Tom Feller



**Sherlock Holmes Vs. Cthulhu: The Adventure of the Deadly Dimensions by Lois H. Gersh; 437 pages; Titan Books; Trade Paperback; \$14.95 but heavily discounted; e-book version \$9.99**

This is the latest volume in the series of new Sherlock Holmes adventures produced by Titan Books of London. Many of these new novels have science fiction or supernatural themes, and many of them are quite good.

Several issues back I discussed the first of a new series of Sherlock Holmes battling the horrors of H.P. Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos. That novel was written by James Lovegrove, and utilized the supposition that all of the Sherlock Holmes stories written by Doyle were fake, that the real life Holmes and Watson had been engaged in a deadly secret war with the minions of Cthulhu and their human allies. I was not happy with that set-up, even tho I did enjoy the novel and felt it was both well written and well constructed plot-wise.

This new novel is not by James Lovegrove, and it is also not set in his odd version of Sherlock Holmes' universe. Ms. Gersh has created a novel in which Holmes and Watson face extraordinary events that are directly tied in with the Cthulhu monsters, but this is just another case for Sherlock Holmes and Watson, albeit an extremely remarkable and difficult case. I like that premise a whole lot more than the one proposed by Lovegrove.

The setup involves several remarkably gruesome deaths, one apparently caused by a thief who slaughtered a furniture maker, and others apparently caused when somebody caused a steam engine used to provide power for a new overhead-electric carriage line to run wild so that wires and parts came loose and smashed the builder of the machine to jelly. In both cases very little was left of the victims except bones piled in an odd configuration. In the center of each pile, a large, round bone with odd symbols etched on and inside it.

I wanted to like this book, really I did. I have always thought that Sherlock Holmes is a character who could easily interact and confront both scientific and supernatural foes in interesting ways. Titan Books, the company that published this volume, has shown that it can attract authors who know how to develop those types of themes and make them work for the world's most famous fictional detective.

Unfortunately this is not one of those. The writing here wanders between two extremes, the maudlin mundane and some hyper intensive efforts designed to deliberately gross out the reader. The reader knows from

the very title of the novel what the core of the story is, and immediately we get the details of one of the strange deaths as a master furniture maker using unique and very old diagrams is in the process of finishing a strange chair etched with weird designs while reciting the words on the parchment, actions that result in his brutal death.

As the story unfolds there are a number of fantastic deaths linked to events with no possible explanation. But as the pages turn in this book neither Holmes nor Watson has a clue as to what is actually going on, even when they are confronted by extraordinary events so incredible that it is impossible to believe that anybody, especially two alert, intelligent people who are supposed to be sharp observers and experts in the use of logical deduction, could not have concluded that there is something considerably out of the ordinary going on here.

Except they don't. They continue to believe that there must be some reasonable, logical, human agent at work, a master-mind of crime, possibly Professor Moriarty, yet there also seems to be no motive, and no one seems to gain anything from the murders. Things spin out of control with even more deaths, yet they somehow remain detached from the impact of the events, let alone the obvious clues.

A typical example: our heroes regard the fantastic machine that resulted in four of the initial deaths, and then caused the new electric tram service carriage to overturn and wreck, a machine absolutely like nothing anyone has ever seen before, a machine that runs on phosphorous, and a device that its keeper, the son of the purported inventor, repeatedly declares is alive, a machine that almost manages to kill Holmes and Watson when they investigate the site, as simply a mechanical device that is malfunctioning. Then later, when the police decide to go in and shut the contraption down, it starts running wild, flinging wires and cables, ejecting parts that slaughter four police officers on the scene and injure many more. Lestrade sends an urgent message asking Holmes for help and advice. Neither of our protagonists can be bothered, and don't even seem to be particularly upset by this sudden demonstration of deliberate mayhem.

Instead they decide to journey off to Avebury, a remote part of England where the other strange murder took place. They investigate the workshop scene of the crime with the man's son, and decide that whoever killed the craftsman must have come straight down from the ceiling with incredible force, yet there are no signs of illegal entry, and most of the body of the slain man, except for the odd configuration of bones, is gone.

Investigating some of the odd furniture the man created, they encounter a cult devoted to Dagon, with a brooding mansion filled with bizarre furniture, unearthly paintings, and unknown symbols involving octopi-like creatures all over the place. They are made to feel very unwelcome and are even attacked, but only snap into action later when the host and head of the great hall filled with the grotesque images and symbols turns up murdered, sliced and stabbed to death by an apparent house burglar. Even then they refuse to admit that anything is really wrong; all this stuff simply must have some sort of mundane and hum-drum explanation.

The most unbelievable part of this novel is the bone headed stubbornness of Holmes and Watson to accept facts as they unfold, or make conclusions that anybody, firm realist or not, could not possibly explain away as conventional crimes committed by ordinary human agents. They think maybe some of these strange people may somehow be connected with a Druidic Religious revival, but they aren't sure and supporting evidence is thin.

I found it hard going pushing my way thru to the end of the book. In addition to all the ineptitude and mush-brained inertia on the part of the two protagonists, a lot of filler pages are inserted wherein Watson meets with, speaks with, thinks about, and worries about his wife and newborn son, while berating himself for skipping out on them, even for a short time, to go off on another one of Holmes' complex murder cases when he really should be sticking around the homestead, tending to his medical practice, and giving thanks a dozen or more times a day because he has such a wonderful loving wife, and remembering how lucky he is not to be one of the poor wretches mired in poverty in London's east end. A little of that goes a long way, and unfortunately there is quite a lot of it in this book, well beyond the point of tedium and also well beyond the point of annoying aggravation.

Near the end, 400 or so pages later, after even more deaths, and a trip over to France to investigate mysterious tunnels and the Cult using them, even the author's inept version of Sherlock Holmes finally accepts that the paranormal is involved with these deaths, and then, using what I consider to be a flimsy subterfuge, manages to deal with the Cult of Dagon and the Cthulhu minions. It was not a satisfactory ending.

There are many inconsistencies in the plot, and while the writing itself is generally good, the characters of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson diverge widely from what most followers of the great detective would expect. Given all this jumble of problems I cannot recommend this novel to anyone.

---review by Bob Jennings

# THE DEVIL, YOU SAY!

by

Tom McGovern

As an evangelical Christian, I had a bit of trepidation about checking out the new TV show, *Lucifer*. Not having read the Vertigo comic book on which it is based, I had no idea going in what it would be like, and my mind conjured up having to endure an hour-long festival of blasphemy, anti-Christian rhetoric, and pornography with each episode. Now, obviously, had the show really been like that, I'd have shut it off halfway through the first episode. But, really, there was little for me to worry about. There is a fair amount of implied sex, but none on-screen, and the "blasphemy," such as there is, comes across as Lucifer ranting and raving when his plans are frustrated.

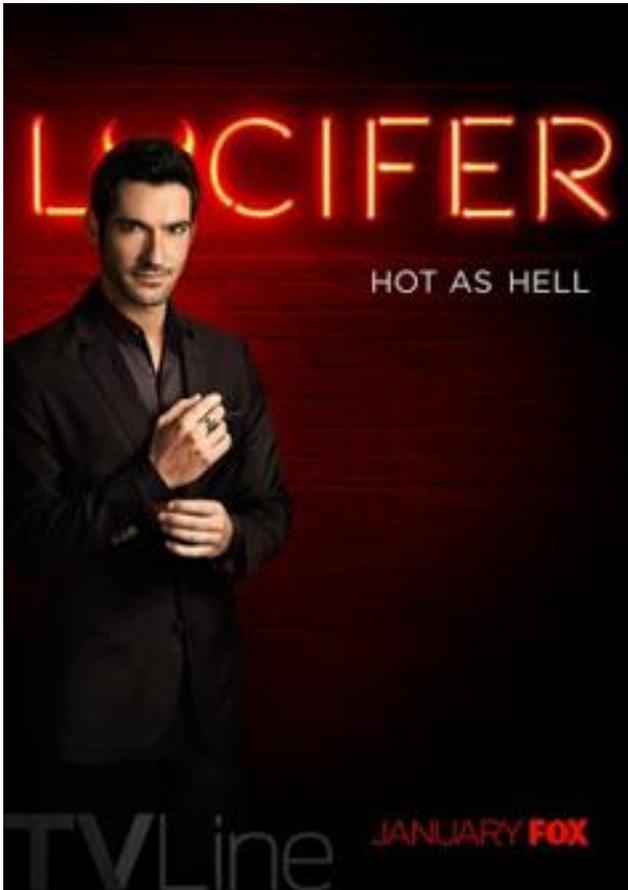
First off, this character, full name Lucifer Morningstar, is clearly from an alternate universe. He has little in common with the Prince of Darkness found in the Bible. He comes across to some degree as a petulant teenager (though he is obviously an adult) who has had a bit of a falling out with his overbearing Dad. Assigned to take charge of hell and supervise the torment of the souls confined there, he has simply abandoned his position and decided to come to Earth for a permanent vacation. While here, Lucifer has opened a nightclub that is managed by his assistant, an attractive female demon who has joined him in his escape from Hades.

