



# Tightbeam #285

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This is issue #285, April 2018, 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](http://n3f.org)

# EDITORIAL RAMBLINGS

by Bob Jennings

## SOMETHING INTERESTING ON YOUTUBE

Our esteemed club President Gorge Phillies has drawn my attention to an unusual presentation of linked videos on YouTube. Produced by a person who refers to himself as scifisteve54, he is offering a remarkable series of short videos that are 3-D animated simulations of the insides of several classic vessels from the annals of science fiction literature.

At the top of the list is his compartment-by-compartment look at the inside of Jules Verne's Nautilus. This is a two part presentation that provides views of everything, including the interconnected corridors and the diving suit storage locker. The control room and Captain Nemo's study are as detailed as the original stories could possibly allow. Water-proof steel doors swing open to allow the camera to traverse the entire inside of the ship. This is very impressive stuff.

There are also 3-D looks at the Silver Moon from the Rocky Jones TV show, the space ship from the Buck Rogers TV show, one of the flying saucers from the classic "Earth vs. The Flying Saucers" film, Exeter's ship from "This Island Earth" and more.

I only had a couple of complaints. First off, his tour of the 113 Heavy Jump Multidimensional ship did not even load, even after five separate attempts on two separate computers with three different browsers. I note that Scifisteve54 keeps a count of visitors to each presentation, and this particular simulation only logged 246 views, so I may not be the only person having trouble making this video play.

My other disappointment was with the simulation of the Terra V, the space ship from the Space Patrol TV/radio program. Unfortunately the video shows only the outside the ship; nothing whatsoever of the insides. Also, the outside is a reconstruction based on somewhat inadequate data. The needle nose of the Terra V was never that long in any of the premiums, photos or other pics from the original series.

When I was a youngster, and one of the world's biggest fans of the Space Patrol radio program, one of the three Ralston Rockets touring the country to promote the Instant Ralston and Chex cereals, sponsors of the programs, stopped at a shopping plaza near my home. My Mom immediately took my brother and me to see this, and I was able to explore the ship inside and out (and linger inside a lot longer than anybody else, altho the people running the exhibit were pretty tolerant, seeing as I was such an enthusiastic fan). I was hoping this 3-D simulation would show the insides, but, alas, only the hull of the craft is pictured.

I tried to contact scifisteve54 to get some additional information about his project, but unfortunately none of the links to his website, or any connecting link work at all. Most of the comments in the viewer section are four years or more old, and his primary contact site—scifisteve.com will not even load. These are not good signs. The impressive 3-D tour of the Nautilus was uploaded to YouTube six years ago; altho his latest creation, the (non-loading for me) tour of the Multidimensional ship was posted a couple of days before Christmas last year, so he still seems to be actively creating these impressive 3-D simulations.

If anybody reading this knows sciefisteve54 or how to get in contact with him, please let me know. I would love to learn more about his project and how he accomplishes all this historically accurate 3-D imagery.

Meanwhile, anyone who would like to check out the site for themselves can follow this link---  
[https://www.youtube.com/user/Scifisteve1954/featured?disable\\_polymer=1](https://www.youtube.com/user/Scifisteve1954/featured?disable_polymer=1)

## STILL WEIRD ON THE WEB

As I mentioned last issue, the promo ads on my computer browser have been showing ads for sexy women's clothing, modeled by sexy young ladies, even tho I have never bought any such items and have no intention of every doing so.

But recently, a new wrinkle has been added. Now in addition to comely young damsels in very abbreviated skirts and playsuits, I am now getting ad offerings of attractive young ladies modeling---maternity tops! Whoever is handling the marketing for these companies needs to do a reality check, or maybe stop popping those pastel colored pills while he pulls those all-nighters adjusting his marketing plans.

STILL AMAZING AFTER ALL THESE YEARS!

The kickstarter campaign to revive *Amazing Stories* as a print magazine again was launched about a week later than the original plans called for. As of today's date (20 March, 2018) the project has raised \$9,846 in pledges from 220 backers, with 17 days left to go.

The project needs to raise \$30,000 in pledges to get the magazine rolling. What they would really like to raise is \$60,000 so they can sail along as a relatively secure print magazine for a year or more. The initial \$30,000 will get the relaunch issue going and enable the company to produce more issues, plus insure a strong presence at the upcoming WorldCon.

Obviously more needs to be done here. There are many multiple levels of donations listed at their site: <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/1898637184/the-return-of-amazing-stories-magazine> The lowest level of contribution is a mere ten bucks, which gets you the electronic version of the new mag. Twenty-five dollars gets you print copies as well as the electronic version. There is a list of stories and authors whose material will be featured in the first new print issue, a very impressive array of talent. Beyond that there are close to a hundred different premiums and gifts that are offered to help get reluctant fans involved.

Please check the site out, and more than that, please consider making a donation. Help revive the world's first science fiction magazine as a print entity once more.

ELDRITCH SCIENCE

One of the benefits of belonging to the N3F is access to a number of club activities and publications unique to the National Fantasy Fan Federation, including *Eldritch Science*, a publication devoted to science fiction/fantasy fiction and poetry that goes directly to N3F members.

The second issue of ES came out a few weeks back, carrying 84 pages of original fiction and poetry, mostly longer stories. If you are a member who somehow overlooked the issue (send in two separate parts because of its length), then you should check your email files and take a look at the mag. There are a few illos, but mostly lots of text, with nine separate stories, mostly longer pieces, and some assorted poems.

These are all well crafted works of fiction. The writing is smooth and polished, clearly professional quality, and most of these stories would have found a home in a professional published magazine, except for the fact that there aren't that many professional magazines, either the print or pixel kinds, still being published on a regular basis anymore. Increasingly most of the internet mags are closed to new submissions, and the print mags are so over stocked they can easily pick up material from established and recognized writers.

The other problem is that these are mostly longer stories. Increasingly existing SF/fantasy publications want short stories, fiction that is eight thousand words or less, mostly lots less. Another difficulty is that many of these stories don't fit convention memes. The surviving fiction venues like to boast that they are open to any kind of fiction so long as it presents a good solid story, but there are themes that almost never show up anyway. ES carries fantasy stories of magical adventure, a sword & sorcery quest, a SF story with a strong Christian theme, a lost cult adventure, a high tension thriller involving precognition gone terribly wrong and more. I doubt that many of these stories would have fit in with most of the existing publications devoted to fantastic fiction.

I thot almost all of the fiction this second issue was quite good. There were a couple of pieces that left me flat for purely personal reasons, but the hitting average is very strong. N3F president George Phillies is also the editor of ES, and is always looking for interesting stories, particularly longer stories, up to and including novel length.

Most science fiction fans may not have serious aspirations of becoming a professional writer (a very risky and notoriously unreliable line of work), but most SF readers have written a story or two, or three. If you happen to have a few stories lying around, consider sending them along to George for his consideration. Email submissions in almost any format are preferred.

Please note, this does not mean that George will accept everything. He is looking for quality stories with interesting themes, strong plots, and stories that will hold a reader's attention. He will provide some short comments and critique if your story doesn't happen to meet his editorial needs. You get a chance to have your material published and displayed before an interested audience. A letter column is projected for future issues of ES, so you can also get reader feedback about your writing. Please note also that all rights to material published in ES revert back to the creators after the issue is out.

You can send stories or inquire further by contacting George at [Phillies@4liberty.net](mailto:Phillies@4liberty.net).

# LETTERS



**Lloyd Penney; 1706-24 Eva Rd.; Etobicoke, ON CANADA M9C 2B2**

I have been doing a lot of fanzine letter catch-up, and some titles, I've let go for a long time while my job and transit there and back ate up a lot of time. My job is still pretty part-time, so I am catching up. I have 282 and 283 to work on, and suddenly, 284 arrived. I plan to create comments for all three issues.

282... I wish I knew why more people don't respond to the zines they get, but unfortunately, an e-zine becomes just as disposable as anything else people get in their e-mail.

My loc... Yvonne and I explored the new subway extension, and it's quite handy, especially for one of the local universities in the northwest of the city, and also for the city of Vaughan, just north of the Toronto city line. Well, did we ever see *The Last Jedi*? No, we did not, and I think we feel we're not missing much. I hate to say it, but the same goes for *Blade Runner 2049*. Yvonne is enjoying her retirement, and all kinds of projects on the back burner have come to the fore. You're right, retirement won't be goofing off, but simply working just as hard, but for projects of your own.

283... The March 15 deadline for voting in the FAAn Awards is close, and we still have to send in our votes. I had my doubts about actually attending, but seeing it's in Toronto, I scraped together the C\$100, and bought a membership. I am now kinda looking forward to it. My name is not yet on the Corflu 35 membership page, so I have sent along a note to Colin Hinz, hoping they have received my cheque.

No locs? Well, that's partly my fault. Working to rectify the situation...

Andre Norton was someone I wanted to meet, one person in a very long list. She was certainly prolific, and I loved her stories, and I've got a pile of them on my recently edited bookshelves. Like Clifford Simak, full and exciting stories could appear in about 150 pages or less, which to me indicated a writer of some skill.

284... *Oddities on the Web*? It wouldn't be the web it they weren't there. I buy very little off the web, but lately, I have been tempted. I would very much like to see the new *Amazing Stories*, but as always, I don't have enough money to support this project.

Nic Farey's FAAn Award zine gave me a little publicity, for most people never see all the locs I write. I do get a lot of clubzines and apazines, and I respond to them, too.

I can't comment on many books, but years ago, I was working for an architectural company, and in their lunch room was a copy of Lev Grossman's *The Magicians*. Both Yvonne and I were caught by it, and we looked for more. When we were at the Reno Worldcon, we met Lev, and that is where he found out his books had some real fans, for there was a *Magicians* party, with ribbons for all wannabe students from Brakebills Academy. We tried the TV series, but that didn't catch with us. We got all three books in the series, and we loved them.

And, we have seen the entire run of 15 episodes of *Star Trek Discovery*. In Canada, we see them on the Space channel, and it's part of basic service. The series is also shot in a series of huge studios on the Toronto waterfront. I will not say more, other than some say it's real *Trek*, and others say it's not *Trek* at all, and I side with the former group.

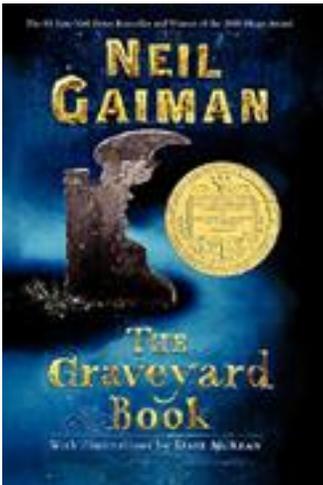
I didn't say as much as I wanted to in each part of this zine, but I think I have said what I can. I have a four-hour shift in the morning, so I will wrap this up, and get it to you. I hope to do better in the future, and get totally caught up with the wealth of fanzines I receive. See you with the next issue.

###Thanks for your comments. I haven't seen the new *Star Trek Discovery*---having to pay a premium for essentially just the ne program turned me off. Yes, there are other things presented on the 'special' channel, but nothing I have any interest in at all. I'm sure the series will be released on DVD in another year or so, and I'll catch up on it then.

I haven't read the *Magicians* series myself, but at the same time I bailed out of the TV series mid-way thru the first episode. The production struck me as being too self-aware, too concerned with its own sense of uniqueness to be believable for me. Unfortunately there several other major SF/fantasy television launches that have turned me off for the same reason. However, the first novel is in my To Be Read stack.###



# BOOKS



## **The Graveyard Book by Neil Gaiman; available in hardback, Paperback, and e-book formats**

I haven't read every single Hugo Award-winning novel, but I filled in one of the gaps by finally getting around to reading this one, which also won the Carnegie and Newbery Medals as well as the Locus Award for best young adult novel for that year. The cover blurb compares this novel to Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Books*, because the main character, Nobody Owens, is an orphan raised by non-humans. However, instead of animals, he is raised by ghosts, a vampire named Silas, and a werewolf named Miss Lupescu who reside not in a jungle, but in a graveyard. He also makes friends with a living female contemporary named Scarlett. The reason he is an orphan is that in the opening chapter, the rest of Owens's family is killed by Jack, a professional assassin who is the equivalent Shere-Khan, the tiger. Jack's motivation is not revealed until the end. Owens escapes only because he managed to crawl out of his crib while the

family is sleeping but before the assassin's arrival and meanders to the graveyard, where a ghostly couple adopt him. The killer feels bound by professional ethics to finish the job, of course, which sets up the ending. I feel this is a perfect little book, but for the Hugo I prefer something more ambitious, such as Gaiman's own *American Gods*.

---review by Tom Feller



## **The Raven, the Elf, and Rachel by J Jagi Lamplighter , Wisecraft Publishing, available in Trade Paperback and e-book formats**

This is a series of 4 books about Rachel Griffin, a young magician sent off to boarding school. There are some similarities with the Harry Potter series, unavoidably. However, Rachel grew up in a magical family, knew from very early on that she could use magic, and has been sent off to learn how to do it better. She already can fly well on a broomstick. The boarding school, Roanoke Academy, is on a floating island hidden in the Hudson River. There are residential halls, corresponding to schools of magic. Rachel's family, who are English nobility who can trace their descent back to ancient Rome, have traditionally started with music, and there Rachel has been dropped though this is not where she wants to be.

Rachel starts out being strictly obedient, doing what she is told, and attempting to do well. In doing well she is assisted by a magical gift, namely she has an absolutely perfect memory for everything. If she wonders what happened

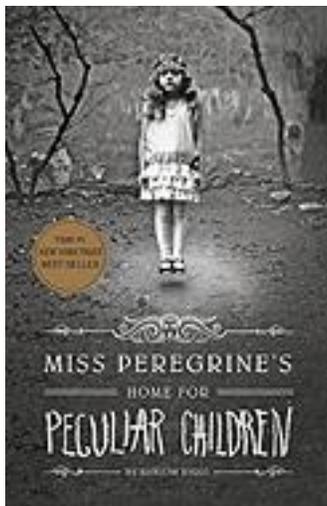
she has merely to replay the memory in her mind. There are then villains of various sorts, heroes, secret societies, a romantic interest who is 16 when she is 13, and significant suggestions that just as magicians hide

their existence from the mortal world so also there is some higher-level secret organization that hides its existence from magicians.

There is actual coming of age here. Rachel starts out as someone who will always do what she is told. It is a major step of character development in the 1st book of this four-part series when she disobeys an adult's instructions. This is a major character challenge. One of her close friends, the Crown Princess of magical Australia, moves in exactly the opposite direction, so there is an amusing back-and-forth between them. The series has illustrations by Lamplighter's husband John Wright, who is a writer himself.

The themes are arguably appropriate for young teenagers, notably what I assume is a delicate handling of early romantic relationships by young women. Readers who are looking for Judy Blume should look elsewhere.

---review by George Phillis



**Ms. Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children by Ransom Riggs; available in hardback, paperback and e-book formats**

This is the first book of a four book series (thus far). The book has also been turned into a movie (released in 2016), and a graphic novel.

The volume is a journey of discovery, in which the hero has a superpower— he can see things that others cannot — that leaves his parents with the impression that he is insane. He manages to persuade his parents to let him and his father go off to a mysterious island off the coast of England. Hidden there is the school in question, which for a while took care of his grandfather in the distant past. There is considerable back-and-forth. A number of people are decidedly not what they appear to be. There is an interesting and different use of time travel loops in which the people inside the loop are not reset, so they keep getting older mentally but do not age physically.

The volume is somewhat supported, not to make mention being made thicker, by the use of a considerable number of quaint photographs, mostly from long ago. The photographs of the other people with superpowers are particularly cleverly done. Unfortunately, in a number of ways the volume simply does not hold up.

First of all, the book ends in the middle. Something unfortunate has happened, the superheroes must set off to pursue the villains, but there is no conclusion. In addition, there are several points where things don't quite hold up well. Every day, the school mistress must give lessons to the younger children. However, while the children do not get any older physically while they are in the time loop, they have a full set of recollections of all of their past experiences, so intellectually they are in their 50s or 70s or 90s or ever older. What then is the point of the lessons? That part of the work doesn't hold up well.

---review by George Phillis



**Goering's War Book One by Kim Kerr; 432 pages; available as a Trade Paperback and an e-book**

The writing here is entirely adequate. This book is an alternative history work on World War II. There is a singular branch point, namely that Hitler manages to get himself killed in a 1939 assassination attempt, Goering becomes the German Lord Leader (in case you wondered how the title is actually translated), and then the history starts to deviate.

The Germans take Poland, advance into France, but when the German Tank Divisions reach Calais, instead of stopping, Goering orders them to advance. After all, he was a fighter pilot, a fairly good one, and that sort of bold initiative is about what you would expect. There is no Dunkirk evacuation because the Germans get there first and capture half a million British and French troops. The

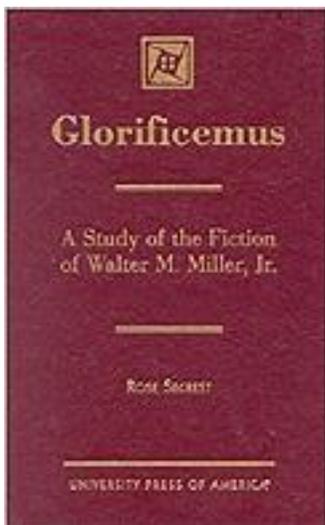
Germans then invade Britain, and by the narrowest of margins are successful. However, Goering sees no point to attacking Russia. To judge from things, he significantly demobilizes as the German army, which was really larger than the German economy could stably support.

The author depicts Goering in 1942 as a drug-addled fop, whose Junior cabinet members cover for his deficiencies. They deduce that in 1942 Russia is going to invade Germany, and try to take corrective action. At this point the alternative-historical plotting appears to fall apart.

A fully mobilized Soviet army and Air Force, which should have been complete with all of the updates and new equipment that was only being introduced in 1941, rolls into Poland. It allegedly takes a million casualties, this being no more serious than the casualties it took in the real 1941 in the Battles of the Frontiers. The red army then, rather mysteriously in this reader's opinion, falls apart and is thrown back toward Leningrad, Moscow, and Dnepetropetrovsk.

Meanwhile, for no apparent reason, America enters the war by launching a surprise attack on Britain, a surprise attack which is relatively successful. There is a great deal of detailed combat at the individual soldier level, which features large numbers of people shooting, getting killed, being blown up, running out of supplies, at tedious cetera. The overall plotting to this reader's eyes does not hold up, and much of the combat details seem designed mainly to expand an already hefty page count.

---review by George Phillies



**Glorificemus by Rose Secrest; Hardback only; list price \$82.00 but available at a discount on many book selling sites**

This is a serious literary study of the fiction of Walter Miller, Jr. The author is a real Neffer. The book was published by the University Press of America. Unlike most SF works, it is a hardback volume published on archival grade paper.

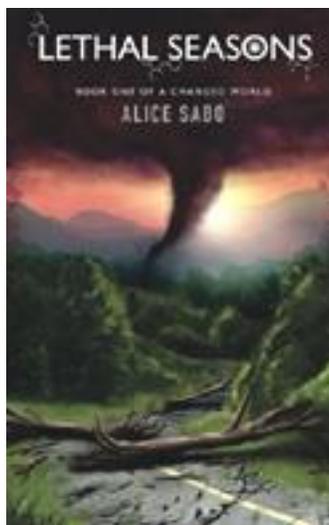
Miller wrote one novel, *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, and a very large number of short stories, which appeared in many of the standard science fiction magazines of the 1950s, particularly *Astounding*. The last story was apparently "The Lineman" which appeared in the August 1957 issue of *Fantasy & Science Fiction*. To understand much of Miller's work, one must actually be familiar with the Roman Catholic Church and also reasonably fluent in Latin.

There is a great deal going on symbolically and literarily in Miller's works, much of which I suspect went entirely over the head of many of his readers. Included in the work is a short summary of each of Miller's stories, a fair number of which I have never heard of, along with a discussion of various themes found in his work including conscience, original sin, women, pain, intelligence, technology, light, space, and Eden.

*A Canticle for Leibowitz* was originally published as 3 shorter works which were edited together to

form the novel. There is a detailed comparison of the changes between the original stories and the novel as it appeared. If you are interested in serious literary analysis of science fiction, which many fen actually are, this would be an excellent addition to your collection.

---review by George Phillies



**Lethal Seasons by Alice Sabo; 370 pages; available in Trade Paperback and e-book formats**

If a book makes me stay up late to get to a "stopping point," it has something special that really captures my attention. In the last several months, *Lethal Seasons* by Alice Sabo is one of only a couple that kept me up till 2 a.m. several nights in a row.

A dystopian novel, *Lethal Seasons* includes familiar elements like a runaway virus, androids (called biobots) with superhuman abilities, climate change, charismatic leaders who are trying to reestablish civilization, and evil

gangs trying to destroy it. I admit I don't seek out dystopian novels—get enough of that from the news—so my opinion isn't as well informed as it could be. The only thing I see that's really different in this novel is the use of train stations as a lifeline that supplies rations and vaccine from a largely absent “government” to keep people hanging on to life.

So what about this novel kept me up, whipping through pages on my Kindle? Good grammar, immediate immersion, pace, and character development.

I read, or try to read, a lot of books that are published by small companies or even self-published. One of the problems many have is that the authors never learned grammar and apparently didn't have an editor. In some cases, I don't even get through the back-cover blurb before I start grinding my teeth. While I might debate a couple of comma placements, this book didn't make me grind my teeth once.

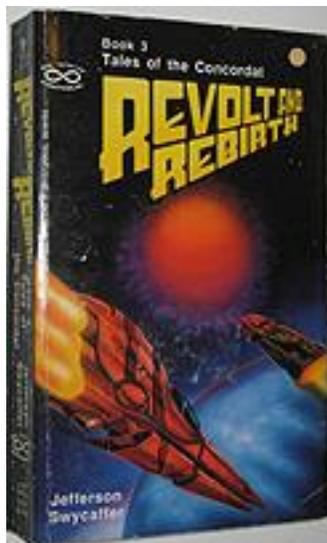
Another problem with some books I try to read is that they start way before the story does. I remember being told that when authors have finished a novel, they should throw out the first two chapters. Lethal Seasons starts with a bang and handles part of the problem of back story partly by using quotations from Angus Moss, the “charismatic leader.” Including those details in a book is completely in character for him. Individual characters' back stories are revealed a little at a time throughout the novel as they should be.

The pace of the story kept me completely engaged. Downtimes revealed interesting details about how life at High Meadow, a successful settlement of survivors, was maintained.

I immediately liked the main protagonist, Nick, who is the explorer for the settlement who finds other settlements they can trade with. I could identify with Angus, a man probably about my age, who is doing his best to keep a history of events and to prevent the old knowledge. Wisp, a biobot, isn't the evil or unfeeling character of stereotypes, but a fully-developed human being, albeit a manufactured one. Even many minor characters are sufficiently well drawn to bring them to life.

The night I finished this book, I ordered the sequel before I turned out my light. I'm still thinking about it and am concerned for the wellbeing of the characters almost as if they're people I know. Lethal Seasons meets my criteria for five stars.

---review by Angela Meyers



### **Revolt And Rebirth (Tales of the Concordat, Book 3) by Jefferson Swycaffer; available in paperbacks and e-book formats**

Revolt and Rebirth is the third book in a series of stories of the Concordat, a huge collection of planets existing in anarchic circumstances in various star systems in a far future time.

Revolt and rebirth are major themes and Swycaffer shows a vast vision both in space and time with a novel encompassing primal energies of both creation and destruction, along with human development and degeneration. The scenes of the novel switch from a time of revolt and destruction to a time of cultural re-emergence involving an empire known as Archive, notable for its vast storage of books which suffered destruction during the revolution. But the contents of the books are being reproduced from computer preservation in an era hundreds of years in the future beyond the initial time of revolt. We watch the development and conclusion of the revolt and are switched intermittently to the future recovery of resources and the emergence of a new spirit, with a suggestion that without the

lost knowledge the characters in the future society are doomed to repeat the mistakes of the past. In fact, we can see this beginning to happen in the some of the future segments.

The book opens with the revolutionaries beginning to assemble and conspire in the places of degeneration which they inhabit. We meet the characters surrounding the emperor against whom they are conspiring and find both the royalty and the nobility suffering and suicidal. Vicious arena events in which revolutionaries are being killed are pictured. The arena victims are individuals who were often randomly pulled off the streets at a moment's notice.

All of this is happening while interstellar flight and commerce are established and maintained, with interactivity among different worlds existing over cosmic distances. The different cultures are practically ground

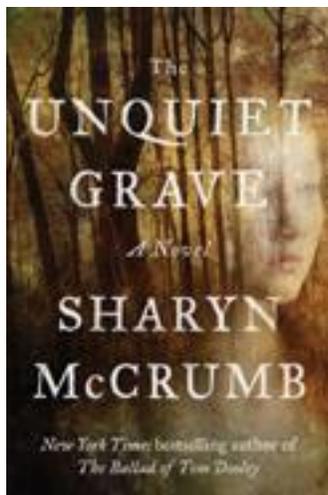
into the dust. Life is cheap and the people pay little attention to the termination of their own lives when it occurs.

Switching to the future, we find an avant-garde attitude coming into being, and a notion of restoring the arts after their near absolute suppression by the use of government run prison camps. The people are conditioned to their cultures and circumstances. They will fight when there is fighting, or just go about their everyday routine activities unless otherwise stimulated. All the people from the opening story sequences have been dust for long centuries, yet there is a great similarity of circumstances in the future culture which has evolved from those revolutionary times.

The major action for the future society revolves around a plan to bring music into the public consciousness once more, which is altogether against the long established governmental policy. The plan does progress and a sort of success is achieved by using a vast technology to make the musical score as effective as possible. When the people realize there is an actual opera available again, they attend it, and music is there once again. The rebirth of the arts is more of interest to the evolution of humanity than it is to any of the individuals, and in the end the characters wonder if they'll live to see any results from what they have tried so mightily to recreate, symbolizing what an immensity they exist in and how little individual importance they have even as perceiving entities.

The book gives us a study of an ageless topic in which we might think of as the Renaissance, the Crusades and the Industrial Revolution, and may consider for ourselves what effect these historical occasions might have upon ourselves. It is a book well worth reading for drawing our attention to these historical forces which shape our common history.

---review by John Thiel



### **The Unquiet Grave by Sharyn McCrumb**

In West Virginia, there is a legend called the “Greenbrier Ghost”. In 1897, a woman named Mary Jane Heaster testified in a murder trial that the ghost of her daughter Zona appeared to her to tell her that she had been murdered by her husband, Erasmus “Trout” Shue. McCrumb based this thoroughly-researched novel on that event, and all the characters actually lived. There are four point-of-view characters, Mrs. Heaster, an African-American attorney named James Gardner who helped represent Trout, John Alfred Preston, the attorney who prosecuted the case, and Trout himself in one chapter toward the end. The author takes the position that Trout was guilty, but is skeptical that Mrs. Heaster was actually visited by the ghost of her daughter.

Mrs. Heaster’s story begins in 1895. Zona, her pretty 20 year old daughter, becomes pregnant by an itinerant farm hand. Deciding that the father is definitely NOT husband-material, Mrs. Heaster finds a childless middle-aged couple to quietly adopt the baby and manages to keep the pregnancy a secret. Then Zona meets the handsome Trout, a blacksmith who has quite a lot of baggage himself. Only 35 years old, Trout had already been married twice. His first wife divorced him while he was in prison for theft, and his second wife died in a fall. Despite her mother’s misgivings, Zona marries Trout, but dies a few months later.

Most of Gardner’s story takes place in 1930, when he was a patient at the “West Virginia Insane Asylum for the Colored Insane”. Gardner had attempted to kill himself after the death of his wife and was committed. The first few chapters from his point of view consist of his conversations with his doctor, who is from New York and half his age, and Gardner’s role in the event is revealed through flashbacks.

Preston was an American Civil War veteran who served in the Confederate army and then became an attorney after the war. He was the county prosecutor at the time of Zona’s death. When Mrs. Heaster recounted the story of her ghostly visitations, he took a chance that he would be ridiculed out of office and had Zona’s body exhumed. After the autopsy showed that Zona had indeed been murdered, he indicted Trout.

The best part of the novel feature Mrs. Heaster, but the parts concerning Gardner and Preston tend to slow it down. The author makes the classic mistake of sharing ALL her research with the reader.

---review by Tom Feller

# In Defense of Wonder: Being in part a review of MATTER by Iain M. Banks

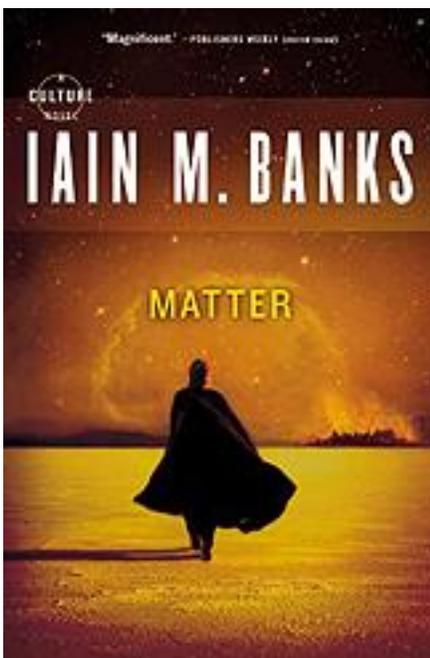
by Andy Hooper

## The Black Insurgent Banner

Trufans and Insurgents have been fighting like Mods and Rockers between my ears for the past few weeks, and once again, Arnold J. Katz is to blame. In recent issues of his FANSTUFF, Arnie traced the history and meaning of “Insurgency” in fandom. To Arnie, “Insurgency” is a shorthand term for all the skeptical, critical and fractious elements of fandom’s personality, while the more obedient, credulous and mutually-nurturing parts are best described as “Trufannish.” My first reading of Arnie’s overview thoroughly confounded me – his description made Insurgency sound like mundane bullying or an ideology embraced by self-identified fakefans, who held our pretensions, rituals and obsessions in general contempt. After reading more of Arnie’s sidebars, it’s clear he believes Insurgency arises as a necessary reaction to an excess of gormless trufannishness, which tends to suppress criticism and standards of quality in favor of rosy self-indulgence. It may be that Insurgents have a pre-disposition toward contrarian or critical reaction, but they would never express these tendencies so memorably if fandom did not tend to revel so indiscriminately in dreck.

The thing that gave me intellectual whiplash was that these ideas come on the heels of other editorials in which Arnie lays out the basic case that fandom is no longer, and indeed should not be, interested in science fiction. He has, in so many words, taken Francis Towner Laney’s fundamental question “Why don’t you leave fandom?” and restated it as “Why don’t you leave science fiction?” And to judge from similar sentiments expressed by correspondents to this and other fanzines, Arnie’s opinion appears to be shared by many fanzine fans.