That's not enough for him, though. Through a series of events, he becomes involved with Chloe, a pretty female police homicide detective who, reluctantly at first, allows him to assist her in solving murders. While there is some sexual tension between the two, that's as far as it goes, and Chloe appears for the first several episodes to be drifting toward a reunion with her estranged husband, also a police detective to whom Lucifer refers as "Detective Douche."

A couple of other elements in the plot: Lucifer takes up both professionally and sexually with a female psychologist. This relationship helps to move forward the overarching story of Lucifer's personal emotional development (Spoiler: He appears to be becoming, um, good, sort of). Also, one of Lucifer's fellow angels, Amenadiel, has been assigned to get Lucifer back to hell where he belongs, and is continually working behind Lucifer's back to bring about this end.

After these basics have been established,





the show pretty much levels off into a formulaic police procedural, with Lucifer using his unique talents in helping Chloe to solve a different murder in each episode. Where he was unhappy in hell being forced to torment sinners who presumably deserved it, he actually enjoys bringing justice to evil people here on earth. As the show proceeds through the season (I'm 10 episodes in as I write this), Lucifer seems to be developing in his character as a result of his feelings toward Chloe. At first, she was pretty much just an object of his lust and an interesting person, but as the episodes roll by, he is clearly developing tender feelings toward her, and becoming more, um, human as a result. Too much so, in fact, since he was invulnerable (to bullets, for example) at the beginning of the series, but in later episodes finds that his supposed "immortality" has developed a few leaks.

As I said earlier, this Lucifer is not the same character found in the Bible. The one reference to "Lucifer" found in most Bibles is at Isaiah 14:12 and the term found there is pretty clearly intended to be a descriptive term, not a proper name. Where older translations such as the King James Version use the term, "Lucifer," more modern versions use phrases such as "day star" or "shining one." It seems unlikely that the word "Lucifer" was ever intended as an appellation for the devil of

Scripture.

Also, the biblical Satan is never seen to be the ruler of hell; rather he is (or, more properly, becomes) its most prominent prisoner. Cast into the "lake of fire" after the second coming of Christ, Satan is in hell to be punished eternally himself, not to punish others. As such, it would not be possible for him simply to decide on a vacation.

Lucifer of the TV show also has a strong aversion to liars and hypocrites, and is often seen wreaking vengeance upon such. That seems like a pretty big stretch for the person who is so often referred to as the "father of lies," if we are to believe that this character in any way reflects the devil found in the Bible.

Maybe my theological training is causing me to over-analyze this show. But I'm finding that I can easily compartmentalize it by regarding it strictly as a fantasy. This program clearly takes place in an alternate universe where there is a character called Lucifer who isn't all that bad of a guy, where supposedly holy angels engage in deceit and subterfuge to accomplish their goals, and where God is a mere background figure. These are not the biblical characters I learned about in my theology courses; not by a long shot.

One other point I'd make about this program is that it is a bit derivative. The themes are similar to elements found in other shows like iZombie (supernatural being helping the police solve murders), The Mysteries of Laura (female detective solves crimes with her ex as a major background figure) and, of course, any number of police procedural series. The frequent scenes of Lucifer consulting with his female psychologist friend also can't help but bring back memories of The Sopranos.

Lucifer is a well-written, witty and interesting show, on the air for two seasons already, and it has been renewed for a third season to begin this coming October. It is not nearly as offensive as I feared it would be. It might be worth a try for you, too.

# *The Supernatural Mysteries of Wilkie Collins*

by

**Jon D. Swartz**

William Wilkie Collins (1824 – 1889) was born in London, the son of a well-known landscape artist, William Collins. Named after his father, Collins swiftly became known by his second name (which honored his godfather, the famous painter Sir David Wilkie). From the ages of twelve to fifteen Collins lived with his parents in Italy, which made a great impression on him.

In 1840 at the age of 17 he left school and was apprenticed as a clerk to a firm of tea merchants owned by friends of his father; but after five unhappy years, during which he wrote his first novel, *Iolani*, he entered Lincoln's Inn to study law.

Despite selling a short story in 1843, his novel *Iolani, or Tahiti As It Was*, was rejected by every publisher he sent it to, and, in fact, that novel was never published during his lifetime. Collins said later that he believed the theme of uninhibited island life was too risqué for the so-called legitimate publishing houses to take a chance on. Believed lost, the manuscript was rediscovered in the 1990s and published in 1999 by Princeton University Press. Essentially a revenge story, there is an illegitimate birth and romantic betrayal, with lots of potential action, but the story moves too slowly for most modern readers, and it also uses a lot of what can best be described as overblown 'purple prose' in the latter half of the novel.

By all accounts despite being enrolled to become a barrister, Collins had no great interest in law either, but his father wanted him to have a profession that would provide a steady income. He spent most of his time writing another long novel, *Antonina, Or, The Fall of Rome*, and socializing with friends instead of doing much studying. Despite this he managed to complete college and was called to the bar in 1851. He never practiced law, but he did use his knowledge of the legal system in several of his later stories.

After his father's death in 1847, Collins produced his first published book, *Memoirs of the Life of William Collins, Esq., R.A.* (1848). At that time he also considered a career in painting, exhibiting a picture at the Royal Academy summer exhibition in 1849; but with the appearance of his first published novel, *Antonina* (1850), his career as a writer began in earnest.



*Antonina* attracted attention because of the British fascination with ancient Rome at the time. The story (440 pages) is slow going, and is primarily a character story of one Roman Lady trying to protect her family and herself from the inevitable threat of the Goth invasion. With counter plots, rival pagan religious factions, backstabbing politics and power grabs by greedy opportunists on all sides, the story should have featured plenty of action and character development, but save for *Antonina* herself and the few people she is intimate with, this is a story of relentless historic tragedy, with the events of war, siege, famine, and the humiliating defeat of the Roman Forces delivered in a steady stream of events seen by people who have no way of directly influencing the unfolding drama.

An instrumental event in Collins' career occurred in 1851 when he was introduced by a mutual friend to Charles Dickens. Collins and Dickens met in March and acted in a play together in May of the same year. Sharing this interest in amateur theater, they became lifelong friends and collaborators. Collins became an editor of Dickens' periodical *Household Words*, and several of Collins' novels were serialized in Dickens' weekly *All the Year Round*, with Dickens later editing and publishing them himself. In addition, Collins' younger brother married Dickens' younger daughter.

Under Dickens' influence Collins branched out with his writing, turning out reviews, short stories, travel books, social commentary, and in 1855 wrote his first play, *The Lighthouse*; initially performed by Dickens' own theatrical company at Tavistock House.

Collins suffered from a form of arthritis known as rheumatic gout and became severely addicted to opium (laudanum) that he took to relieve the pain. As a result he experienced paranoid delusions, the most notable being his conviction that he was constantly accompanied by a subjective doppelganger that he dubbed "The Ghost Wilkie." One of his novels, *The Moonstone*, prominently features the effects of opium and opium addiction. While writing it, Collins' consumption of laudanum was such that he later claimed to have no memory of writing large parts of the novel.

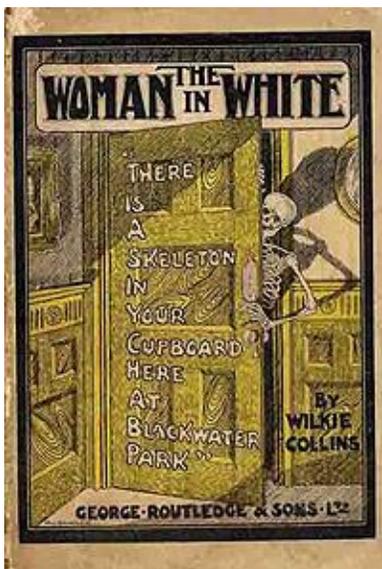
His most productive writing period came in the 1860s, when he turned out four of his most influential and best selling novels: *The Woman In White*, *No Name*, *Armadale*, and *The Moonstone*. The stories featured innovative plots and intriguing, including often flawed characters caught up in unusual events while beset by the strengths and failures of real life human beings. Supernatural themes became more prominent in many of his stories, while *The Moonstone* is often considered the first novel length detective-suspense story. The novels and plays he wrote during this period rapidly went through multiple printings and were widely reprinted outside the British Isles.

His fortune was secured, but his efforts to ease the pain of his gout through spas and experimental medical treatments were not successful. His continued addiction to opium was also affecting his eyesight so it became increasingly difficult to concentrate on his writing. In 1873 he successfully toured the United States and Canada giving readings and publicizing his works. Back home he began mentoring new upcoming writers and championing copyright protection for all authors and publishers.

Collins was opposed to the institution of marriage, and never officially married, but lived, on and off from 1858, with Mrs. Caroline Graves, a young widow, and her small daughter Elizabeth. He also fathered three children by another woman, Martha Rudd, whom he met after Mrs. Graves left him in 1868 to marry another man. Caroline Graves returned to Collins after only two years of that marriage, however, and Collins continued relationships with both women until his death in 1889.

Collins is buried in Kensal Green Cemetery, West London. His grave (Number 31754, Square 141, Row 1) notes him as the author of *The Woman in White* -- in accordance with his dying request.

## The "Supernatural" Novels

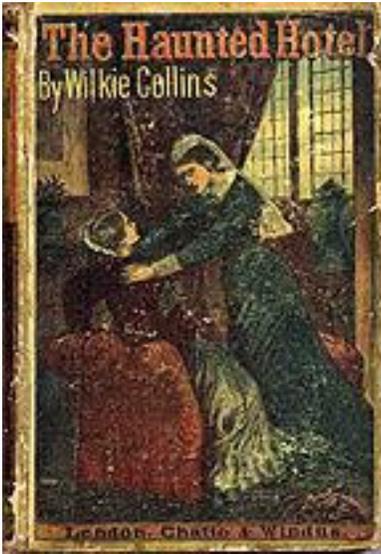


*The Woman in White* (1860)

A poor art master is employed to teach two young women and falls in love with one of them, Laura. His feelings are returned, but Laura is already engaged to another man. The couple are parted and Laura marries, but she and Marian, her half-sister, are then caught up in her new husband's plot to steal her fortune and even her identity. The art master and Marian battle to expose the fraud and reclaim Laura's identity, fortune, and position in society. Throughout the story they encounter various supernatural elements, including a mysterious "woman in white" -- who plays a crucial role in the novel's main events. [This novel has been reprinted many times over the years and also been made into movies, both in England and America.]

*The Moonstone* (1868)

The book is widely regarded as the precursor of the modern suspense novel. T. S. Eliot called it "the first, the longest, and the best of modern English detective novels." Based on a contemporary murder, it contains a number of ideas which became common tropes of the genre: a large number of suspects, red herrings, an English country house, investigation by talented amateurs, and two police officers who represent, respectively, the "local bungler" and the skilled Scotland Yard detective. As with many of his other stories, there are also supernatural elements. [This novel has been reprinted many times and also made into TV programs and movies in England and America]



### *The Haunted Hotel* (1887)

This ghost story was set in 1860 and originally published in book form with another story by Collins, *My Lady's Money*. Apart from the supernatural elements, *The Haunted Hotel* contains detective procedures and an insurance fraud relying on substituted identity that anticipates his later *Blind Love* (1890). The novella is considered to be an unusually horrific story for Collins to have written, and has been described as “a ghost story, a mystery story, and an early psychological thriller, all melded smoothly together.” It was his last significant work before ill health due to his opium addiction deprived him of his writing ability. [*The Haunted Hotel* has been reprinted many times, e. g., in the collection *Great Ghost Stories* (Avon, 1941)]

### *Ioláni or, Tahiti as it was* (1999)

This was Collins' first novel. He was 20 years old and working with the London tea merchants Antrobus & Company when he started writing it in 1844. It is uncertain when he finished it, if indeed Collins ever considered it completed. *Ioláni* was never accepted by a publisher and the manuscript was rarely even seen until it suddenly surfaced in New York in 1991. Although described by Collins as “a romance,” it features sinister warrior priests, political intrigue and treachery, madmen, ritual human sacrifice, and sorcery – placing it firmly in the tradition of his later and more famous supernatural mysteries.

## **Short Genre Fiction**

“The Dream Woman” (an encounter with a homicidal ghost/reprinted many times, including: January 1927 issue of *Weird Tales*; May 1960, Vol. 1, No. 1, issue of *Fear Magazine*; *Alfred Hitchcock's Fatal Attractions*, 1983)

“Mrs. Zant and the Ghost” (an investigation of the strange dilemma of a Mrs. Zant/reprinted in *Classic Ghost Stories*, Dover, 1998; in *Phantastic Book of Ghost Stories*, Barnes & Noble, 1996)

“A Terribly Strange Bed” (a surreal tale of a young Englishman in Paris/reprinted in *In the Grip of Terror*, Perma Books, 1951)

“Miss Jéromette and the Clergyman” (a tale of a strange religious student and an enigmatic French girl/reprinted in *Victorian Ghost Stories*, Usborne Books, 2004.

“The Dead Hand” (a young man with no experience of death has to spend the night in a room with the dead body of a stranger/reprinted in *Mad Monkton and Other Stories*, Oxford University Press, 1994)

“Blow Up with the Brig!” (the narrator of the tale is haunted by a near-death experience/reprinted in *Strange and Fantastic Stories*, Whittlesey House, 1946)

“Nine O'Clock!” (a curse causes the male members of a French family to die at the hour of nine o'clock/reprinted in *Sensation Stories*, Dufour Editions, 2004)

“The Devil's Spectacles”(magic spectacles allow the person wearing them to see others' true motives/reprinted in *The Haunted Hotel & Other Stories*, Wordsworth Editions, 2006)

“Mad Monkton” (“an ancient family living in a moldering abbey, a family curse, a haunting, a ghastly quest, and a tragic outcome”/reprinted in *The 4<sup>th</sup> Fontana Book of Great Ghost Stories*, 1967)

“The Last Stage Coachman” (ghostly apparitions in a supernatural allegory of trains/reprinted in *Sensation Stories*, Dufour Editions, 2004) [the first published story that Collins signed]

“Mrs. Bullwinkle” (a ladylike nurse with unusual eating habits/reprinted in *Terror!*, Lancer Books, 1966)

“The Lady of Glenwith Grange” (two sisters, one “feminine” and one not, in a double identity plot involving a sinister house/reprinted in *The Lady of Glenwith Grange* with five other stories by Collins, Paperback Library, 1966) [aka “The Angler’s Story of the Lady of Glenwith Grange”]

Note: Most of these stories are reprinted in *The Haunted Hotel and Other Strange Tales*, Wordsworth Editions, 2006, or in *Mad Monkton and Other Stories*, Oxford University Press, 1994.

## Conclusions

Critics have been uniformly kind to Collins and his work. One described him as “the best-selling creator of the vogue for supernatural and sensation fiction in England of the 1860s.” Another remarked that “he produced a stream of original short stories during his career” and that “adapting the tradition of the Gothic tale of terror, Collins wrote ghost stories with a contemporary flavor and also made major contributions to the newly emerging detective story.” The editor of a volume of his collected short stories wrote “as a purveyor of mystery, suspense, and the uncanny, as a chronicler of the dark underside of everyday life in the mid-Victorian period, and as a story-teller who quickly seizes the reader’s interest and refuses to let go, Collins has few rivals.”



In his later writings Collins turned away from supernatural themes and toward novels of social commentary. These novels were less successful than his earlier ones, leading contemporary poet Algernon Charles Swinburne to write: “What brought good Wilkie’s genius nigh perdition? Some demon whispered – ‘Wilkie! Have a mission.’”

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Cox, J. Randolph. *Masters of Mystery and Detective Fiction*. Salem Press, 1989.

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# ***TIGHTBEAM INTERVIEWS:***

## **FAN ARTIST JOSE SANCHEZ**



Jose Sanchez was born and raised in Miami, Florida on March 10, 1968, where he still lives today with his wife Aliana. At the age of six he was introduced to finger-painting. By first grade he had picked up his first pencil, but it was not until the summer of 1977 when Star Wars hit the movie screens across America, that his imaginative spark was truly ignited! Like so many other people that were influenced by the cult phenomenon, he was too. So much so, that this led him to seriously explore and develop his talent for creating art further. As time has gone by and he has honed his skills, he has been notably influenced by the works of Science Fiction and Fantasy artists such as: Stephen Youll, Donato Giancola, Chris Moore, Tim White, Jim Burns, David B. Mattingly and Michael Whelan, to name but a few.

He attended Lindsey-Hopkins Technical Education Center in Miami, Florida where he received a certificate in Commercial Art Technology-majoring in illustration and minoring in Graphic Design. Jose says he would ideally like to see himself one day working professionally in the motion picture industry as a Concept Artist. He had previously worked on a low-budget SF/Super Hero Animation flick titled: "Shadow Runner", designing the individual character's spaceships. "They tend to depend more on technology than they do on their own superpowers".