It’s something I’ve been dealing with since I began to read and publish fanzines. There has always been a tendency for many of fandom’s best writers to become jaded and impatient with the genre of literature that brought most of us into the subculture. To them, it just isn’t very cool to read or particularly to write about science fiction. Part of it is just the crabbiness of older fans, who inevitably feel that contemporary fiction has to be a pale shadow of the works they enjoyed in their personal golden age. But Arnie genuinely believes that mere science fiction readers are not particularly likely to meet his personal definition of a “Fan.” In his estimation, a persistent devotion to the genre itself is likely to delay or deny the social connections that mark mature participation in fandom. In the Katz Universe, being mono-maniacally attached to a single interest can keep an “Interest Group” from ever making the critical evolutionary step into being a fandom.



At best, fanzine fandom now seems to smile indulgently at fan writing inspired by science fiction, before returning the conversation to cats or sports cars or convoluted psychohistoric theory devoted to fandom itself. At worst, SF readers are casually belittled, and ascribed a metaphorical coonskin cap to go with a taste for the aforementioned dreck. And “Fan History” is seen as

having only oblique connections to the history of science fiction, most of which were broken sometime around 1970.

So despite feeling a bit like a nerd (that word again) for doing so, I'm going to spend a significant part of this article talking about science fiction. And not just extra fan-friendly works of magical realism like ***Among Others*** – I mean thick, epic space operas with glossaries and appendices necessary to explain all the different varieties of talking space squid that populate their pages. If you find this too terrible to contemplate, I invite you to turn briskly on to other pages, where correspondence and fanzine review should provide ample opportunity for squid-free ego-scanning.

## Cultural Exchange

It isn't as if I can claim to be an especially prolific or ardent SF reader myself. I've not been a regular reader of any of the SF magazines for nearly 30 years, and have seldom even heard of most of the works nominated for awards each year. I have devoted an increasing amount of reading time to history over the past several decades, and then had all my reading habits severely curtailed by the problems that I had with my vision from 2006 to 2009. My eyes are stable now, and I am finally able to read nearly as quickly as I did before my vision needed correction, and the experience of reading and thinking about Jo Walton's ***Among Others*** has acted like a shot of science fiction adrenaline to my sense of wonder – just a little of Mori's zeal for the genre has rubbed off on me, and I'm looking hungrily at all the science fiction that I have been piling unread upon the shelves for years.

We've even embraced parts of Mori's reading list, now famously findable at Amazon and other online venues. Carrie feels certain she has never read LeGuin's ***The Dispossessed***, while I don't think I have ever actually read Delany's ***Triton***, although I think I've seen more words analyzing the novel than are contained in the work itself. We're supposed to undertake them more or less simultaneously, but one of us will probably have to abandon something else in progress to make that effort a success. I also had a scheme to re-read George R.R. Martin's ***The Armageddon Rag*** in time to write something about it for a March 21<sup>st</sup> deadline, but that's been revealed to be another mad dream. Because I'm 300 pages deep into ***Surface Detail***, a "Culture" novel by Iain M. Banks, and there's no way I'll stop voluntarily now.

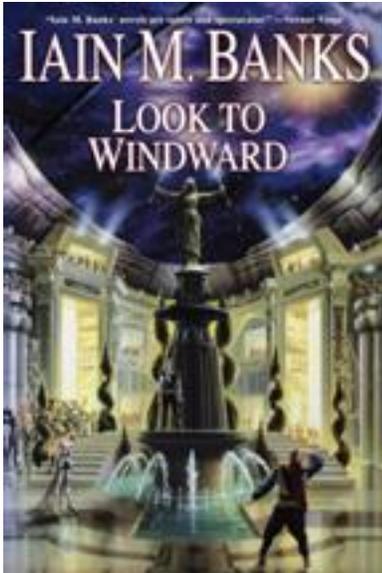


If I have a "favorite" sf author, it must be Banks – I have generally kept pace with the prolific Scottish novelist's work for more than 25 years. One of my earliest brushes with real writing talent was acting as Banks' liaison during his first American Guest of Honor turn, at Wiscon 14 in 1990. It was a memorable weekend – John Jarrold was along to spend a bit of promotional money on a flash young novelist, and he made sure the action was perpetually hilarious. We drank a great deal of Madison's first micro beer, Capital Gartenbrau, I ate a little acid, and John introduced us to the terror of the "Black Hose of Calcutta."

You indeed had to be there, but I also tried to listen to everything Banks had to say on the subject of writing. I think by that time I had read ***The Wasp Factory*** (1984) and ***The Bridge*** (1986), both termed "Non-SF," and the first three "Culture" novels, ***Consider Phlebas*** (1987), ***The Player of Games*** (1988) and ***Use of Weapons*** (1990). I was frankly dazzled by

those books, and thought that I heard echoes of Graeme Green, Michael Moorcock and James Blish in Banks' voice. And the vivid, teeming galaxy of The Culture seemed one of the most inventive settings

in the history of the field, a vast integrated interstellar society of panhuman and machine intelligences, living completely free from the issues of scarcity, disease and ideological oppression. He has called it his “secular heaven,” and living vicariously within it for the span of several hundred pages at a time has been one of the most profoundly pleasurable reading experiences of a lifetime spent looking for exactly that.



In the subsequent 23 years, I did my best keep up with a very respectable volume of work. Banks issued three Culture novels between 1990 and 2000, the inventive and quizzical *Excession* (1996), the subtly passionate *Inversions* (1998), and the dramatic, eye-popping *Look to Windward* (2000). A collection of shorter works, *State of the Art* (1991) featured three shorter stories involving the Culture, including one in which Contact agents choose to leave Earth to itself as a sort of control group in their study of panhuman societies. Whether this is a tragedy or a narrow escape from one depends on your opinion of the Culture.

Over the same span, Banks’ presented two SF novels not set in the Culture, the adventurous *Against a Dark Background* (1993) and *Feersum Enjin* (1994), notorious for the Glaswegian dialect employed in one of its narratives. He returned to the universe of the former work in *The Algebraist* (2004), another spectacular space opera that received a well-deserved Hugo nomination. And if I were to list his 14 mainstream novels, and the intoxicating travelogue *Raw*

*Spirit* (2002), this essay wouldn’t fit in an ensmallled fanzine.

There was an 8-year gap between *Look to Windward*, and the next Culture novel, *Matter* (2008). This was the beginning of a three-book outburst in five years, continuing with *Surface Detail* (2010) and *The Hydrogen Sonata* (2012). But this wave began at the moment my eyes were probably at their worst. I found it challenging to read a four-page fanzine article, so 500-page novels were not on my reading list. Even after my eyes improved, I was slow to begin reading longer works again. But in the galvanic afterglow of reading *Among Others*, I had a powerful urge to “catch up” with science fiction, and immediately thought of the stiff six inches of Scottish space opera standing on the shelf. I had read them all in order so far, so I began with *Matter*.

### By the Falls of Hyeng-zhar

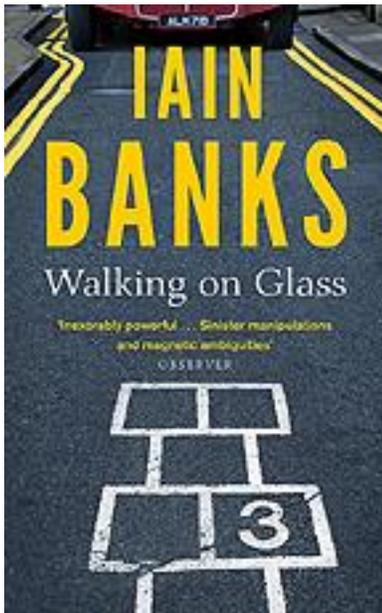
In almost all of the writing workshops that I’ve attended, including Clarion West, the population has been evenly split between writers who emphasize the creation of characters in their work, and those who concentrate on plot, often using the words “action” and “story” to describe the same thing. Maybe two writers in 25 are most passionately devoted to the settings of their stories, weaving long descriptive passages into their character’s experience, always trying to make you see it for yourself.

I think, for good or ill, that I’m one such, always obsessed with context, even in fan writing. To me, the popular observation that setting is like an additional character in a narrative is one of the most desirable goals for a storyteller. And in this capacity, Banks never disappoints. *Matter* introduces another incredible setting to the Culture universe, already populated with enormous Ringworld “Orbitals” and starships so vast they could easily accommodate the entire state of Connecticut inside them. The “planet” Sursamen is an Arithmetic Shellworld, an artificial body composed of concentric spheres with considerable void space between them, a structure preserved by thousands of enormous supporting pillars, termed “Towers” by the world’s inhabitants. Different levels of the Shellworld are filled with different forms of atmosphere, including levels composed entirely of liquids or preserved as a vacuum. Heat and illumination are provided by “Rollstars” and “Fixstars,” artificial nuclear reactors, mobile or static as their names imply. To travel between “levels,” one must use travel tubes contained

within the Towers. The exterior of the Shellworld is also heavily populated, in natural and artificial craters filled with artificial atmospheres. The variety of environments allows a Shellworld to have a population composed of many different genera of beings. Sursamen is home to at least five different species identified by name, and many hundreds more that are not specified. Most of these sentients are quite aware of one another, and Sursamen hosts a complex network of patrons and clients that mirrors its concentric structure.

The origins of the Shellworlds are obscure; they are distributed in a rough net around the perimeter of the galaxy, but some undetermined number of eons in the past a race known as the “Iln” destroyed a large number of the spheres. They can be unpredictable places to live; in the past, Shellworlds have activated automatic defense systems that exterminated the populations living inside them! Most are now under the control of one or more advanced races, which have developed methods for “disarming” their defenses – or so they hope. Many have one or more particularly advanced beings living in their cores, in retreat from galactic society – naturally, these beings are revered as gods by the other inhabitants of the Shellworld.

Sursamen is home to at least two races of humans, occupying large portions of the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> levels of the Shellworld. As the book opens, they are at war with each other, and the inhabitants of the 8<sup>th</sup> have inflicted a decisive reverse on the forces of the 9<sup>th</sup> level. But the victorious King is treacherously killed by his most trusted lieutenant; and the novel details the subsequent reactions and experiences of the former King’s three adult or near adult children. What complicates the picture dramatically is that the King’s daughter has taken service in the arm of the Culture known as “Special Circumstances,” the galaxy’s most badass espionage and midnight-black ops specialists. Her skills could reverse almost any calamity – if the Culture will let her use them.



This superspy Princess, Djan Seriy Anaplian dam Pourl (Banks names are always an entertainment unto themselves), soon resolves to return home and see what she can accomplish; her point of view begins thousands of light years from Sursamen and steadily grows closer. Her youngest brother, Prince Oramen, is trapped in the Court of his murdered father; his Hamlet-like point of view remains focused on the relevant levels of Sursamen, first the 8<sup>th</sup>, then increasingly the 9<sup>th</sup>. His elder brother Prince Ferbin was meant to die in battle, but survived to witness his Father’s murder, and begins a relentless flight upward and outward to Sursamen’s surface and beyond, in hopes of making contact with his fabulous sister.

It gradually becomes clear that many parties of increasingly advanced power and accomplishment are behind the conflict between the people of the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> levels. The web of manipulation and outright extermination grows wider and more terrible, until there is no coherent moral argument against intervention by the Culture, through Djan Seriy and one of their gloriously sentient spaceships. And while the star-spanning perspectives are a familiar feature of Banks’ work, he also hits tones of claustrophobia and eldritch dread that are positively Lovecraftian in tone. There are sections of Matter that have all the elements of a classic “Mythos” story, lacking only the Old Ones themselves to qualify for the canon.

And all this takes place against relentlessly vivid and exotic settings: An indescribably vast artificial water world, home to more creatures of one sentient species than all the Culture’s citizens, real and artificial. Dizzying rides on huge flying reptiles that are smokeless dragons in all but name. And most haunting, an immense, pulverizing waterfall, created by the drainage of a sea from one level of the Shellworld to another. The relentless action of the water has progressively revealed and destroyed a buried city composed primarily of improbably strong and beautiful glass. The city and something that

may lie beneath it eventually unite all the narratives, and then drag our perspective even deeper into the Shellworld's past. The book's ending is unequivocally positive, but it's important to press on through the Appendix to the Epilogue to get its full impact.

## Shipbuilding

To the veteran reader of Iain M. Banks, there is always a special satisfaction in the parts of a book that advance our general appreciation and state of knowledge regarding the Culture. In *Matter*, this is mostly accomplished through interactions with the spaceships that are its most mobile and memorable citizens. The Culture is not a society conducted through the use of spaceships; it's a society *composed* of spaceships, and other Minds with similarly star-spanning perspective. Some contain populations measured in millions, while others typically have no humans or other passengers on board at all.

Humans are altered and augmented in any way they can imagine; Djan Seriy's mentor in Special Circumstances is currently living in a body that resembles a large tumbleweed. But the demands of interstellar travel and other advanced manipulations of physical reality require Ships and Minds to extend their awareness into "four dimensions," per Banks' narrative. (Shellworlds also exist in four dimensions, which may suggest some of their value as galactic defensive grid.) This perspective is distinctly outside of human experience and presumable tolerance; so in a manner of speaking, the Culture's spaceships bend reality so you don't have to. How can I not love them, when they are setting and character seamlessly rolled into one?

The Ships of the Culture name themselves with the sensibility of a fan editor selecting an interlineation. They are equal parts non-sequitur and pronouncement of oblique portent, sometimes warm, less frequently cold. Much of the later action of the novel is aboard or abetted by the supposedly-faithless, secretly heroic ship Liveware Problem. And there are encounters with ships including *Lightly Seared on the Reality Grill*, *You Naughty Monsters*, *Xenoglocissist* and *You'll Clean That Up Before You Leave*. Other races have some remarkable names for their vessels too. The crab-like Oct provide passage on a ship titled *The Hundredth Idiot*, while the watery Morthanvelders ply the stars in *Now, Turning to Reason, & Its Just Sweetness*.

Science Fiction has always indulged itself in alien monikers and languages composed of clashing syllables, but Banks is never willing to stop there, to simply characterize something as inscrutable and move on. Every different race and polity of the galaxy is inexplicable in its own particular way. *Matter* doesn't have the multiple alien viewpoints of *Look to Windward*, but its human protagonists have such different mindsets that they might as well be of different species. The Culture doesn't see itself as embodying the interests of all humanity, nor does it require that "mankind" dwell entirely within its borders or follow its mores. But the option is always open.

It's by no means a galaxy free of conflict. The Culture and its peer civilizations have reached a scale where warfare no longer makes any economic sense, inevitably consuming far more resources than it can possibly secure. Yet warfare remains an important profession, a pastime, and a ubiquitous cultural phenomenon. The advanced races of the galaxy, the Optimae, can sometimes be satisfied with ritualized or virtual bloodletting. But most allow clients and proxies to do the bleeding, in the manner of Terrestrial superpowers in late 20<sup>th</sup> Century. At one point, Prince Ferbin and his long-suffering horse Patsy man Holse meet the renegade Culture agent who once gave his father critical insights on his path to power. They find Xide Hyrlis directing one side of a nightmarish war on a worthless, pock-marked high gravity world. The conflict is conducted entirely for the pleasure of allegedly more advanced alien clients, providing a very real form of "War Porn."