He is also interested in the publication and gaming markets. His credits have included several fanzine covers and one semi-prozine cover and interior artwork. His art has also appeared in the official LucasFilm Star Wars Insider magazines. "City Patrol", was chosen for publication in the March/April 2006/issue #86. "Oil Bath", "Artoo", "Pair of Jaws" and "Land of the Rising Suns" in April 2014/issue #148 now being published by Titan Publications and online at starwars.com on the Jan.15,2014 Blog article: Bantha Tracks: Best of the Year, Online edition: "AT-AT Driver" and in the Blog article: Bantha Tracks: Art Galaxy, March 2014 " Djas Puhr-Settling The Score!"

Major interests include: *Favorite movies*--Star Wars, District 9, X-Men, Star Trek-Next Generation, Superman and any really cool sic-fi movie that comes my way!

*Favorite TV shows*--Supernatural, Mysteries At The Museum, Bizarre Foods, Hardcore Pawn, Impractical Jokers, Battlestar Galactica-(original 1978 series), Star Trek and Star Trek-Next Generation.

*Favorite bands / musical artists*--U2, Seal, Boston, Korn, Simple Minds, Norman Brown, Joe Satriani, Ace Frehley, Billy Idol and Steve Stevens.

*Favorite Tools of the Trade*--Airbrush and all mixed media-especially markers and colored pencils.

*Other Interests*--Aircraft of all types, Submarines, Racing Motorcycles, Hovercraft, UFO's, Wildlife, Cooking and the Supernatural.

Much of his art can be currently seen here: [jose77sanchez.deviantart.com/g...](http://jose77sanchez.deviantart.com/g...)

also on efanazines.com and now with apparel products here: [www.shopvida.com/collections/j...](http://www.shopvida.com/collections/j...)

**Tightbeam:** *A few follow-up questions. You say you started drawing around age six, but when did you really decide you wanted to become an artist?*



I'm going to try and answer your questions as best that I can, since I really first had an interest in art as far back as kindergarten. The teacher at the time asked all the children to dip their fingers in some goopy substance that at the time I had NO clue what it was or WHAT to do with it. It may have been egg-tempera since it also had a peculiar smell to it as well. She quickly showed me- and I began to rub my fingers in a circular motion on some sort of white paper board in front of me. "Hmm-I like this!"...Just like that and in an instant, I was hooked. I like the way it felt on my fingers and how the colors seemed to mix and swirl together to form new colors.

Then as I grew older, probably around 1st grade-I discovered the pencil. Started doodling and drawing rocket ships, cartoons and anything else that captured my fancy. I even remember being bored at family gatherings and I'd start do draw anybody or anything that got my attention-including caricatures of the same family members and people would get a big laugh out of it-which I remember enjoying very much. It was pretty much something that just started spontaneously and I did it to entertain myself-but as I got older and got people' attention, my interest and skills deepened.

**TBM:** *From your artwork it is clear at Star Wars, the first three movies, had an enormous impact on you. You seem to date your*

*interest in serious art from that point onward, but you must have fiddled around with other art, serious and/or cartoonish before Star Wars came along. Did any of your earlier art see print anywhere; (school papers, local press, amateur zines, whatever?)*

I was already into Sci-Fi at a very early age, since I used to watch Land of the Lost, Star Trek, Space: 1999 and Battlestar Galactica back in early 1970's, so yeah I may have fiddled with other art related to shows of this genre and maybe other cartoons too like the Golden Oldies Daffy Duck, Bugs Bunny, Mickey Mouse and other lesser known ones as well-but Star Wars is what really marked me for life and it was SPECIFICALLY Star Wars -A New Hope / Episode 4 that REALLY started to make me think seriously about my art and not so much The Empire Strikes Back and by the way, I liked Return of The Jedi the least. I actually thought it was the



worst of the three movies. I also didn't like the prequels as much either. Although the newer Disney released The Force Awakens/ Episode 7 and Rogue One, are really excellent in their own right.

**TBM:** *After seeing the first Star Wars what did you do with your art efforts?*

Remember now that when I first saw Star Wars was back in 1977, I was only about nine years

old and I remember visiting for the first time something called a "convention", which my brother and I accidentally stumbled upon. I think that we were at K-Mart or something like that and next door was a Howard Johnson Hotel, we casually walked in and saw all these people dressed in costumes and tables with merchandise everywhere--I guess this was our first "meeting" with Fandom and I bought my first ever Star Wars newspaper-which I still have to this day. It was a very pleasant experience to see other people that liked the same things that we did, so it left a strong impression on both of us, although my brother Sergio really had started doodling way before me and I sort of caught on to him, so much so that one day he told me: "Hey, Tico , you're really getting good at this", needless to say I was very surprised.

But it really wasn't until around 1997, (The Special Editions were just beginning to get released), that I seriously pursued trying to get into Lucas Film. There was a call for portfolios at around that time, since the prequels were being planned at that stage-specifically Star Wars -Episode 1 / The Phantom Menace and among 10,000 entries only about two dozen people were chosen-which I thought was silly for such a large project. I was long distance on the phone with them back and forth, but nothing ever materialized from it.

Then I remembered the Battlestar Galactica people and decided to give them a shot. Their community received me with open arms and a lot of my artwork was showcased on the Battlestar Fan Club web site, plus I got a free table at a convention that they were attending and signed autographs on my prints. At one point, I had forgotten my metallic silver paint pen and asked Adam West ( "Batman" ) to lend me his. I told him: Don't worry, I'll give it back to you, to which he smiled.

I have to mention that by 1995 I had already started Technical Trade School Lindsey Hopkins and majored in Commercial Art Technology and minored in Graphic Design, which I was required to take, in order to get my Certificate.

**TBM: Did you try to imitate Star Wars with your art, and get it displayed somewhere, or did you do art just for yourself at that point in time?**

Yes, I did and started displaying my stuff at local conventions in the South Florida area at first and when I could not, I would create images just as a hobby, but I wasn't fully committed to the artshow circuit as of yet. That would come later on.

**TBM: Beyond Star Wars movies, and TV SF programs, did you encounter or read any print science fiction/fantasy material, either novels, magazines, or comic books? Comic books seem to have been a big influence on a lot of SF artists, yet you don't mention them at all in your mini-bio.**

Growing up I was really strictly and profoundly a visual person observing pictures, television and everyday life around me, so I really didn't read much by way of novels and periodicals and my childhood friends were much more into comic books than I was- although I always kept a few here and there. They would collect double issues of everything and bag them in the clear comic book bags and store them in large white boxes. Over time, I would have the opportunity to go to cons and I would collect 8"x 10" sci-fi pictures of anything that I thought would help me as reference material in the future. Although the comic book and sci-fi and fantasy covers did catch my eye and I would look at them and study them a lot every chance I got to visit the bookstore. I also tried to send many, many samples of my work over the years to different publication companies-only to be rejected-(something that hurt me and I found hard to recuperate from).





**TBM:** *Did you have to submit art samples to the Lindsey-Hopkins school to show you had basic talent, or did they let students jump in and find their own way? Also, why commercial art and ad design?*

I basically signed up and started as a regular paying student. I was there for about three and a half years ( January 1995-June of 1999 ) and graduated with high grades and my Commercial Art Certificate. I got into Commercial Art to both help improve my art skills and as a way of hopefully finding a steady job. While I was there, I entered many poster contests and received trophies and diplomas for my participation-

several times in first place.

Unfortunately, where I lived and still live today, I could not find work as an illustrator, and employers demanded I have "experience" coming right out of school, so that was very disappointing for me as well. I wondered how do you get "experience" if you haven't even "officially" started working yet? Go figure. I always thought that was stupid and it never helped me further my career interests.

Then, I met my wife and we got married on February 4, 2000. We had to find a place to live, pay bills and the rest is history. Ever since then though, I have had a mixed success in the art field, but not working for anyone else, just doing it myself as a freelancer. I have sold many prints nationwide on and off again at several sci-fi/fantasy conventions and have even been paid by a few semi-pro publications for cover and interior work. At one point, some of my work was even used to advertise some conventions, and as program book covers. I have also gotten a lot of covers accepted for the amateur SF fanzine field. Many of these can be seen right now on the [www.efanzines.com](http://www.efanzines.com) web site, as well as on my deviate art pages; which again is---

jose77sanchez's DeviantArt gallery

**TBM:** *Did you have ambitions to do movie set design, or storyboards, or were you thinking that designing advertising, or drawing steam shoves was the real way to financial security?*



As I looked into the motion picture industry, I had and still have ambitions to work someday there as a Concept Artist or even Matte Painter. Since I really haven't had any professional connections, this hasn't helped me either. Although I once designed several spaceships for a low-budget Sci-fi / superhero

animation film titled "Shadow Runner". Visit the site here: <http://www.internationalhero.co.uk/s/shadrnr.htm>

**TMB:** *I am also curious about a side-line you mentioned previously, when you decided to become a male model. How on earth did you ever get into that line of work, and how did it work out for you? I understand modeling is very demanding work, so if you had become successful doing that there would have been lots less time for your art career.*

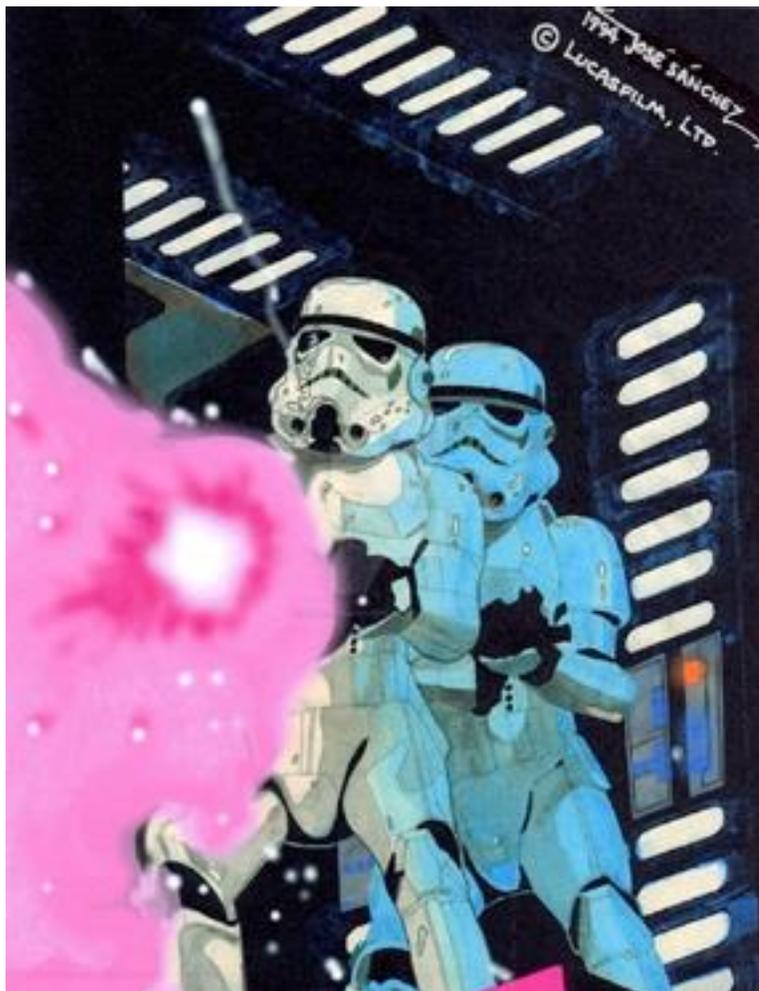
Yeah, this was something that I tried out just to see if it would work. A lot of my friends meant well and encouraged me to do so, but after about a little over a year, much personal financial investment, time, effort, driving back and forth to lots of commercial "try-outs", I decided to call it quits and get back on track. I did, however manage to land a job as an extra on the 1998 comedy movie "There's Something About Mary", that starred Ben Stiller and Cameron Diaz. That was an experience. Everyone complained about their feet hurting, since we were only allowed to wear dress shoes for the whole day--but we were all well fed and it paid \$50 per day. It was the first time that I had shark for lunch!

The picture that you have of me is one of my head modeling shots from the same modeling agency that got me that gig in the first place.

**TBM:** *How does your wife feel about your interest in science fiction art? Some artists have families that are very supporting, but many do not. Trying to do art as a career, or even as a part time second income job has lots of ups and down, and often the paying work is erratic. This must have created some initial uneasiness on your part and on the part of your wife too. How did/do you handle that kind of pressure?*

Fortunately for me, she has always been very supportive of me and my work ever since we met--although at first she really didn't understand it too much.

As far as doing art as a consistent paying job--unfortunately, it hasn't really been as successful for me as I would have hoped for, so any assignments that I did manage to snag over the years have been sporadic and limited at the most. So my income has basically come in from my regular daytime job, combined with hers as well.



**TBM:** *Your work has appeared in many fanzines. How did you first encounter science fiction fandom? What are your feelings toward the fan press? Has fanzine artwork been useful in broadening your reach toward more commercial markets?*

I walked into a comic book store in North Miami Beach, Florida that happened to also have Sci-fi magazines and the owner handed me their small 5"x7" fanzine. I had just seen Star Wars; The Empire Strikes Back and we were talking about the lines outside the movie theater, how long I had been in it (3 hours ) and he encouraged me to write about it and get back to him. So, when I came back to the store with my article, he

decided to use my manuscript as a movie review in the next issue and a humorous drawing of E.T. on a Star Trek communicator "phoning" the U.S.S. Enterprise soaring above him on the inside back cover. At the end of the review he wrote: "Whew!"

And this was my first brush ever with Fandom. As with everything, the fan press has its pros and cons. I think that the fanzines market overall has been and continues to be a positive influence for me to showcase my talent. You get feedback from the editors and audience and that's extremely important to me. This way, you hear what others are saying and you tend to grow from it-as long as it's constructive and not downright rude and nasty, of course!

Also, not everybody is so friendly and accepting in Fandom. There are a number of fanzines that no matter what they say, will not accept my work, so I have moved on to those that do. I understand that my work may not "fit in" with their purpose---but others [fanzines] I see could use my art because it fits their publication style, and in my opinion they are just stubborn not to accept my work. Some rejections are a mystery to me to this day and it evades me as to why... At any rate, this doesn't really bother me and I just move on. Got to stay positive above everything and move full steam ahead!

**TBM:** *You mention having an interest in racing motorcycles, and several pieces of your art have featured future cycles of various kinds. Are you actively involved in running cycles, either for fun or in competitions?*

Yes! -I would love to ride a motorcycle in the future-preferably a racing one like a Ninja! I think that I would do it for fun, since I have always been fascinated by cycles.

**TBM:** *Do you do commercial art full time, or is all your art these days purely fan efforts and second-income projects?*

I would say the latter, but if there is anyone is out there in the professional market reading this right now and would like to give me a chance--I will not let you down and would fully appreciate it! 😊



# cinema

The Feature film of the evening was “She Devil”, a science fiction picture from 1957. This was a cinematic handling of “The Adaptive Ultimate”, a landmark science fiction story written by Stanley G. Weinbaum in 1935.

Stanley Weinbaum was one of the most influential of the early writers of science fiction, a person whose vision and imagination literally altered the style and the focus of the genre forever. His first published story “A Martian Odyssey” appeared in the July, 1934 issue of *Wonder Stories* and was immediately hailed as a masterpiece. It featured Tweel, a totally alien creature that was unique, absolutely non-human, with goals that were not even remotely human in scope, yet a being that was immediately sympathetic. Isaac Asimov stated that “A Martian Odyssey” was one of only three science fiction stories ever written that completely changed the way all science fiction stories written afterward were created.

Weinbaum followed this success with a series of adventures set on other planets, including “The Red Peri”, “The Lotus Eaters”, and “The Mad Moon”. On planet Earth he set his groundbreaking novels “The New Adam” and “The Black Flame”, several humorous adventures featuring Professor Haskel Van Manderpootz, “Proteus Isle”, “The Adaptive Ultimate”, and more. Every one of these was an ingenious, carefully written adventure that significantly expanded the boundaries of the field.

Universally hailed for his brilliant writing and unique ideas, his career was short. Just eighteen months after the publication of “A Martian Odyssey” Weinbaum was dead from lung cancer at age thirty-three.

“The Adaptive Ultimate” became one of his most enduring stories. In addition to being reprinted numerous times both in and beyond the science fiction field, it was featured on the *Escape* radio program in March of 1949, then later in September that same year on the *Studio One* television series under the title ‘Kyra Zelas’, the name of the woman featured in the story. In 1952 the TV series *Tales of Tomorrow* ran it as ‘The Miraculous Serum’. *The Science Fiction Theater* series adapted it again in December 1955 under the title ‘Beyond Return’.

The story was optioned for motion pictures by Kurt Neumann who knew a good thing when he saw it (or read about it, in this particular case). Neumann had been born in Germany where he apparently made some short silent films. Information about his earliest years is sketchy. He came to Hollywood in the early 1930s specifically to direct German language versions of Hollywood movies. Whether that meant he directed scenes where the actors learned German words phonetically or whether he directed entire new casts of German speaking actors is also unclear.

What is clear is that he was connected with Carl Laemmle Sr. and Jr., the heads of Universal Studios, apparently helping them merchandise and prepare films for the German market, which was changing dramatically with the advent of the new Nazi regime. He graduated to directing and producing English language films for



Universal including “The Big Cage”, “My Pal the King” (with Tom Mix), and the original; “Secret of the Blue Room”.

This led to other work. He was originally scheduled to direct “The Bride of Frankenstein” but the job was given to James Whale instead. In the late thirties he moved to Hal Roach where he produced 45 minute films, comedies and other material, intended to balance out double feature bills. He was also able to make shorts that could later be welded together to run as short features for double feature presentations. In the late forties he worked with RKO to turn out their series of Tarzan features starring Johnny Weismuller and Gordon Scott.