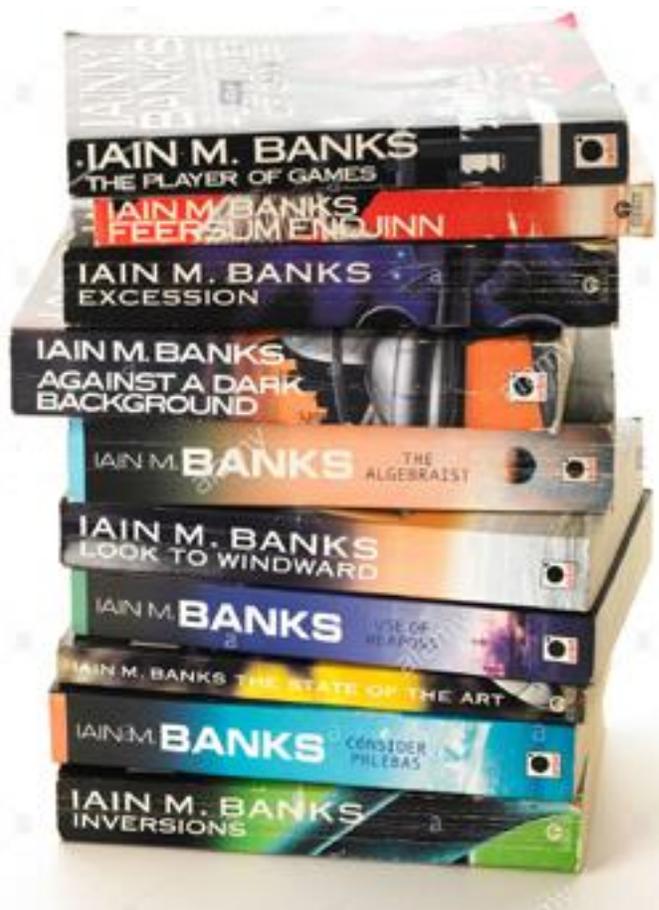
The audience with him seems like a grim echo or parody of the meeting between Arthur Dent, Ford Prefect and Slartibartfast, the Magrathean architect of Earth's fjords in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* cycle. Hyrlis is convinced that his every word is overheard and recorded by tiny devices,

and subsequent evidence shows that he is probably right. Prince Ferbin, coming from a technical complex charitably described as Steampunk, presumes he is simply insane. But the endlessly voyeuristic appetites of the Galaxy's Players make such monitors commonplace, a fact that enables Djan Seriy to know much – but certainly not all – of what has taken place on levels 8 and 9 while she is still many light years away. In Banks' hands, scale is a palette, used for making pictures out of time. After developing with unruffled deliberation, the book begins to accelerate at a steady rate, until it is literally speeding toward its own center at thousands of kilometers per hour. The many still mysterious and unknown levels of Sursamen, its purpose and history, pass in a blur as the story streaks toward its resolution. Like so many fantastic and speculative settings, I was far from ready to leave when I ran out of novel.

Yet I also exult; two more Culture novels to read, right here in my hands! And beyond those, and the other titles figuratively queued up in paragraphs above, I have a decade of new writing to enjoy, as well as all that work that had not yet risen to the front of the line before my vacation from the field. I wouldn't want to lapse totally into Zen on you, but this is all quite wonderful, in that it is so full of Wonder. Your experience may always be different, but I recommend a good Clydeside Space Opera to clean out the cobwebs, and set your internal controls for the heart of the sun once more.

**Matter**, by Iain M. Banks, Orbit Books, New York & London, 2008; available in Trade Paperback, and e-book versions.

This article was reprinted from Andy Hopper's excellent fanzine **Flag** issue #3 from 2013. **Flag** comes out on an irregular but frequent basis, primarily as a print fanzine, altho recent issues have also been posted on the efanzone.com web site. Winner of numerous FAAn awards as best writer of the year, Andy may be reached at [fanmailaph@aol.com](mailto:fanmailaph@aol.com)



# The Science Fiction/Fantasy Stories of Erle Stanley Gardner

by  
Jon D. Swartz

There's a story behind this. I'll try to be brief. When I was on the faculty at The University of Texas, I spent a great deal of time in one of the library's special collections buildings. I don't know how it came about, but on a floor in the building was Erle Stanley Gardner's actual study that the University had acquired. You could walk completely around it and look at every aspect of the room through the glass walls. Around the study, covering the walls on the other side of the walkway, were copies of covers of pulp magazines in which Gardner had had stories published. The highlight of the exhibit, however, was a red button that you could push and hear Gardner describe the objects on his desk and tell how he had acquired them! I spent many enjoyable afternoons in this room. I had never read his mysteries, and didn't read them after these experiences; but my interest in Gardner himself was aroused -- hence, the attached article that I wrote years later.



Erle Stanley Gardner (1889 -1970) was born in Malden, Massachusetts. His father, a mining engineer, took the family west to Portland, Oregon, and then to the small mining town of Oroville. During these years Gardner picked up a knowledge of mining, which was later reflected in his novels. His family moved around the western United States, following his father's work in the mining field. In 1909 Erle graduated from Palo Alto High School in the San Francisco Bay Area.

As a young man Gardner led a somewhat unconventional life. He was kicked out of Valparaiso University Law School in Indiana after only a few weeks, ostensibly because he was involved in a fistfight. Later he boxed and arranged unlicensed wrestling matches. While working as a typist in a law office in California, he "read law" -- and without any formal legal education -- passed the bar in 1911. At the age of twenty-one Gardner opened his own law office in Merced, California, but his practice was not successful.

From 1911 to 1918 he worked as a lawyer for a corporate attorney in Oxnard, California. During this period he defended poor Chinese clients and became known as "t'ai chong tze" (the big lawyer). In 1921 Gardner married Natalie Frances Talbert, and they had one child. From Oxnard he moved to Ventura, where he was a partner in a law firm. From 1918 to 1921 he was a salesman for

Consolidated Sales Company, but then returned to Ventura, where he continued as a lawyer until 1933.

It has been reported that in the courtroom Gardner radiated self-confidence like his later creation Perry Mason. He reportedly enjoyed developing trial strategy and trial oratory, but otherwise found law hum-drum and boring. He accepted a large number of cases from indigent clients that he felt were being unjustly exploited or wrongly accused. These cases did not help the profitability of his law practice.

In the early 1920s Gardner began writing for the pulp magazines, making his first sale in 1923. He quickly became a very successful writer of mystery, western, and science fiction (SF) stories before he published his first novel. During those years he claimed he worked at law during office hours, and however many hours away from the office were needed to create a solid case, then every other waking moment was spent

writing. Gardner was apparently one of those individuals who could function on very little sleep, so it was not unusual for him to write stories until the early hours of the morning, then bathe, shave, eat a quick breakfast, and head out for a full day at his law office.

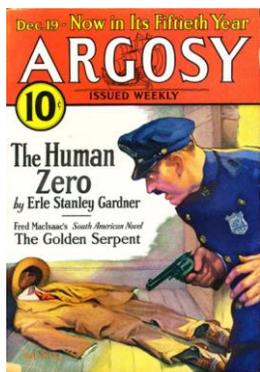
He had more than a hundred books published during his lifetime, most of them mystery novels. In 1933 his first Perry Mason novel, "The Case of the Velvet Claws" was published, and shortly thereafter Gardner quit the law business to devote himself full time to writing. Gardner's mysteries, particularly the long running Perry Mason stories, were extremely popular, and led to radio programs, television shows, and movies about his fictional characters, earning him millions.

Gardner's success as an author and his work-a-holic writing habits took their toll on his marriage. He and his wife separated in 1930, but did not divorce. When Natalie died in 1968, he immediately married Agnes Jean Bethel, who had been his secretary since 1930, the time of his separation from his first wife.

Readers of the Perry Mason novels will note that his clients are almost invariably innocent people in danger of being convicted by false evidence, heavy handed or malicious police methods, or lying witnesses. Thruout his life Gardner was a strong supporter of the underdog, and he was particularly concerned about people who had been convicted of crimes they did not commit. With several prominent friends he created The Court Of Last Resort. This project reviewed, and if sufficient evidence was discovered, tried to reverse miscarriages of justice. The project has many notable successes, and some notable failures due to government officials who refused to admit they had made any kind of error, even when confronted with substantial evidence of malfeasance. A book based on the cases the project handled was written by Gardner and published in 1952, and has been in print almost continuously ever since. A short lived TV series was based on the Court of Last Resort and their most famous cases.

Over the years Gardner invented several pseudonyms including Kyle Corning, A. A. Fair, Charles Green, Grant Holiday, Carleton Kendrake, Charles J. Kenny, Robert Parr, and Les Tillray.

Science fiction was a field that interested Gardner, but not an area that was as easy to write, or as profitable as his crime and detective material. Gardner never used a penname for his SF material.



## SF Stories in Genre Magazines/Books

The Munsey line of pulps were among Gardner's steadiest customers. He sold all of the science fiction material that appeared in magazine form to their flagship title *Argosy*, including---

"Rain Magic" (10/20/1928) [Intelligent cannibal ants, a monkey man, and a ledge of gold in darkest Africa – did Gardner read Burroughs?]

"Monkey Eyes" (Serial: 07/27 to 08/03/1929) [A grotesque scientific experiment in India]

"The Sky's the Limit" (Serial: 12/07 to 12/14/1929) [A trip to Venus via an anti-gravity drive]

"A Year in a Day" (07/19/1930) [Invisibility used for a crime]

"The Man with Pin-Point Eyes" (01/10/1931) [Reincarnation and lost gold in the West]

"The Human Zero" (12/19/1931) [A man is killed in a locked room and both his body and his murderer disappear, leaving only frozen objects behind]

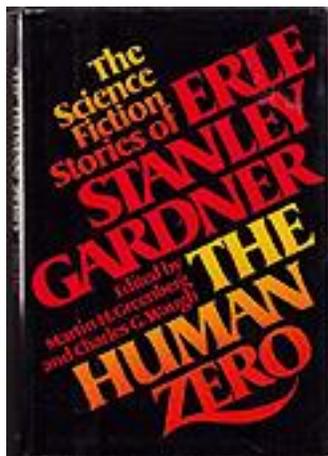
"New Worlds" (12/17/1932) [A worldwide flood is caused by a shift in the earth's poles]

In 1962 and 1963 several of these stories were reprinted in *Fantastic*---

"The Human Zero" (reprinted in the January 1962 issue)

“New Worlds” (reprinted, September 1962)

“Rain Magic” (reprinted, April 1963)



### **The Human Zero**

Published in 1981 by William Morrow; Gardner's long time book publisher. This book contained all seven of the *Argosy* stories listed above. Four were reprinted in this collection for the first time since their original appearances during the late 1920s and early 1930s.

Most critics consider these seven stories to be all of Gardner's SF/fantasy, but he also wrote many other stories with fantastic elements -- some of which included masked avengers and hunchbacked villains. In addition, he wrote series of stories featuring such fantastic characters as El Paisano (who could see in the dark), Reed Sample (a psychic), and Speed Dash (a human fly with a photographic memory and almost superhuman abilities).

Gardner's own account of his days writing about such characters for the pulps as “Speed Dash,” was published in the June, 1965 issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*. In this very entertaining article, Gardner said that Speed's fictional successes were always attributed to the fact that he led a pure life – an attribute of the character that was insisted upon by the publisher.

### Conclusions

As might be expected for a writer so prolific, literary critics in general have not been kind to Gardner and his books, either completely overlooking them or describing them as formulaic. Even a colleague, Rex Stout, once said that the Perry Mason books weren't even novels! On the other hand, one critic, H. R. F. Keating, saw fit to include a Perry Mason title (*The Case of the Sulky Girl*) in his list of elite crime/mystery books and wrote: “Formula fiction should not be despised. Many readers . . . want just this sort of book.” He also gave Gardner credit for helping put “a final nail into the coffin” of the brilliant amateur sleuth in American crime writing.

In an obituary in the March 12, 1970, issue of *The New York Times*, Albin Krebs suggested that the success of Gardner's mysteries “was due to his intricate plots, his happy endings, and his ability to entertain.”

Gardner's SF/fantasy stories, on the other hand, have been largely ignored. With the exception of the Greenberg/Waugh anthology and some brief comments on the three reprints in *Fantastic*, nothing has been written about these efforts.

On the other hand, Greenberg and Waugh were quite complimentary, stating that “Gardner possessed many of the characteristics of the typical science fiction fan: a feeling of not fitting in as an adolescent, an avid curiosity, a high intelligence, a great propensity for and enjoyment of arguing with people, and a tendency to alternate periods of solitude with periods of multiple companionship.” They concluded that, had he been born fifteen years later, he might even have encountered *Astounding's* editorial genius, John W. Campbell, and wound up as a SF writer. See Note at end of the Bibliography.

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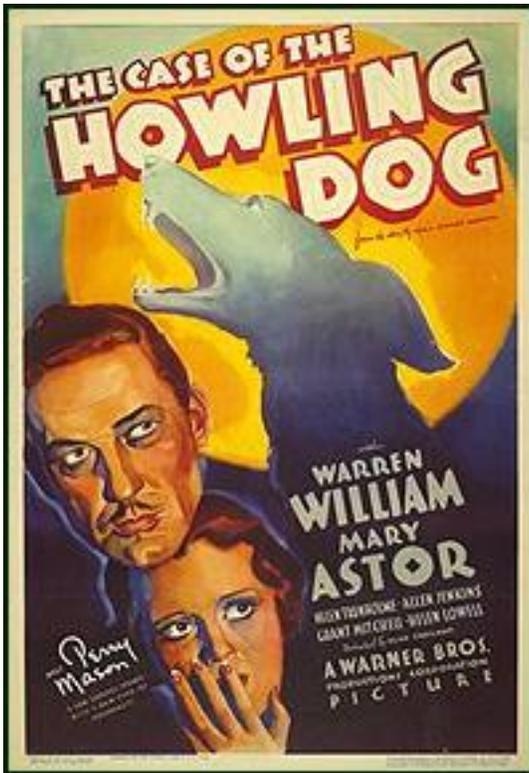
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# COUNSELOR FOR THE DEFENSE!

by Robert Jennings

I've been watching the original Perry Mason movies produced in the 1930s. Between gatherings of friends I have managed to see the entire six picture run in less than a month. Most of these films were based on novels created by Erle Stanley Gardner. Some are successful as films and some are not. Back in the 1930s having a book turned into a movie was a virtual guarantee that sales of the book would take a nice jump, and I'm sure that was the case with the assorted Perry Mason novels; particularly so since Gardner turned out new Mason mysteries on a regular and continuing basis.

Since Gardner was also hammering out mysteries and adventures for the pulp magazine market at the same time, the money and the prestige these movies created must have been welcome indeed. A couple of the movies are worth noting.



“The Case of the Howling Dog” is a Perry Mason thriller from 1934, starring Warrant Williams, the first of the series of Perry Mason movies Warner Brothers did based on the Erle Stanley Gardner novels. Williams is excellent in the role. He is the perfect Perry Mason, and starred in the first four of the six PM movies that were made in the mid 1930s.

The movie was based on the fourth Perry mason novel, which also appeared in 1934. The movie follows the setup of the novel closely. It does an excellent job of presenting a very complex crime case in the form of visuals that the average movie goer can understand.

An eccentric wealthy man bullies his way into Mason’s offices and wants him to help deal with a neighbor’s howling dog and also to draft a will for him, two tasks Mason has no interest in, until he mans asks Mason if a will is valid if the person who made the will is executed for murder.

The case has plenty of twists and turns, as wife stealing, double crossing, a confrontational murder, lying witnesses, blackmail and plenty of red herrings explode all over the place.