Somewhere along the line he took to writing most of the films he directed, then he also took on the chore of producing them as well. He never resorted to billing his pictures as ‘Karl Neumann Spectaculars’ the way certain other triple threat movie makers did, but he could have. His success with the odd and unusual led him to concentrate on science fiction for most of the latter part of his film making career.

He wrote, produced, directed and merchandised such 1950s era features as “Rocket Ship X-M”, “Son of Ali Baba”, “Kronos”, and “The Fly”, his greatest success of the decade.

“She Devil” was one of three Neumann pictures released in 1957. It enjoyed reasonable success but did not make any lasting impression with either hardcore science fiction fans or the general viewing audience. The production features generally excellent acting from a solid cast of professionals.

The film follows the original story in the opening scenes. Dr. Dan Scott (Kelly) has discovered a serum that cures animals of all ailments, no matter what type. He is anxious to try his discovery on a human being, despite a need for additional testing. His mentor Dr. Richard Bach (Dekker) urges caution until the serum can undergo additional tests. Enter Kyra Zelas, a young woman with a meek, almost colorless personality, who is dying of tuberculosis. She become the human test subject. The serum cures her almost immediately, but it also seems to change her personality. She becomes assertive, with a hot temper and a desire to get her own way in everything.

The audience realizes things are definitely wrong when she jumps out of a moving car, runs into a shop, steals a dress she wants, then changes her hair color and demeanor by sheer force of will. Scott falls in love with the new Kyra, and altho she seems to care for him, she wants wealth and power. At a party she seduces one of the wealthy guests, Barton Kendall (Archer). When his wife objects and vows to expose her, Kyra disguises her appearance again, stages a car accident murder knowing she can survive any kind of injuries with her near instantaneous regenerative abilities. She then proceeds to browbeat Kendall trying to force him into suicide or a disastrous divorce settlement.

The two scientists wake up to the reality that they have created a monster, a creature that for all intents and purposes is indestructible. Using the same gimmick employed in the original story, they manage to cause Kyra to fall unconscious. In the original story this causes Kyra’s death, but in the movie the pair rapidly perform an operation to reverse the effects of the serum. Kyra reverts back to her original personality, but she also has the original terminal case of TB, now even further advanced.

There are many worthwhile things about this film, but while it is a good picture, it is not a great picture, and with an original story this strong it should have been memorable. The sets and the backgrounds are all good, and the camera work, including the eerie scene where the female protagonist Kyra changes her hair color thru sheer will power, done by longtime cinematic veteran Karl Struss, was very dramatic.

The problem, in my opinion, is that the film is too long. The original short story had enormous emotional impact on the printed page, and the 1949 *Escape* radio version at half an hour in length is a white-knuckle thriller. Trying to stretch this concept out to 77 minutes is simply too much. In order to reach that length a lot of padding and lengthening was done on scenes that should have been kept short and snappy. This not only slows down the pace of the film, it dilutes the emotional horror of the concept---that the most humane medical intentions have saved the life of a young woman, yet at the same time have inadvertently created a ruthless, greedy super-human monster without a conscience, whose new talents allow her to do almost anything she wants without fear of recognition or reprisal.

The producers and distributors may have also had some reservations about the film. It was originally released as part of a double feature on 1957 with “Kronos”. Still, I found it an enjoyable movie. Ironically Karl Nemann died in 1958 of a heart attack at age 50, just after a preview showing of “The Fly”. He died never knowing that “The Fly” would become a huge box office hit and a cult film remembered to this very day. Unfortunately the same cannot be said for “She Devil”.

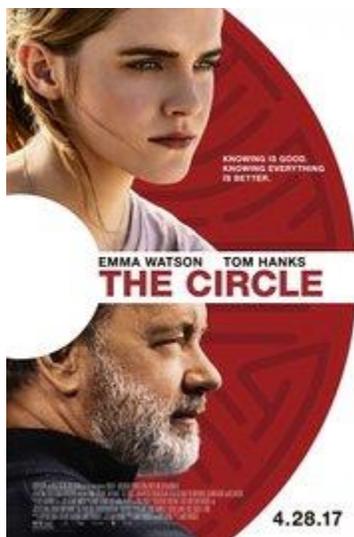
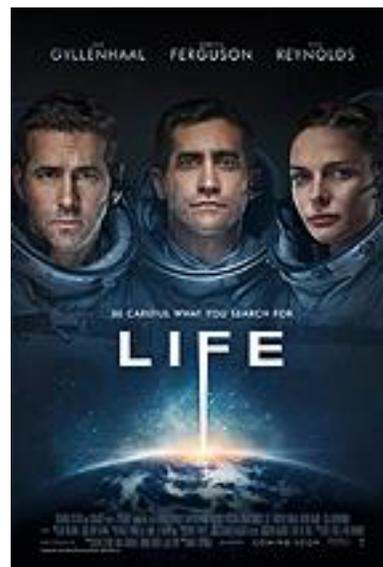
For those interested, the original story “The Adaptive Ultimate” can be read on-line (or downloaded) from this internet web site---<http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks06/0601511h.html>

---review by Bob Jennings

## Life

This is a first contact story in the tradition of *Alien*, but the plot is much simpler. (There is no android on board secretly helping the alien, for instance.) An unmanned probe to Mars brings back a soil sample, which is retrieved by the International Space Station. The astronauts (Hiroyuki Sanada, Ryan Reynolds, Rebecca Ferguson, Jake Gyllenhaal, Olga Dihovichnaya, Ariyon Bakare) find that it contains a one cell organism, which a school girl names “Calvin.” They induce Calvin to grow, but it gets out, of course, and kills the astronauts one-by-one. The special effects are excellent, and it is a competent thriller, although the filmmakers made changes to the ISS for dramatic purposes. There are also some scientific errors, but that is not unusual in movies of this kind.

---review by Tom Feller



## The Circle

I do not know whether to call this movie a cyberthriller, which is how it is being marketed, or an SF film, because of the satirical and cautionary tale elements. My wife had no hesitation in calling it “horror”, because it shows every minute of a person’s life being recorded, stored in “The Cloud”, and monetized. (The reviewer in *The New York Times* compared it to the 1977 version of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. That must be a trend this year.)

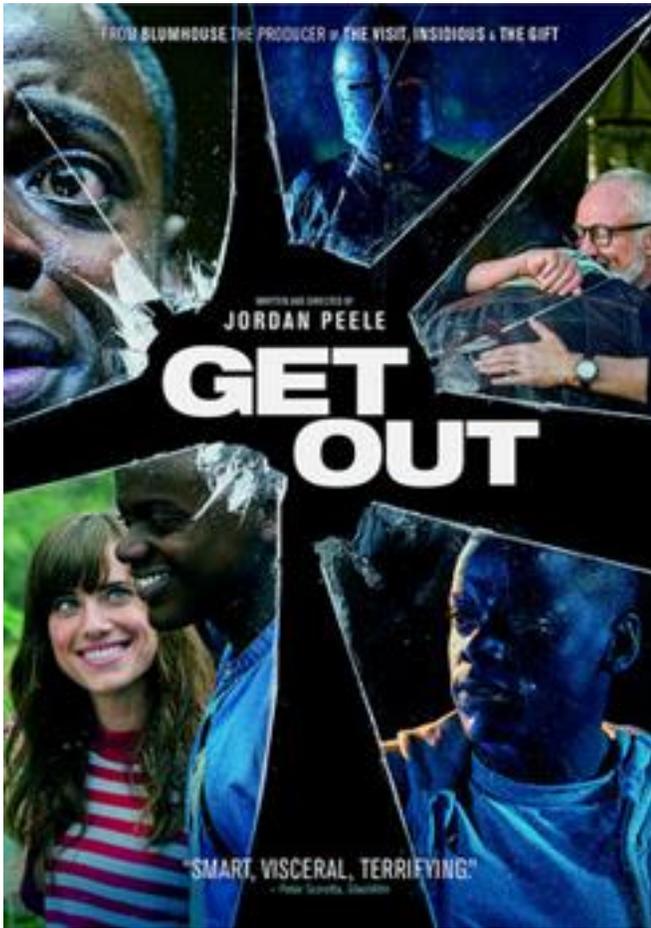
At the beginning of the film, Mae Holland (Emma Watson), an art history major, is working in a cubicle for a city’s water department. Then her friend Annie (Karen Gillan) helps her get a job with The Circle, the equivalent of Facebook/Google/Twitter/Apple, etc., in the “Customer Experience” department. (The company’s campus in the film is based on Apple’s actual campus.) While at work, she meets Eamon Bailey (Tom Hanks), one of the company’s founders. During a company “Dream Friday” pep rally like the ones the late Steve Jobs used to lead, Bailey reveals a new device, a golf ball-sized wireless webcam that can be worn or used for surveillance. As an

experiment, Mae agrees to wear one 24 hours a day, although she is allowed three minute bathroom breaks, and immediately becomes an Internet star. This instant fame has negative consequences, of course.