Williams does an excellent job of portraying Perry Mason, a successful lawyer who is trying to figure out who is who and what the hell is going on in a case where almost everyone has very good reasons to lie about their part in the multiple crimes that have transpired. Williams makes the viewer

feels he is in on the workings of Mason’s mind, that he is in a sense as much a part of this adventure as the actors on the scene. Each new twist is a shock and a revelation to the people around Mason, and each new layer of sub plot reveals new connections with other people and to the lies they have told to conceal their own involvement in the very messy murder mystery.

The resolution is very well handled. Until the last minutes of the movie most people who have never read the original book are surprised by the double revelations that lead to Mason’s female client being cleared of all charges, plus the final information that Mason has deliberately not revealed all of the important facts in the case for what he believes are perfectly good reasons.

All the cast in this production are outstanding. Headline stars and a tight, fast moving plot made this an instant success at the box office, which led to three more Perry Mason movies, all based on books by Gardner to be produced in rapid succession. Warren Williams is perfect as a mature, savvy criminal lawyer with a highly successful practice who is able to take or turn down any case he chooses, but is instinctively drawn to oddities

and curious anomalies that invariably lead to complex cases requiring detective skills as well as lawyering expertise.

This brings us to “The Case of the Black Cat”, a 1935 Perry Mason movie based on “The Case of the Caretaker’s Cat”. With this entry into the series Warren Williams has been replaced as the lead for reasons nobody I have encountered has ever been able to explain.

Ricardo Cortez stars as Perry Mason this time and does a good job in the role. This was a fast moving and entertaining film, so long as you don’t pay too much attention to what the plot is supposed to be. For openers, there is no black cat in this movie; the caretaker’s cat is calico, while private detective Paul Drake is portrayed as a barely competent lout. The story moves along well right up until the end, where Perry Mason has to explain the murder mystery and the convoluted plots involved.

The problem is that none of the clues and the events portrayed in the movie lead to the kinds of conclusions Mason is drawing from them. It’s been many decades since I originally read the book, but I’m reasonably sure Erle Stanley Gardner didn’t make a blotch of the clues he laid out for his readers, or ask them to make as many convoluted jumps in logic as this movie summation of the criminal events does.

Many Perry Mason fans consider this to be the weakest of the six Mason movies produced, most often mentioning the way Paul Drake is portrayed. My primary complaint is that the story simply doesn’t add up. To quote one of Mason’s courtroom lines, the film is trying to introduce facts not in evidence. I might also add that the summation is irrelevant, immaterial and failed to convince this member of the jury.

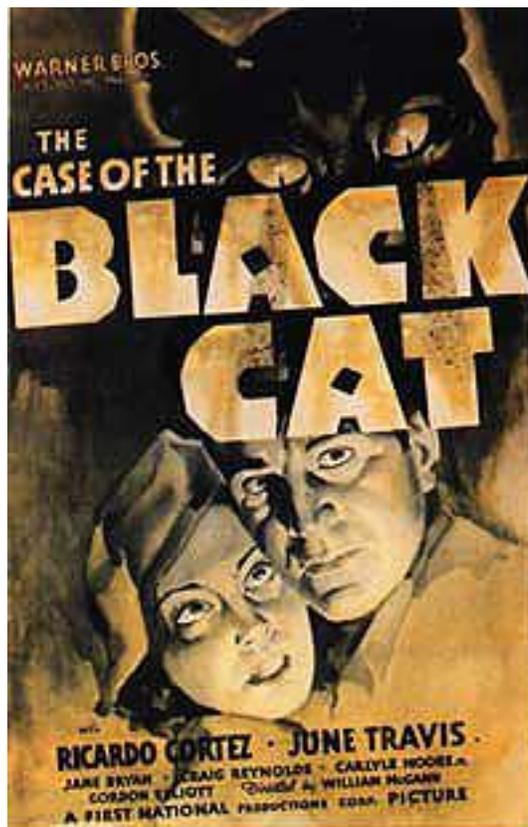
These early movies are far closer to the novels than the television program, as even a casual comparison shows. Constraints of time forced the TV series to severely condense those novels that were adapted to the small screen, including cutting out pertinent characters and sometimes eliminating essential plot details.

But it goes deeper than that. In the books Perry Mason was an attorney perpetually In Opposition. In particular he was opposed to slip-shot police methods, to evidence tampering on the part of the prosecution and the mind set of law enforcement officials from the lowest to the highest to look for quick, simple solutions in order to close cases without being particularly concerned about whether they were charging the right person for the crime. In the TV show things were much more sanitary and cordial. The casual police reliance on faked evidence or suppressed evidence or coerced testimony that was an integral part of the novel plots seldom arose on TV.

In the books DA Burger hated Mason’s guts and made no bones about trying anything he could to get him kicked out of the legal profession. In the TV series they battled in court, but got along nicely after the drama was completed. In the movies the DA’s role is also handled with kid gloves, presumably to forestall any potential local censorship issues. In the books Gardner made it plain that Mason will go to almost any lengths to uncover information that will help his client and break down the police evidence. In the earliest novels he is also not above using illegal methods to clear his clients.

The novels were so successful that CBS created a Perry Mason radio program beginning in 1943. This was a late afternoon fifteen minute five-a-week show that blended crime stories with soap opera. The stories were almost all originals, many developed from plot ideas Gardner supplied, and were supposed to run eight to ten weeks each, but sometimes the story lines ran longer than that, up to six months in some cases. The heavy influx of talky soap opera characterizations sometimes slowed down the actual plots, but there were enough action and dangerous situations to deliver a strong male listenership along with the ladies in the audience.

CBS wanted to turn the radio program into a daily television series in the mid 1950s, but Gardner nixed the idea after CBS insisted Mason develop a troubled romantic interest as part of the basic plot. Gardner’s



falling out with CBS meant the radio show was going to end no matter what happened. The radio show finished up in 1955. Sponsor Proctor & Gamble hired the radio writers and staff, and with CBS continued the series, minus the Perry Mason character, as “The Edge of Night” on television. This crime/situation soap opera ran thirty years on the tube, ending on Dec 28, 1984, after 7,420 episodes.

Gardner’s falling out with CBS didn’t last very long. In 1957 He agreed to the network’s idea for a prime time Perry Mason television program, over which he had considerable creative control. Gardner established his own production company, Paisano Productions (named after his Temecula, California home). He and CBS settled on a half million dollar up front payment, plus half the profits from the show, and, most important to Gardner, he got final approval for all the TV scripts.

In fact it was Gardner who picked Raymond Burr to play the lead role. Burr had made a career playing bad guys in movies and on radio, and had originally auditioned for the part of DA Hamilton Burger. Gardner took one look at the audition and declared that Burr had to be cast as the lead. And the rest, as they say, is television history.

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The following story is another classic of fantasy. It is hardly a forgotten classic, so much as being a neglected one these days. Originally written in 1910 by John Buchan, a politician and historian who was the 15<sup>th</sup> and longest serving Governor General of Canada (from 1935 to 1940) he was also an accomplished writer of adventure and fantastic fiction. He is best remember for his novel of suspense and espionage “The 39 Steps” which has been filmed four times and has never been out of print from the moment it was published in 1915 until now.

For a long time in the first half of the twentieth century “The Grove of Ashtharoth” was considered essential reading if you were a serious fan of fantasy and supernatural literature. It was adapted to radio twice, once by Suspense and then by Escape. Altho optioned for motion pictures, it was never turned into a film.

The times have changed, and this interesting piece of fiction is not nearly so well known now as it was in past days. Many N3F members have never even heard the title of the story, much less read it. We think it’s time to correct that oversight. Herewith, we present---

# THE GROVE OF ASHTAROTH

by

**John Buchan**

C'est enfin que dans leurs prunelles  
Rit et pleure-fastidieux  
L'amour des choses eternelles,  
Des vieux morts et des anciens dieux!  
---PAUL VERLAINE.

WE were sitting around the camp-fire, some thirty miles north of a place called Taqui, when Lawson announced his intention of finding a home. He had spoken little the last day or two, and I had guessed that he had struck a vein of private reflection. I thought it might be a new mine or irrigation scheme, and I was surprised to find that it was a country- house.

“I don’t think I shall go back to England,” he said, kicking a sputtering log into place. “I don’t see why I should. For business purposes I am far more useful to the firm in South Africa than in Throgmorton Street. I have no relations left except a third cousin, and I have never cared a rush for living in town. That beastly house of mine in Hill Street will fetch what I gave for it—Isaacson cabled about it the other day, offering for furniture and all. I don’t want to go into Parliament, and I hate shooting little birds and tame deer. I am one of those fellows who are born Colonial at heart, and I don’t see why I shouldn’t arrange my life as I please. Besides, for ten years I have been falling in love with this country, and now I am up to the neck.”

He flung himself back in the camp-chair till the canvas creaked, and looked at me below his eyelids. I remember glancing at the lines of him, and thinking what a fine make of a man he was. In his untanned field-boots, breeches, and grey shirt he looked the born wilderness-hunter, though less than two months before he had been driving down to the City every morning in the sombre regimentals of his class. Being a fair man, he was gloriously tanned, and there was a clear line at his shirt-collar to mark the limits of his sun-burn. I had first known him years ago, when he was a broker's clerk working on half-commission. Then he had gone to South Africa, and soon I heard he was a partner in a mining house which was doing wonders with some gold areas in the North. The next step was his return to London as the new millionaire,—young, good-looking, wholesome in mind and body, and much sought after by the mothers of marriageable girls. We played polo together, and hunted a little in the season, but there were signs that he did not propose to become the conventional English gentleman. He refused to buy a place in the country, though half the Homes of England were at his disposal. He was a very busy man, he declared, and had not time to be a squire. Besides, every few months he used to rush out to South Africa. I saw that he was restless, for he was always badgering me to go big-game hunting with him in some remote part of the earth. There was that in his eyes, too, which marked him out from the ordinary blonde type of our countrymen. They were large and brown and mysterious, and the light of another race was in their odd depths.

To hint such a thing would have meant a breach of friendship, for Lawson was very proud of his birth. When he first made his fortune he had gone to the Heralds to discover his family, and those obliging gentlemen had provided a pedigree. It appeared that he was a scion of the house of Lowson or Lowieson, an ancient and rather disreputable clan on the Scottish side of the Border. He took a shooting in Teviotdale on the strength of it, and used to commit lengthy Border ballads to memory. But I had known his father, a financial journalist who never quite succeeded, and I had heard of a grandfather who sold antiques in a back street at Brighton. The latter, I think, had not changed his name, and still frequented the synagogue. The father was a progressive Christian, and the mother had been a blonde Saxon from the Midlands. In my mind there was no doubt, as I caught Lawson's heavy-lidded eyes fixed on me. My friend was of a more ancient race than the Lowsons of the Border.

"Where are you thinking of looking for your house?" I asked. "In Natal or in the Cape Peninsula? You might get the Fishers' place if you paid a price."

"The Fishers' place be hanged!" he said crossly. "I don't want any stuccoed overgrown Dutch farm. I might as well be at Roehampton as in the Cape."

He got up and walked to the far side of the fire, where a lane ran down through thorn-scrub to a gully of the hills. The moon was silvering the bush of the plains, forty miles off and three thousand feet below us.

"I am going to live somewhere hereabouts," he answered at last.

I whistled. "Then you've got to put your hand in your pocket, old man. You'll have to make everything, including a map of the countryside."

"I know," he said; "that's where the fun comes in. Hang it all, why shouldn't I indulge my fancy? I'm uncommonly well off, and I haven't chick or child to leave it to. Supposing I'm a hundred miles from rail-head, what about it? I'll make a motor-road and fix up a telephone. I'll grow most of my supplies, and start a colony to provide labour. When you come and stay with me, you'll get the best food and drink on earth, and sport that will make your mouth water. I'll put Lochleven trout in these streams—at 6000 feet you can do anything. We'll have a pack of hounds, too, and we can drive pig in the woods, and if we want big game there are the Mangwe flats at our feet. I tell you I'll make such a country-house as nobody ever dreamed of. A man will come plumb out of stark savagery into lawns and rose-gardens." Lawson flung himself into his chair again and smiled dreamily at the fire.

"But why here, of all places?" I persisted. I was not feeling very well and did not care for the country.

"I can't quite explain. I think it's the sort of land I have always been looking for. I always fancied a house on a green plateau in a decent climate looking down on the tropics. I like heat and colour, you know, but I like hills too, and greenery, and the things that bring back Scotland. Give me a cross between Teviotdale and the Orinoco, and, by Gad! I think I've got it here."

I watched my friend curiously, as with bright eyes and eager voice he talked of his new fad. The two races were very clear in him—the one desiring gorgeousness, the other athirst for the shooting spaces of the North. He began to plan out the house. He would get Adamson to design it, and it was to grow out of the landscape like a stone on the hillside. There would be wide verandahs and cool halls, but great fire-places against winter time. It would all be very simple and fresh—"clean as morning" was his odd phrase; but then

another idea supervened, and he talked of bringing the Tintorets from Hill Street. "I want it to be a civilized house, you know. No silly luxury, but the best pictures and china and books. . . . I'll have all the furniture made after the old plain English models out of native woods. I don't want second-hand sticks in a new country. Yes, by Jove, the Tintorets are a great idea, and all those Ming pots I bought. I had meant to sell them, but I'll have them out here."

He talked for a good hour of what he would do, and his dream grew richer as he talked, till by the time we went to bed he had sketched something liker a palace than a country-house. Lawson was by no means a luxurious man. At present he was well content with a Wolseley valise, and shaved cheerfully out of a tin mug. It struck me as odd that a man so simple in his habits should have so sumptuous a taste in bric-a-brac. I told myself, as I turned in, that the Saxon mother from the Midlands had done little to dilute the strong wine of the East.

It drizzled next morning when we inspanned, and I mounted my horse in a bad temper. I had some fever on me, I think, and I hated this lush yet frigid table-land, where all the winds on earth lay in wait for one's marrow. Lawson was, as usual, in great spirits. We were not hunting, but shifting our hunting-ground, so all morning we travelled fast to the north along the rim of the uplands.

At midday it cleared, and the afternoon was a pageant of pure colour. The wind sank to a low breeze; the sun lit the infinite green spaces, and kindled the wet forest to a jewelled coronal. Lawson gaspingly admired it all, as he cantered bareheaded up a bracken-clad slope. "God's country," he said twenty times. "I've found it." Take a piece of Sussex downland; put a stream in every hollow and a patch of wood; and at the edge, where the cliffs at home would fall to the sea, put a cloak of forest muffling the scarp and dropping thousands of feet to the blue plains. Take the diamond air of the Gornergrat, and the riot of colour which you get by a West Highland lochside in late September. Put flowers everywhere, the things we grow in hothouses, geraniums like sunshades and arums like trumpets. That will give you a notion of the countryside we were in. I began to see that after all it was out of the common.

And just before sunset we came over a ridge and found something better. It was a shallow glen, half a mile wide, down which ran a blue-grey stream in linns like the Spean, till at the edge of the plateau it leaped into the dim forest in a snowy cascade. The opposite side ran up in gentle slopes to a rocky knoll, from which the eye had a noble prospect of the plains. All down the glen were little copses, half moons of green edging some silvery shore of the burn, or delicate clusters of tall trees nodding on the hill brow. The place so satisfied the eye that for the sheer wonder of its perfection we stopped and stared in silence for many minutes.

Then "The House," I said, and Lawson replied softly, "The House!"

We rode slowly into the glen in the mulberry gloaming. Our transport wagons were half an hour behind, so we had time to explore. Lawson dismounted and plucked handfuls of flowers from the water-meadows. He was singing to himself all the time—an old French catch about Cadet Rousselle and his trois maisons.