As a thriller, unfortunately, the film has few thrilling scenes, except for a car chase scene that is disturbingly reminiscent of the death of Princess Diana. As a satire, it is not sufficiently focused, although there are some amusing scenes, especially one early in the film when Mae is criticized for not spending her weekends participating in company-sponsored social activities.

This film is notable as Bill Paxton’s final movie. He plays Mae’s father who has multiple sclerosis. Paxton and the late Glenna Headly as Mae’s mother provide ample support and a sane view point of view. I would rate this film as pretty good, but not great.

---review by Tom Feller



## Get Out

This movie was marketed as a horror film, although the writer/director, Jordan Peele of the Key and Peele comedy team, calls it a “social thriller”. I would call it a good old-fashioned sci-fi/horror flick but with a new twist. The basic premise is an old one, used mostly in comic books and B-movies, but it is not revealed until the end. The twist is the racial element. In fact, if you miss the first five minutes and knew nothing about the movie going in, you would think during the first hour that you are seeing something in the tradition of *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner?* Peele cites the original *Night of the Living Dead* and *The Stepford Wives* as two of his influences, although I would have guessed *The Wicker Man*.

Rose (Allison Williams), a European-American woman, brings her boyfriend Chris (Daniel Kaluuya), an African-American man, home to meet her parents (Bradley Whitford, Catherine Keener), who are quite rich and have two African-American servants (Marcus Henderson, Betty Gabriel). Both parents make such a fuss about not being prejudiced that they make Chris feel uncomfortable, and he also notices something not quite right about the two servants. (One reviewer compared them to the pod people from *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*.) Lil Rel Howery plays Chris’s best friend

and provides much of the film’s comic relief. This is Peele’s first effort as a director, and it is quite impressive.

---review by Tom Feller



## Guardians of the Galaxy Vol 2

This is the sequel to the hit movie from two years ago and the superhero team, Peter Quill/Star-Lord (Chris Pratt), Gamora (Zoe Saldana), Drax (Dave Bautista), Rocket Raccoon (voice of Bradley Cooper), and Baby Groot (voice of Vin Diesel), are still together and add a new character to the team named Mantis (Pom Klementieff). (Mantis was created in 1973 by Steve Engelhart and originally appeared in *The Avengers* #112).

This time the film delves into the family relationships of two of the characters, Peter and Gamora, and we meet Ego, Peter’s father (Kurt Russell) and Gamora’s sister Nebula (Karen Gillan). The special effects are excellent, and this is a fun movie.

Diesel only had to say “I am Groot”, his character’s only line of dialogue, seventeen times during this film. Stan Lee, Michelle Yeoh, Jeff Goldblum, and Sylvester Stallone all have cameos, but Stallone appears in more than one scene and has the most dialogue.

---review by Tom Feller



# FANZINE REVIEWS

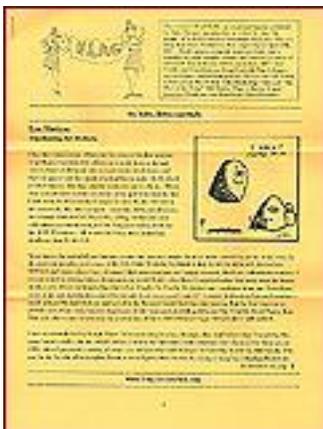
A regular feature of *TIGHTBEAM*

by

Bob Jennings

In my opinion fanzines are one of the pillars of fannish existence, as much the heart and core of fandom as conventions, correspondence and clubs. Despite the popularity of the Internet, there are still many fanzines being physically printed and actually mailed out to interested fans. I will try to take a glance at some of the print fanzines that I have received since the last issue of *The Insider* was mailed out. Copies of print fanzines intended for review should be sent to---**Robert Jennings; 29 Whiting Rd.; Oxford, MA 01540-2035**

Most of these fanzines are available to interested parties for "the usual", which is fan shorthand for sending the editor/publisher a letter of comment, or a copy of your own print fanzine in trade, or contributing written or artistic material for publication. Most editors will cheerfully send you a copy of their zine if you send along a card or letter asking for a sample copy, or, if you want to be a nice guy, you could enclose a couple of bucks to help defray the cost of postage.



**FLAG #19** 8-1/2x11", 10 pages; originally published monthly, but that schedule has eroded thru much of this year; by Andy Hooper; 11032 30<sup>th</sup> Ave. NE; Seattle, WA 98125; sample issue sent on receipt of a long SSAE, after that The Usual

This is another one-person fanzine. Issues of *Flag* will appear primarily in the printed format. This is technically a perzine, since except for the letter column, every issue is written by editor Hooper himself.

This issue is devoted mostly to fan history. Andy starts off discussing his efforts to help people, mostly the widows or relatives of deceased fans, to sell their accumulations of old fanzines. From there he moves on to a history of Shangri L'Affaires, the long running club fanzine of the Los Angeles Science Fiction Society. As Andy notes, the zine had its ups and downs almost since its first issue came out back in 1940, often with long gaps between issues, gaps sometimes stretching on for years, as new editors came on board, and then frequently left after only

heading the fanzine for a few numbers. Thruout its history the zine was generally above the pretty politics and sometimes nasty back-biting that oftentimes roiled the club itself.

The letter column this time round is expanded and does not seem to be very much affected by the fact that the previous issue dealt with Andy's efforts (with a list and photos) to sell off the toy collection of a deceased friend. The subjects covered are far ranging, providing entertaining, often insightful comments about fandom, science fiction, and the world around us. The issue finishes with a page of very brief reviews about current fanzines.

*Flag* has always been an entertaining read, well worth checking out.



## MY BACK PAGES #18

8-1/2X11"; 32 pages; irregular from Rich Lynch; P.O. Box 3129; Gaithersburg, MD 20885---The Usual

This is one of the most attractive, well produced fanzine being produced these days. The layout is quite professional, and the issue abounds with full color photographs on almost every page. The appearance is visually stunning.

Each issue of this zine is composed mostly of articles Rich wrote in the past that were primarily presented to a limited audience, as thru a science fiction apa, for example. Some of them are relatively recent write-ups, others are drawn from his long history as an active science fiction fan.

Rich has a government job dealing with environmental issues that requires him to travel frequently, and frequently he is directed to go to far distant locations. Hey, let's say it right...he gets catapulted to some incredibly remote places on this planet to deal with conferences and scientific forums. Sometimes he gets a day or two or even three off before or after the event, and he makes full use of the time to explore the local area and examine the history and sights. He

often discusses these junkets around the country and around the world, accompanied by color photos of scenes, people, relics, buildings, oddities--all kinds of fascinating things.

Not content with this globe-trotting existence, he and his wife Nicki also take local jaunts on their mini-vacations to places like Philadelphia, New York City, to concerts, and of course, to assorted science fiction conventions hither and yon.

And he writes well about his adventures. I have to admit that travel reports by most people tend to be pretty dull stuff. They tend to be mainly lists of people seen, foods eaten, travel problems and the big event of the excursion. For whatever reason fans seemed obsessed with the foods they gobbled down at conventions or on travel jaunts, and they report it avidly, as tho anybody else actually cared about what they had for lunch that particular day. Rich doesn't do any of that. He concentrates on things that a general reader would find intriguing or amusing and writes about them in a casual yet detailed manner that makes even the most obscure and unique thing interesting. It takes a good writer to do that, and he adds in lots of full color photos of some of the places and things he experienced along the way.

This issue details his trip to Norway, specifically to Bergen, by way of Oslo, including two missed flights in a single day, and having to hit the red-eye to London, truing to catch up with the rest of his business conference partners. Luckily Bergen turned out to be loaded with old, odd, and generally fascinating places and objects to investigate in the breaks between and after his international carbon sequestering conference event. As he notes in comments and photos, the scenery in and around the city is absolutely spectacular, with wildlife abundant almost up to the city limits. Luckily his event took place during a pleasant season. In winter the area gets plenty of ice and snow, including bitterly cold winds off the ocean.

Rich is deeply involved with efforts to preserve the history of science fiction fandom, a monumental effort considering how broad, and at the same time, fragmented SF fandom has been thru the decades. He attended and reports on the recent FanHistiCon, also connecting with fanzine preservation projects thru the University of Georgia presentation at DeepSouthCon, and then he offers a long, thoughtful remembrance of David A. Kyle, whose recent death at age 97 took away the oldest SF fan, and the last surviving member of the original Futurians.