"Who owns it?" I asked. "My firm, as like as not. We have miles of land about here. But whoever the man is, he has got to sell. Here I build my tabernacle, old man. Here, and nowhere else!"

In the very centre of the glen, in a loop of the stream, was one copse which even in that half light struck me as different from the others. It was of tall, slim, fairy-like trees, the kind of wood the monks painted in old missals. No, I rejected the thought. It was no Christian wood. It was not a copse, but a "grove,"—one such as Artemis may have flitted through in the moonlight. It was small, forty or fifty yards in diameter, and there was a dark something at the heart of it which for a second I thought was a house.

We turned between the slender trees, and—was it fancy?—an odd tremor went through me. I felt as if I were penetrating the temenos of some strange and lovely divinity, the goddess of this pleasant vale. There was a spell in the air, it seemed, and an odd dead silence.

Suddenly my horse started at a flutter of light wings. A flock of doves rose from the branches, and I saw the burnished green of their plumes against the opal sky. Lawson did not seem to notice them. I saw his keen eyes staring at the centre of the grove and what stood there.

It was a little conical tower, ancient and lichened, but, so far as I could judge, quite flawless. You know the famous Conical Temple at Zimbabwe, of which prints are in every guide-book. This was of the same type, but a thousandfold more perfect. It stood about thirty feet high, of solid masonry, without door or window or cranny, as shapely as when it first came from the hands of the old builders. Again I had the sense of breaking in on a sanctuary. What right had I, a common vulgar modern, to be looking at this fair thing, among these delicate trees, which some white goddess had once taken for her shrine?

Lawson broke in on my absorption. "Let's get out of this," he said hoarsely, and he took my horse's bridle (he had left his own beast at the edge) and led him back to the open. But I noticed that his eyes were always turning back, and that his hand trembled.

"That settles it," I said after supper. "What do you want with your mediaeval Venetians and your Chinese pots now? You will have the finest antique in the world in your garden—a temple as old as time, and in a land which they say has no history. You had the right inspiration this time."

I think I have said that Lawson had hungry eyes. In his enthusiasm they used to glow and brighten; but now, as he sat looking down at the olive shades of the glen, they seemed ravenous in their fire. He had hardly spoken a word since we left the wood.

"Where can I read about those things?" he asked, and I gave him the names of books. Then, an hour later, he asked me who were the builders. I told him the little I knew about Phoenician and Sabaaan wanderings, and the ritual of Sidon and Tyre. He repeated some names to himself and went soon to bed.

As I turned in, I had one last look over the glen, which lay ivory and black in the moon. I seemed to hear a faint echo of wings, and to see over the little grove a cloud of light visitants. "The Doves of Ashtaroth have come back," I said to myself. "It is a good omen. They accept the new tenant." But as I fell asleep I had a sudden thought that I was saying something rather terrible.

## II

THREE years later, pretty nearly to a day, I came back to see what Lawson had made of his hobby. He had bidden me often to Welgevonden, as he chose to call it—though I do not know why he should have fixed a Dutch name to a countryside where Boer never trod. At the last there had been some confusion about dates, and I wired the time of my arrival, and set off without an answer. A motor met me at the queer little wayside station of Taqui, and after many miles on a doubtful highway I came to the gates of the park, and a road on which it was a delight to move. Three years had wrought little difference in the landscape. Lawson had done some planting—conifers and flowering shrubs and such-like—but wisely he had resolved that Nature had for the most part forestalled him. All the same, he must have spent a mint of money. The drive could not have been beaten in England, and fringes of mown turf on either hand had been pared out of the lush meadows. When we came over the edge of the hill and looked down on the secret glen, I could not repress a cry of pleasure. The house stood on the farther ridge, the view-point of the whole neighbourhood; and its brown timbers and white rough-cast walls melted into the hillside as if it had been there from the beginning of 'things. The vale below was ordered in lawns and gardens. A blue lake received the rapids of the stream, and its banks were a maze of green shades and glorious masses of blossom. I noticed, too, that the little grove we had explored on our first visit stood alone in a big stretch of lawn, so that its perfection might be clearly seen. Lawson had excellent taste, or he had had the best advice.

The butler told me that his master was expected home shortly, and took me into the library for tea. Lawson had left his Tintorets and Ming pots at home after all. It was a long, low room, panelled in teak half-way up the walls, and the shelves held a multitude of fine bindings. There were good rugs on the parquet floor, but no ornaments anywhere, save three. On the carved mantelpiece stood two of the old soap-stone birds which they used to find at Zimbabwe, and between, on an ebony stand, a half moon of alabaster, curiously carved with zodiacal figures. My host had altered his scheme of furnishing, but I approved the change.

He came in about half-past six, after I had consumed two cigars and all but fallen asleep. Three years make a difference in most men, but I was not prepared for the change in Lawson. For one thing, he had grown fat. In place of the lean young man I had known, I saw a heavy, flaccid being, who shuffled in his gait, and seemed tired and listless. His sunburn had gone, and his face was as pasty as a city clerk's. He had been walking, and wore shapeless flannel clothes, which hung loose even on his enlarged figure. And the worst of it was, that he did not seem over-pleased to see me. He murmured some-thing about my journey, and then flung himself into an armchair and looked out of the window.

I asked him if he had been ill.

"Ill! No!" he said crossly. "Nothing of the kind. I'm perfectly well."

"You don't look as fit as this place should make you. What do you do with yourself? Is the shooting as good as you hoped?"

He did not answer, but I thought I heard him mutter something like "shooting be damned."

Then I tried the subject of the house. I praised it extravagantly, but with conviction. "There can be no place like it in the world," I said.

He turned his eyes on me at last, and I saw that they were as deep and restless as ever. With his pallid face they made him look curiously Semitic. I had been right in my theory about his ancestry.

"Yes," he said slowly, "there is no place like it in the world."

Then he pulled himself to his feet. "I'm going to change," he said. "Dinner is at eight. Ring for Travers, and he'll show you your room."

I dressed in a noble bedroom, with an outlook over the garden-vale and the escarpment to the far line of the plains, now blue and saffron in the sunset. I dressed in an ill-temper, for I was seriously offended with Lawson, and also seriously alarmed. He was either very unwell or going out of his mind, and it was clear, too, that he would resent any anxiety on his account. I ransacked my memory for rumours, but found none. I had heard nothing of him except that he had been extraordinarily successful in his speculations, and that from his hill-top he directed his firm's operations with uncommon skill. If Lawson was sick or mad, nobody knew of it.

Dinner was a trying ceremony. Lawson, who used to be rather particular in his dress, appeared in a kind-of smoking suit with a flannel collar. He spoke scarcely a word to me, but cursed the servants with a brutality which left me aghast. A wretched foot-man in his nervousness spilt some sauce over his sleeve. Lawson dashed the dish from his hand, and volleyed abuse with a sort of epileptic fury. Also he, who had been the most abstemious of men, swallowed disgusting quantities of champagne and old brandy.

He had given up smoking, and half an hour after, we left the dining-room he announced his intention of going to bed. I watched him as he waddled upstairs with a feeling of angry bewilderment. Then I went to the library and lit a pipe. I would leave first thing in the morning—on that I was determined. But as I sat gazing at the moon of alabaster and the soapstone birds my anger evaporated, and concern took its place. I remembered what a fine fellow Lawson had been, what good times we had had together. I remembered especially that evening when we had found this valley and given rein to our fancies. What horrid alchemy in the place had turned a gentleman into a brute? I thought of drink and drugs and madness and insomnia, but I could fit none of them into my conception of my friend. I did not consciously rescind my resolve to depart, but I had a notion that I would not act on it.

The sleepy butler met me as I went to bed. "Mr. Lawson's room is at the end of your corridor, sir," he said. "He don't sleep over well, so you may hear him stirring in the night. At what hour would you like breakfast, sir? Mr. Lawson mostly has his in bed."

My room opened from the great corridor, which ran the full length of the front of the house. So far as I could make out, Lawson was three rooms off, a vacant bedroom and his servant's room being between us. I felt tired and cross, and tumbled into bed as fast as possible. Usually I sleep well, but now I was soon conscious that my drowsiness was wearing off and that I was in for a restless night. I got up and laved my face, turned the pillows, thought of sheep coming over a hill and clouds crossing the sky; but none of the old devices were of any use. After about an hour of make-believe I surrendered myself to facts, and, lying on my back, stared at the white ceiling and the patches of moonshine on the walls.

It certainly was an amazing night. I got up, put on a dressing-gown, and drew a chair to the window. The moon was almost at its full, and the whole plateau swam in a radiance of ivory and silver. The banks of the stream were black, but the lake had a great belt of light athwart it, which made it seem like a horizon, and the rim of land beyond it like a contorted cloud. Far to the right I saw the delicate outlines of the little wood which I had come to think of as the Grove of Ashtaroth. I listened. There was not a sound in the air. The land seemed to sleep peacefully beneath the moon, and yet I had a sense that the peace was an illusion. The place was feverishly restless.

I could have given no reason for my impression, but there it was. Something was stirring in the wide moonlit landscape under its deep mask of silence. I felt as I had felt on the evening three years ago when I had ridden into the grove. I did not think that the influence, whatever it was, was maleficent. I only knew that it was very strange, and kept me wakeful.

By-and-by I bethought me of a book. There was no lamp in the corridor save the moon, but the whole house was bright as I slipped down the great staircase and across the hall to the library. I switched on the lights and then switched them off. They seemed a profanation, and I did not need them.

I found a French novel, but the place held me and I stayed. I sat down in an arm-chair before the fireplace and the stone birds. Very odd those gawky things, like prehistoric Great Auks, looked in the moonlight.

I remember that the alabaster moon shimmered like translucent pearl, and I fell to wondering about its history. Had the old Sabaeans used such a jewel in their rites in the Grove of Ashtaroth?

Then I heard footsteps pass the window. A great house like this would have a watchman, but these quick shuffling footsteps were surely not the dull plod of a servant. They passed on to the grass and died away. I began to think of getting back to my room.

In the corridor I noticed that Lawson's door was ajar, and that a light had been left burning. I had the unpardonable curiosity to peep in. The room was empty, and the bed had not been slept in. Now I knew whose were the footsteps outside the library window.

I lit a reading-lamp and tried to interest myself in "La Cruelle Enigme." But my wits were restless, and I could not keep my eyes on the page. I flung the book aside and sat down again by the window. The feeling came over me that I was sitting in a box at some play. The glen was a huge stage, and at any moment the players might appear on it. My attention was strung as high as if I had been waiting for the advent of some world-famous actress. But nothing came. Only the shadows shifted and lengthened as the moon moved across the sky.

Then quite suddenly the restlessness left me, and at the same moment the silence was broken by the crow of a cock and the rustling of trees in a light wind. I felt very sleepy, and was turning to bed when again I heard footsteps without. From the window I could see a figure moving across the garden towards the house. It was Lawson, got up in the sort of towel dressing-gown that one wears on board ship. He was walking slowly and painfully, as if very weary. I did not see his face, but the man's whole air was that of extreme fatigue and dejection.

I tumbled into bed and slept profoundly till long after daylight.

### III

THE man who valeted me was Lawson's own servant. As he was laying out my clothes I asked after the health of his master, and was told that he had slept ill and would not rise till late. Then the man, an anxious-faced Englishman, gave me some information on his own account. Mr. Lawson was having one of his bad turns. It would pass away in a day or two, but till it had gone he was fit for nothing. He advised me to see Mr. Jobson, the factor, who would look to my entertainment in his master's absence.

Jobson arrived before luncheon, and the sight of him was the first satisfactory thing about Welgevonden. He was a big, gruff Scot from Roxburghshire, engaged, no doubt, by Lawson as a duty to his Border ancestry. He had short grizzled whiskers, a weather-worn face, and a shrewd, calm blue eye. I knew now why the place was in such perfect order.

We began with sport, and Jobson explained what I could have in the way of fishing and shooting. His exposition was brief and business-like, and all the while I could see his eye searching me. It was clear that he had much to say on other matters than sport.

I told him that I had come here with Lawson three years before, when he chose the site. Jobson continued to regard me curiously. "I've heard tell of ye from Mr. Lawson. Ye're an old friend of his, I understand."

"The oldest," I said. "And I am sorry to find that the place does not agree with him. Why it doesn't I cannot imagine, for you look fit enough. Has he been seedy for long?"

"It comes and goes," said Mr. Jobson. "Maybe once a month he has a bad turn. But on the whole it agrees with him badly. He's no' the man he was when I first came here."

Jobson was looking at me very seriously and frankly. I risked a question. "What do you suppose is the matter?"

He did not reply at once, but leaned forward and tapped my knee.

"I think it's something that doctors canna cure. Look at me, sir. I've always been counted a sensible man, but if I told you what was in my head you would think me daft. But I have one word for you. Bide till to-night is past and then speir your question. Maybe you and me will be agreed."

The factor rose to go. As he left the room he flung me back a remark over his shoulder—"Read the eleventh chapter of the First Book of Kings."

After luncheon I went for a walk. First I mounted to the crown of the hill and feasted my eyes on the unequalled loveliness of the view. I saw the far hills in Portuguese territory, a hundred miles away, lifting up thin blue fingers into the sky. The wind blew light and fresh, and the place was fragrant with a thousand delicate

scents. Then I descended to the vale, and followed the stream up through the garden. Poinsettias and oleanders were blazing in covert, and there was a paradise of tinted water-lilies in the slacker reaches. I saw good trout rise at the fly, but I did not think about fishing. I was searching my memory for a recollection which would not come. By-and-by I found myself beyond the garden, where the lawns ran to the fringe of Ashtaroth's Grove.

It was like something I remembered in an old Italian picture. Only, as my memory drew it, it should have been peopled with strange figures—nymphs dancing on the sward, and a prick-eared faun peeping from the covert. In the warm afternoon sunlight it stood, ineffably gracious and beautiful, tantalising with a sense of some deep hidden loveliness. Very reverently I walked between the slim trees, to where the little conical tower stood half in sun and half in shadow. Then I noticed something new. Round the tower ran a narrow path, worn in the grass by human feet. There had been no such path on my first visit, for I remembered the grass growing tall to the edge of the stone. Had the Kaffirs made a shrine of it, or were there other and stranger votaries?

When I returned to the house I found Travers with a message for me. Mr. Lawson was still in bed, but he would like me to go to him. I found my friend sitting up and drinking strong tea,—a bad thing, I should have thought, for a man in his condition. I remember that I looked over the room for some sign of the pernicious habit of which I believed him a victim. But the place was fresh and clean, with the windows wide open, and, though I could not have given my reasons, I was convinced that drugs or drink had nothing to do with the sickness.

He received me more civilly, but I was shocked by his looks. There were great bags below his eyes, and his skin had the wrinkled puffy appearance of a man in dropsy. His voice, too, was reedy and thin. Only his great eyes burned with some feverish life.

"I am a shocking bad host," he said, "but I'm going to be still more inhospitable. I want you to go away. I hate anybody here when I'm off colour."

"Nonsense," I said; "you want looking after. I want to know about this sickness. Have you had a doctor?"

He smiled wearily. "Doctors are no earthly use to me. There's nothing much the matter, I tell you. I'll be all right in a day or two, and then you can come back. I want you to go off with Jobson and hunt in the plains till the end of the week. It will be better fun for you, and I'll feel less guilty."

Of course I pooh-poohed the idea, and Lawson got angry. "Damn it, man," he cried, "why do you force yourself on me when I don't want you? I tell you your presence here makes me worse. In a week I'll be as right as the mail, and then I'll be thankful for you. But get away now; get away, I tell you."

I saw that he was fretting himself into a passion. "All right," I said soothingly; "Jobson and I will go off hunting. But I am horribly anxious about you, old man."

He lay back on his pillows. "You needn't trouble. I only want a little rest. Jobson will make all arrangements, and Travers will get you anything you want. Good-bye."

I saw it was useless to stay longer, so I left the room. Outside I found the anxious-faced servant. "Look here," I said, "Mr. Lawson thinks I ought to go, but I mean to stay. Tell him I'm gone if he asks you. And for Heaven's sake keep him in bed."

The man promised, and I thought I saw some relief in his face.

I went to the library, and on the way remembered Jobson's remark about 1st Kings. With some searching I found a Bible and turned up the passage. It was a long screed about the misdeeds of Solomon, and I read it through without enlightenment. I began to re-read it, and a word suddenly caught my attention—

"For Solomon went after Ashtaroth, the goddess of the Zidonians."

That was all, but it was like a key to a cipher. Instantly there flashed over my mind all that I had heard or read of that strange ritual which seduced Israel to sin. I saw a sunburnt land and a people vowed to the stern service of Jehovah. But I saw, too, eyes turning from the austere sacrifice to lonely hill-top groves and towers and images, where dwelt some subtle and evil mystery. I saw the fierce prophets, scourging the votaries with rods, and a nation penitent before the Lord; but always the backsliding again, and the hankering after forbidden joys. Ashtaroth was the old goddess of the East. Was it not possible that in all Semitic blood there remained, transmitted through the dim generations, some craving for her spell? I thought of the grandfather in the back street at Brighton and of those burning eyes up- stairs.

As I sat and mused my glance fell on the inscrutable stone birds. They knew all those old secrets of joy and terror. And that moon of alabaster! Some dark priest had worn it on his forehead when he worshipped, like Ahab, "all the host of Heaven." And then I honestly began to be afraid. I, a prosaic, modern Christian gentleman, a half-believer in casual faiths, was in the presence of some hoary mystery of sin far older than

creeds of Christendom. There was fear in my heart—a kind of uneasy disgust, and above all a nervous eerie disquiet. Now I wanted to go away, and yet I was ashamed of the cowardly thought. I pictured Ashtaroth's Grove with sheer horror. What tragedy was in the air? What secret awaited twilight? For the night was coming, the night of the Full Moon, the season of ecstasy and sacrifice.

I do not know how I got through that evening. I was disinclined for dinner, so I had a cutlet in the library and sat smoking till my tongue ached. But as the hours passed a more manly resolution grew up in my mind. I owed it to old friendship to stand by Lawson in this extremity. I could not interfere—God knows, his reason seemed already rocking—but I could be at hand in case my chance came. I determined not to undress, but to watch through the night. I had a bath, and changed into light flannels and slippers. Then I took up my position in a corner of the library close to the window, so that I could not fail to hear Lawson's footsteps if he passed.

Fortunately I left the lights unlit, for as I waited I grew drowsy, and fell asleep. When I woke the moon had risen, and I knew from the feel of the air that the hour was late. I sat very still, straining my ears, and as I listened I caught the sound of steps. They were crossing the hall stealthily, and nearing the library door. I huddled into my corner as Lawson entered.

He wore the same towel dressing-gown, and he moved swiftly and silently as if in a trance. I watched him take the alabaster moon from the mantel-piece and drop it in his pocket. A glimpse of white skin showed that the gown was his only clothing. Then he moved past me to the window, opened it, and went out. Without any conscious purpose I rose and followed, kicking off my slippers that I might go quietly. He was running, running fast, across the lawns in the direction of the Grove—an odd shapeless antic in the moonlight. I stopped, for there was no cover, and I feared for his reason if he saw me. When I looked again he had disappeared among the trees.

I saw nothing for it but to crawl, so on my belly I wormed my way over the dripping sward. There was a ridiculous suggestion of deer-stalking about the game which tickled me and dispelled my uneasiness. Almost I persuaded myself I was tracking an ordinary sleep-walker. The lawns were broader than I imagined, and it seemed an age before I reached the edge of the Grove. The world was so still that I appeared to be making a most ghastly amount of noise. I remember that once I heard a rustling in the air, and looked up to see the green doves circling about the tree-tops.

There was no sign of Lawson. On the edge of the Grove I think that all my assurance vanished. I could see between the trunks to the little tower, but it was quiet as the grave, save for the wings above. Once more there came over me the unbearable sense of anticipation I had felt the night before. My nerves tingled with mingled expectation and dread. I did not think that any harm would come to me, for the powers of the air seemed not malignant. But I knew them for powers, and felt awed and abased. I was in the presence of the "host of Heaven," and I was no stern Israelitish prophet to prevail against them.

I must have lain for hours waiting in that spectral place, my eyes riveted on the tower and its golden cap of moonshine. I remember that my head felt void and light, as if my spirit were becoming disembodied and leaving its dew-drenched sheath far below. But the most curious sensation was of something drawing me to the tower, something mild and kindly and rather feeble, for there was some other and stronger force keeping me back. I yearned to move nearer, but I could not drag my limbs an inch. There was a spell somewhere which I could not break. I do not think I was in any way frightened now. The starry influence was playing tricks with me, but my mind was half asleep. Only I never took my eyes from the little tower. I think I could not, if I had wanted to.

Then suddenly from the shadows came Lawson. He was stark-naked, and he wore, bound across his brow, the half-moon of alabaster. He had something, too, in his hand—something which glittered.

He ran round the tower, crooning to himself, and flinging wild arms to the skies. Sometimes the crooning changed to a shrill cry of passion, such as a maenad may have uttered in the train of Bacchus. I could make out no words, but the sound told its own tale. He was absorbed in some infernal ecstasy. And as he ran, he drew his right hand across his breast and arms, and I saw that it held a knife.

I grew sick with disgust—not terror, but honest physical loathing. Lawson, gashing his fat body, affected me with an overpowering repugnance. I wanted to go forward and stop him, and I wanted, too, to be a hundred miles away. And the result was that I stayed still. I believe my own will held me there, but I doubt if in any case I could have moved my legs.

The dance grew swifter and fiercer. I saw the blood dripping from Lawson's body, and his face ghastly white above his scarred breast. And then suddenly the horror left me; my head swam; and for one second—one brief second—I seemed to peer into a new world. A strange passion surged up in my heart. I seemed to see the earth peopled with forms—not human, scarcely divine, but more desirable than man or god. The calm face of Nature broke up for me into wrinkles of wild knowledge. I saw the things which brush against the soul in dreams, and found them lovely. There seemed no cruelty in the knife or the blood. It was a delicate mystery of worship, as wholesome as the morning song of birds. I do not know how the Semites found Ashtaroth's ritual; to them it may well have been more rapt and passionate than it seemed to me. For I saw in it only the sweet simplicity of Nature, and all riddles of lust and terror soothed away as a child's nightmares are calmed by a mother. I found my legs able to move, and I think I took two steps through the dusk towards the tower.

And then it all ended. A cock crew, and the homely noises of earth were renewed. While I stood dazed and shivering, Lawson plunged through the Grove towards me. The impetus carried him to the edge, and he fell fainting just outside the shade.

My wits and common-sense came back to me with my bodily strength. I got my friend on my back, and staggered with him towards the house. I was afraid in real earnest now, and what frightened me most was the thought that I had not been afraid sooner. I had come very near the "abomination of the Zidonians."

At the door I found the scared valet waiting. He had apparently done this sort of thing before.

"Your master has been sleep-walking, and has had a fall," I said. "We must get him to bed at once."

We bathed the wounds as he lay in a deep stupor, and I dressed them as well as I could. The only danger lay in his utter exhaustion, for happily the gashes were not serious, and no artery had been touched. Sleep and rest would make him well, for he had the constitution of a strong man. I was leaving the room when he opened his eyes and spoke. He did not recognize me, but I noticed that his face had lost its strangeness, and was once more that of the friend I had known. Then I suddenly bethought me of an old hunting remedy which he and I always carried on our expeditions. It is a pill made up from an ancient Portuguese prescription. One is an excellent specific for fever. Two are invaluable if you are lost in the bush, for they send a man for many hours into a deep sleep, which prevents suffering and madness, till help comes. Three give a painless death. I went to my room and found the little box in my jewel-case. Lawson swallowed two, and turned wearily on his side. I bade his man let him sleep till he woke, and went off in search of food.

#### IV

I HAD business on hand which would not wait. By seven, Jobson, who had been sent for, was waiting for me in the library. I knew by his grim face that here I had a very good substitute for a prophet of the Lord.

"You were right," I said. "I have read the 11th chapter of 1st Kings, and I have spent such a night as I pray God I shall never spend again."

"I thought you would," he replied. "I've had the same experience myself."

"The Grove?" I said.

"Ay, the wud," was the answer in broad Scots.

I wanted to see how much he understood.

"Mr. Lawson's family is from the Scottish Border?"

"Ay. I understand they come off Borthwick Water side," he replied, but I saw by his eyes that he knew what I meant.

"Mr. Lawson is my oldest friend," I went on, "and I am going to take measures to cure him. For what I am going to do I take the sole responsibility. I will make that plain to your master. But if I am to succeed I want your help. Will you give it me? It sounds like madness, and you are a sensible man and may like to keep out of it. I leave it to your discretion."

Jobson looked me straight in the face. "Have no fear for me," he said; "there is an unholy thing in that place, and if I have the strength in me I will destroy it. He has been a good master to me, and, forbye, I am a believing Christian. So say on, sir."

There was no mistaking the air. I had found my Tishbite.

"I want men," I said—"as many as we can get."

Jobson mused. "The Kaffirs will no' gang near the place, but there's some thirty white men on the tobacco farm. They'll do your will, if you give them an indemnity in writing."

“Good,” said I. “Then we will take our instructions from the only authority which meets the case. We will follow the example of King Josiah.”

I turned up the 23rd chapter of 2nd Kings, and read—

“And the high places that were before Jerusalem, which were on the right hand of the Mount of Corruption, which Solomon the king of Israel had builded for Ashtarothe the abomination of the Zidonians . . . did the king defile.

“And he brake in pieces the images, and cut down the groves, and filled their places with the bones of men.

“Moreover the altar that was at Bethel, and the high place which Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, had made, both that altar and the high place he brake down, and burned the high place, and stamped it small to powder, and burned the grove.”

Jobson nodded. “It’ll need dinnymite. But I’ve plenty of yon down at the workshops. I’ll be off to collect the lads.”

Before nine the men had assembled at Jobson’s house. They were a hardy lot of young farmers from home, who took their instructions docilely from the masterful factor. On my orders they had brought their shot-guns. We armed them with spades and woodmen’s axes, and one man wheeled some coils of rope in a handcart.

In the clear, windless air of morning the Grove, set amid its lawns, looked too innocent and exquisite for ill. I had a pang of regret that a thing so fair should suffer; nay, if I had come alone, I think I might have repented. But the men were there, and the grim-faced Jobson was waiting for orders. I placed the guns, and sent beaters to the far side. I told them that every dove must be shot.

It was only a small flock, and we killed fifteen at the first drive. The poor birds flew over the glen to another spinney, but we brought them back over the guns and seven fell. Four more were got in the trees, and the last I killed myself with a long shot. In half an hour there was a pile of little green bodies on the sward.

Then we went to work to cut down the trees. The slim stems were an easy task to a good woodman, and one after another they toppled to the ground. And meantime, as I watched, I became conscious of a strange emotion.

It was as if someone were pleading with me. A gentle voice, not threatening, but pleading—something too fine for the sensual ear, but touching inner chords of the spirit. So tenuous it was and distant that I could think of no personality behind it. Rather it was the viewless, bodiless grace of this delectable vale, some old exquisite divinity of the groves. There was the heart of all sorrow in it, and the soul of all loveliness. It seemed a woman’s voice, some lost lady who had brought nothing but goodness un-repaid to the world. And what the voice told me was that I was destroying her last shelter.

That was the pathos of it—the voice was homeless. As the axes flashed in the sunlight and the wood grew thin, that gentle spirit was pleading with me for mercy and a brief respite. It seemed to be telling of a world for centuries grown coarse and pitiless, of long sad wanderings, of hardly won shelter, and a peace which was the little all she sought from men. There was nothing terrible in it. No thought of wrong-doing. The spell which to Semitic blood held the mystery of evil, was to me, of the Northern race, only delicate and rare and beautiful. Jobson and the rest did not feel it, I with my finer senses caught nothing but the hopeless sadness of it. That which had stirred the passion in Lawson was only wringing my heart. It was almost too pitiful to bear. As the trees crashed down and the men wiped the sweat from their brows, I seemed to myself like the murderer of fair women and innocent children. I remember that the tears were running over my cheeks. More than once I opened my mouth to countermand the work, but the face of Jobson, that grim Tishbite, held me back.

I knew now what gave the Prophets of the Lord their mastery, and I knew also why the people sometimes stoned them.

The last tree fell, and the little tower stood like a ravished shrine, stripped of all defense against the world. I heard Jobson’s voice speaking. “We’d better blast that stane thing now. We’ll trench on four sides and lay the dinnymite. Ye’re no’ looking weel, sir. Ye’d better go and sit down on the brac-face.”

I went up the hillside and lay down. Below me, in the waste of shorn trunks, men were running about, and I saw the mining begin. It all seemed like an aimless dream in which I had no part. The voice of that homeless goddess was still pleading. It was the innocence of it that tortured me. Even so must a merciful Inquisitor have suffered from the plea of some fair girl with the aureole of death on her hair. I knew I was killing rare and unrecoverable beauty. As I sat dazed and heartsick, the whole loveliness of Nature seemed to plead for its divinity. The sun in the heavens, the mellow lines of upland, the blue mystery of the far plains, were all part

of that soft voice. I felt bitter scorn for myself. I was guilty of blood; nay, I was guilty of the sin against light which knows no forgiveness. I was murdering innocent gentleness, and there would be no peace on earth for me. Yet I sat helpless. The power of a sterner will constrained me. And all the while the voice was growing fainter and dying away into unutterable sorrow.

Suddenly a great flame sprang to heaven, and a pall of smoke. I heard men crying out, and fragments of stone fell around the ruins of the grove. When the air cleared, the little tower had gone out of sight.

The voice had ceased and there seemed to me to be a bereaved silence in the world. The shock moved me to my feet, and I ran down the slope to where Jobson stood rubbing his eyes.

“That’s done the job. Now we maun get up the tree-roots. We’ve no time to howk. We’ll just din- nymite the feck o’ them.”

The work of destruction went on, but I was coming back to my senses. I forced myself to be practical and reasonable. I thought of the night’s experience and Lawson’s haggard eyes, and I screwed myself into a determination to see the thing through. I had done the deed; it was my business to make it complete. A text in Jeremiah came into my head: “Their children remember their altars and their groves by the green trees upon the high hills.” I would see to it that this grove should be utterly forgotten.

We blasted the tree-roots, and, yoking oxen, dragged the débris into a great heap. Then the men set to work with their spades, and roughly leveled the ground. I was getting back to my old self, and Jobson’s spirit was becoming mine.

“There is one thing more,” I told him. “Get ready a couple of ploughs. We will improve upon King Josiah.” My brain was a medley of Scripture precedents, and I was determined that no safeguard should be wanting.

We yoked the oxen again and drove the ploughs over the site of the grove. It was rough ploughing, for the place was thick with bits of stone from the tower, but the slow Afrikander oxen plodded on, and sometime in the afternoon the work was finished. Then I sent down to the farm for bags of rock-salt, such as they use for cattle. Jobson and I took a sack apiece, and walked up and down the furrows, sowing them with salt.