There is also an account of encountering a pristine collection of paperback and hardback books years ago at a used book store, which he diligently bought whenever he had the money to spare, and the efforts years later to trace down the owner of the collection, a man who had carefully printing his full name inside every single book. Oh, and commentary on an unexpected late bloomer in the classical musical field who became enormously popular with music that everybody knows (because they've heard it so often) but almost nobody knows who composed it. Well, before reading this article I never heard of Sir Edward Elgar either, but I sure remember one of his most famous compositions: "Pomp and Circumstance", a perennial musical favorite at graduation ceremonies everywhere. All good fun stuff, and there's more here as well.

In years past Rich and Nicki won multiple Hugo Awards for their fanzine *Mimosa*. *Mimosa* is no longer being published, but folks who appreciated that publication would do well to check out this issue of *My Back Pages*.

## HYPNO VISION #2

5-1/2x8-1/2"; 16 pages, published irregularly by Bill Kobb; PO Box 30231; Pensacola, FL 32503; sample copy \$1.00, after that The Usual.

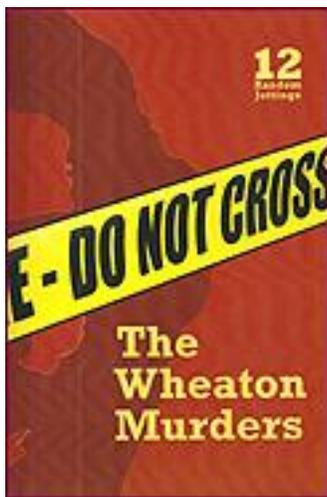
Some fans may remember that Bill produced the esoteric and always interesting *Kobb Log* a few years back, a mag that attempted to cover the history of SF/horror films while reviewing every DVD/VHS tape new or old featuring movies in the genre. *Kobb Log* is no more, but the same free-wheeling spirit can be found in Bill's new perzine, *Hypno Visions*.

In this issue he discusses his recent viewings of obscure films, most from the 1990s, many of them horror, and a lot of those were splatter films with lots of gratuitous gore and savagery. Some of the titles he covers are pretty good, but then, of course, most of the others are really not good at all. Results vary, as they say. Bill tries to find something interesting and worthwhile even in the most wretched of these films, which is sometimes very difficult, considering that a number of them are amateur efforts, turned out with rented equipment and using family members/friends as actors.



Some of the observations he makes are humorous, and others are charmingly odd. Here's a quote from Bill's review of an eminently forgettable far-eastern action thriller "Virgins From Hell"---'Sometimes a movie permits you to discover a special fondness for something you weren't even previously aware you had! In this particular case, turns out, I have a definite "thing" for Indonesian chicks running around in tight, shiny outfits, wearing motorcycle helmets and go-go books and welding machine guns.' Okaaayyy...

Each of the reviews takes up a full page, and comes with a photo still from the picture being discussed. Bill is reportedly still continuing his plan to create a list of recent decent horror films. Be it noted that this has been an ongoing project by Bill for, oh, years and years. Since new horror films, both good and bad continue to appear every season, even his latest lists are so fluid that they are often outdated before he can get them in print. Such are the trials of a genre film buff these days. Always entertaining, the next issue of this fanzine will come out whenever Bill gets the urge to write down another fifteen or twenty reviews. Considering how many movies he watches, that will probably be pretty soon.



**RANDOM JOTTINGS #12** 6x9" Trade Paperback; 80 pages; once a year; from Michael Dobson, 8042 Park Overlook Dr.; Bethesda, MD 20817; or as a pdf zine at eFanzines.com; available for The Usual

Technically this is a fanzine, even tho it also happens to be a trade paperback book. Michel Dobson who published the issue and wrote most of its contents, says so, right up front, and he says it again in his editorial. It comes out on a regular schedule, once a year, and the issues are sequentially numbered, so yeah, it qualifies as a fanzine, fancy tho it may seem to we mere morals on the fannish scene.

Mike relates that the theme of this issue was going to be Murder, particularly a mass murder/random shooting incident he was a witness to back in 1975. The Wheaton murders took place on April 13, 1975, when a single white man began firing randomly at African American people outside a shopping mall in Wheaton, Maryland. Seven people were shot, two died, one was paralyzed from the waist down. Michael was a chance witness to the event. The event made the evening news and the daily papers one time, and then was promptly forgotten by the news media.

But it was a horrific event that was never forgotten by the people involved. The killer was shot dead by the police on the scene. He was an ex-military man who apparently had little or no animosity toward black people before he decided to go killing black people for no reason that anyone has ever been able to discern. The black people he shot were up-scale professional people and teenage students. Thirty-five years later the event is still etched in the memories of the survivors, the police at the scene, and the witnesses, including Michael, who have all in their own way also become long-term victims of this horrific event.

Michael is attempting to gather as much information about this tragedy as possible, and he has made it a point to contact as many people from the event, and to make sure the Wheaton murders are remembered. This is a published record of his efforts in that direction.

The book is also not particularly well organized in my opinion. Some of the information and facts regarding the shooting are repeated, with no extra detail, three or four different times thruout the book. Michael says he wants to prune away the small letter column included here (comments about last issue of the mag) and

make this a stand-alone trade paperback about the murders exclusively, and have the paperback sold on websites such as Amazon. If so he needs to reorganize and rearrange this material to make a better presentation. Right now it all has a shotgun-scatter pattern feel to it with facts, interviews, news reports, his personal comments, comments by some of the survivors, Wikipedia entries, photos of the area, and more, all tossed together without a lot of coherent organization.

I found all of this stuff interesting up to a point, but then it became repetitious and not interesting at all. I am not sure other people are going to bother reading thru all of this, considering the amount of duplication involved. I don't know how people are going to feel about this book as a whole either. It is clearly not science fiction/fantasy/comics related, even tho there is a short letter column with comments on the previous *Random Jottings* issue. If you want to read about this pointless, tragic shooting event, then here it is, and the entire issue is currently posted for free reading on the efanazines.com website. If senseless murder rampages aren't your thing, then certainly pass this by and wait for next year's *Random Jottings* issue.



**DAGON #687**

8-1/2x11", 10 pages, published monthly by John Boardman; 12716 Ginger Wood Lane, Clarksburg, MD 20871; \$15 for ten issues or The Usual.

This is technically John's APA-Q zine, but he usually doesn't bother with mailing comments and when he does they are extremely brief. This is a mostly monthly fanzine devoted to whatever John happens to find interesting or worth commenting on at the moment.

This issue starts with some filksinging commentary, and efforts to create some new filksong verses about horror writer H.P. Lovecraft and his fiction. After noting that Lovecraft's themes were anything but humorous, John then goes on to show how a filk-style fight song could be concocted for dear ole Miskatonic University, mentioned so often in Lovecraft's Cthulhu related stories. Nice stuff.

He also jumps into the world of contemporary politics, by noting that the International Criminal Court has recently received several new complaints lodged against the current president of the Philippines for mass murder and numerous violations of basic human rights, not to mention violations of laws enacted for citizen protection by the Philippine legislature itself. He also suggests that perhaps some current and past American politicians should be indicted by the Court as well. John is apparently unaware that there are standing indictments against a number of American past presidents, secretaries of state, and some past heads of the US department of defense. Since the United States is not a nation that signed the agreement recognizing the rights of the International Criminal Court it seems unlikely that any of those complaints will ever be answered in court, and it seems unlikely to me that Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte will ever appear there either, even tho his nation was one of the original signers of the International Criminal Court treaty.

John also continues to air his opinion and support that all statues, all plaques, and all public monuments celebrating in any way any member of the Confederacy should be removed and scrapped immediately. Wiping out the monuments to history does not change history, but it does help upcoming generations to ignore the lessons of history, and that would be a serious mistake in my opinion.

This being John Boardman, there is also some discussion of happenings in the world of gaming, with an in-depth review of the latest issue of *Car-PG*, the role playing magazine that serves the hobby. He also asks readers for help in starting up a new mail-move Diplomacy game, since his recent attempt to keep one going has failed. I fear the internet has made play-by-mail games pretty much a relic of yesteryear. Strategy war and board games move much better on a computer where the set-up, movement, and results can take place in minutes instead of hours, or days, as was the case with play-by-mail games.

There are other short essays on the development of anti-communist thot in the USA. He blames President Harry Truman for the anti-communist mania; a theory I disagree with. Anti communist and anti socialist sentiment in the US has a long history, going back to the 1880s and even before. Truman and the post war politicians both here and abroad who suddenly noticed Stalin gobbling up east European nations after the end of WWII had some genuine concerns that the same thing could happen here at home, which in my opinion rekindled rather than ignited the long reaching fear of the Red Menace.

The remainder of the issue is devoted to APA-Q mailing comments, which are fairly oblique this time round, altho there are a few good one liners and zingers contained in the mix.

Most issues of *Dagon* make for livelier reading. Most issues carry a mixture of John Boardman's views on the world and they are almost always interesting. *Dagon* is fanzine that is well worth sending for.