The last act was to set fire to the pile of tree-trunks. They burned well, and on the top we flung the bodies of the green doves. The birds of Ashtaroth had an honourable pyre.

Then I dismissed the much-perplexed men, and gravely shook hands with Jobson. Black with dust and smoke I went back to the house, where I bade Travers pack my bags and order the motor. I found Lawson’s servant, and heard from him that his master was sleeping peacefully. I gave him some directions, and then went to wash and change.

Before I left I wrote a line to Lawson. I began by transcribing the verses from the 23rd chapter of 2nd Kings. I told him what I had done, and my reason. “I take the whole responsibility upon myself,” I wrote. “No man in the place had anything to do with it but me. I acted as I did for the sake of our old friendship, and you will believe it was no easy task for me. I hope you will understand. When- ever you are able to see me send me word, and I will come back and settle with you. But I think you will realize that I have saved your soul.”

The afternoon was merging into twilight as I left the house on the road to Taqui. The great fire, where the grove had been, was still blazing fiercely, and the smoke made a cloud over the upper glen, and filled all the air with a soft violet haze. I knew that I had done well for my friend, and that he would come to his senses and be grateful. My mind was at ease on that score, and in something like comfort I faced the future. But as the car reached the ridge I looked back to the vale I had outraged. The moon was rising and silvering the smoke, and through the gaps I could see the tongues of fire. Somehow, I know not why, the lake, the stream, the garden-coverts, even the green slopes of hill, wore an air of loneliness and desecration.

And then my heartache returned, and I knew that I had driven something lovely and adorable from its last refuge on earth.



# cinema

## I Get Misty... (SPOILER ALERT)

One of the things I hate is when I start to like a show, and the season ends on a cliffhanger, and then the show gets cancelled before another season is produced. Unfortunately, that's what happened with *The Mist*, a drama on Spike TV (now on Netflix) based on the Stephen King novella.

I read the novella years ago (decades, actually), and I've seen the prior film based upon it. So I didn't come to this series completely unprepared. However, it's been so long that I've mostly forgotten all but the basic framework of the story. I can't comment here on how faithfully the characters in the show corresponded to those in King's writing. From what I observed in the show, I suspect a lot of liberties were taken and the characters and subplots were updated to conform to the current political climate. For the first several episodes, the development of the characters pretty much perpetuated the standard Hollywood stereotypes – there was a priest (played ably by Dan Butler, probably best known as “Bulldog” on *Frasier*). He, of course, turns out to be morally flawed, manipulating a believing teenager into a violent act. The aforementioned believing teen is, naturally, fanatical and deranged, more than happy to do the priest's dirty work. And one of the most likeable characters – at least at first - is the gay teenager. He's one of the few characters that you really want to see make it through and come out the other side. At least, that is, until his true nature is revealed. But that seems to be one of the themes of this show – everyone is hiding something.

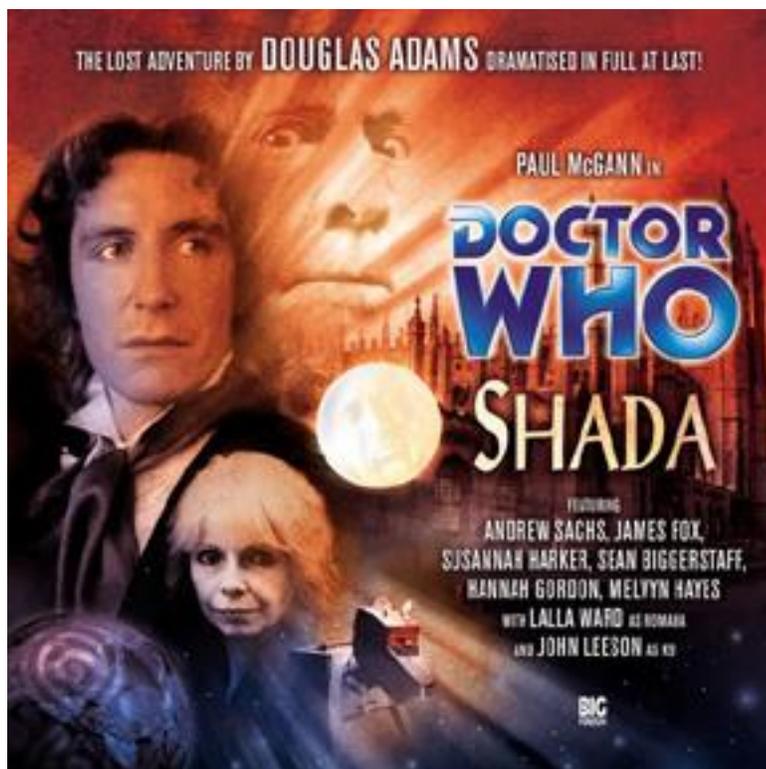
The problem right up front is that there is a young girl named Alex who goes to a party (against her mother's wishes but with her father's permission), gets drunk and gets raped while at the party. Her friend Adrian (the gay teen I mentioned) says that he was there and that it was Jay, the son of the local police chief and



an all-American boy if ever there was one, who committed the act. As the investigation into the rape proceeds, a mist rolls into town, and, as it turns out, there are horrors in the mist. Pretty much anyone who ventures out into it dies horribly, with the exception, for some reason, of Alex. People who are able to get to shelter hunker down in sealed buildings that the mist cannot penetrate. One group ends up in a church, another in a mall, still others in private homes or other buildings. Those in each group develop their own micro-society with their own rules, and things are going on that are never explained – for example, for some reason, there is a military presence in the mall. We never find out why. As time goes on and more horrors occur, characters that seemed good are shown to be corrupt or deranged, masks are uncovered, the depravity of humanity begins to come into play, and civilization starts to crumble. The storyline brought to mind that of *Lord of the Flies*, with the characters' dark secrets, intrigue and maneuvering leading toward an ultimate collapse.

What is the source of the mist? Is it a divine judgment, a rebellion of nature, a government experiment? Who knows? The season ended with the mist still in place, so we will never find out (but, in fairness, as I recall, King never explained in the novella what the source of the mist was either). I enjoyed watching the show, although the increasing depravity of the characters made it more and more difficult and disturbing as the end of the season approached. Ultimately, some good characters die, some bad ones survive, and many threads are left hanging. I'd cautiously recommend this series if a second season were on the way, but as it is, there are just too many unresolved storylines at the end for me to endorse it.

---review by Tom McGovern



### Shada: A Dr. Who Adventure

As many Dr. Who fans know, Shada is one of the missing Dr. Who stories. The history of Shada is a bit different from the rest of the missing episodes of Doctor Who. Unlike the missing stories from the first decade of the show, the master tapes for Shada were not erased. They never existed!

The 17<sup>th</sup> season of Doctor Who has elements in place to make it one of the great periods for The Doctor. Tom Baker was comfortably in his sixth year in the part. On top of that, the Doctor's companion, Romana, was played by Lalla Ward. Baker and Ward has become a couple during the previous season and were briefly married during the 17<sup>th</sup> season.

Perhaps more exciting than the happy couple in the lead roles, the script editor for the season was none other than Douglas Adams! Adams had written the scripts for two stories in the previous season,

and came on as the head writer in 1979. Shada was the script that he had spent most of the year working on.

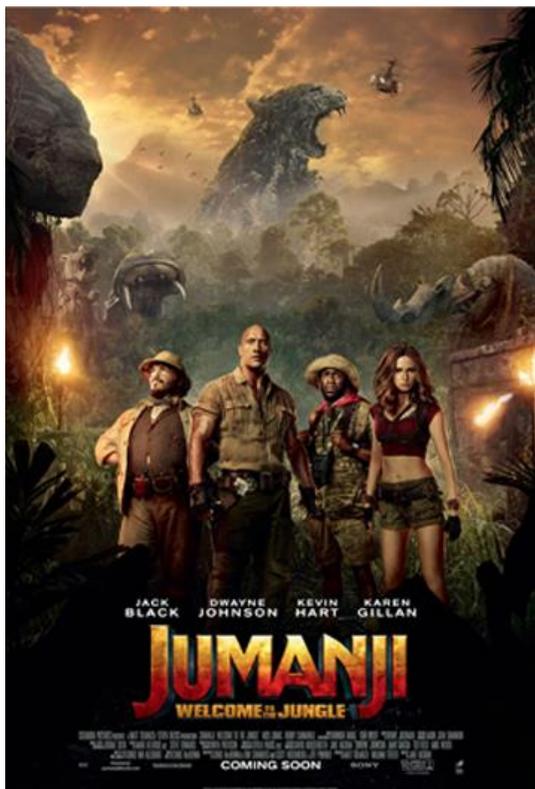
Unfortunately, even with all of those things going for it, the 17<sup>th</sup> season was not a high point for Doctor Who. Concurrently with Adams being named as head writer for the show, his silly little radio serial "The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy" hit the air. The rest is history. With the success of "Hitchhiker's Guide" Adams suddenly was consumed by the demands of reproducing the play for a TVG adaptation and a novelization.

After a disappointing season with some really bad stories, Shada, the season finale was a catastrophe. It wasn't the story, which all involved insist to be among the best. The problem was with the BBC itself. There was a stagehand strike in the fall of 1979 that stopped production of the story. Frustratingly, all the location

shooting was completed, but none of the stage scenes could be filmed. Shada had to be abandoned incomplete until now.

The BBC has now completed the story using animation to film in the unproduced parts with Baker, Ward, and other surviving cast members to perform the voices. Shadra was released on November 24<sup>th</sup> on streaming media. Unfortunately that was only seen on UK i-tunes. I'll have to wait for the DVD to become available on Amazon later this year.

---review by Gary Robe



## Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle

Last year we wasted our time in Orlando by going to see the thoroughly awful “A Monster Calls”. This year we avoided that error by deciding on “Jumanji” as at least being fun to watch. What a surprise when the film is not only better than anticipated, it was one of the high points of the trip.

On the opening scene we see the magical Jumanji board transfer itself into an Atari cartridge, which proceeds to suck a young player into the game in the 80s. Fast forward to the present when a group of four teens in detention run across the dusty Atari set and are pulled in as well.

This Breakfast Club group consists of Spencer, a game nerd, Fridge, a jock, Bethany, a mean girl, and Martha, a girl genius. In the game Spencer’s avatar is Dr. Smolder Bravestone (Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson), the hunky hero; Fridge is Moose Finbar (Kevin Hart) the sidekick porter; Bethany is Prof. Shelley Oberon (Jack Black), zoologist and cartographer; and Martha is Ruby Roundhouse (Karen Gillan), a Killer Of Men.

The four must learn to cooperate to solve the quest to leave the game alive. Each has three lives in the game, and the assumption is that after a third game death, the character is permanently erased.

Each character has strengths. Bravestone has super speed, climbing, fearlessness, boomerang, and smoldering intensity. Moose has cranial assault and weapons carrying ability. Oberon has cartography, anthropology, and paleontology skills. Ruby has karate, T’ai chi, jiu-jitsu, and dance attack. The characters also have weaknesses. Ruby is susceptible to venom, Oberon lacks endurance, Moose is weak, slow and can’t endure cake. Bravestone has no weakness.

All of the actors do a great job of conveying their inner personas inside game avatars. Jack Black is especially funny playing his inner girl reacting to being in a male body. There is also a lot of fun when The Rock delivers a line with Smoldering intensity and both “female” characters react. Comic timing is essential in pulling off an ensemble performance like this, and this particular Gang Of Four doesn’t miss a beat.

It’s very silly, but done with so much heart that I was sad to see it end when the quest is complete. It’s full of great lines, and works on enough levels to be suitable for both kids and adults. There are lots of quotable lines and I’m predicting that The Rock’s smoldering intensity will give birth to a jillion internet memes.

---review by Gary Robe



# FANZINE REVIEWS

A regular feature of

**TIGHTBEAM**

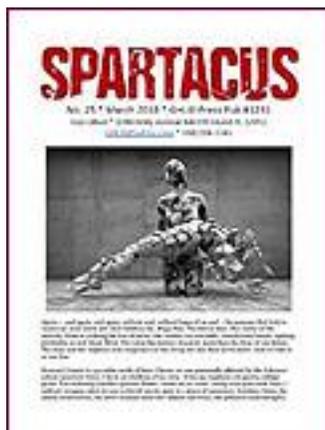
by

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.



**SPARTACUS #25** 8-1/2X11”, produced by-monthly by Guy Lillian 111; 1390 Holly Ave.; Merritt Island, FL 32852; published on paper for distribution thru SFPA (The Southern Fandom Press Alliance); otherwise posted free in electronic form on the efanazines.com web site

This is a fanzine of personal opinion and comment, primarily dealing with politics, the real life federal level kind, and the kind that involves fandom, particularly conventions, Hugo Awards, and personalities who may be making ripples in our little sequestered hobby pond. Guy believes he is a strong liberal free-thinker, but he often expresses viewpoints solidly in line with the majority of conservative mainstream thot.

This issue he has many words about the recent Parkland High School massacre. How much is enuf before the American public decides to do something to curb the epidemic of violent mass murders that have swept the nation in recent decades? Guy has the usual suggestions: rising the age for gun ownership, denying permits to mentally disturbed people, a total ban on assault weapons, a training period for any person wanting to buy weapons. To that I would add that every handgun manufactured in the USA from this point forward be made child proof, a very easy thing to do, something that most owners of guns are happy with, but which gun manufactures and their lobbyists oppose because of the retooling costs involved.

Will any of this come to pass? Not unless there is a sea change in the national political climate. The current political party in power has already staked their claim to the free and open ownership of any kind of

firearm by anybody who happens to be legal United States citizen. Most members of the GOP accept hefty campaign donations from both the NRA and gun manufacturers. It is unrealistic to expect that these people will bite the hand that feeds them.

Guy suggests this most recent firearms massacre will create a dramatic change in public awareness, that it will create a national loss of innocence, something that will directly affect the outlook of the American people, similar to the effect on the American psyche that occurred with the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941, or the assassination of JFKennedy, or the twin towers attacks on 9/11. Maybe. I hope so. But the American people have become brutalized, cynical, bitter, and angry. News of savagely murdered children no longer horrifies them. This is a sad and sorry comment on American society, but it is the current reality, and under the current reality nothing will be done to address the problems of gun violence or the free and easy access to firearms by anybody able to sign their name and put their money down on the counter of their nearest Guns 'R Us store.

Guy has his usual tirade against the latest escapades of Donald Trump, and notes with some unease the information that people who consider themselves strongly conservative are not particularly worried about the idea that the Russian government might have interfered with the last US Presidential election. That's because their candidate won. If the next bout of election meddling, (which will certainly occur with the upcoming November mid-term voting), happens to bring in people whose views are different from their own, then you can be sure they will be up in arms screaming in full moral outrage mode. It's human nature.

The issue has some short comments about Guy's new duties as a college teacher, and even a few letters about his past issues. There are paragraphs about the passing of Billy Graham, an open minded, gentle person who wanted everybody to live the tenets of Christianity that so many of us merely pay lip service to, the passing of friends, the recent Olympic games, and the death of his beloved dog Paprika.

The issue is entirely a reflection of Guy Lillian's personality, an in-print personal conversation with him and the things that are on his mind, and the things that have been happening in his life recently. There is some teeth-gnashing, but mostly these issues are friendly, open, joyful, and fun to read.



**PABLO LENNIS #364** 8-1/2x11"; 28 pages, published monthly by John Thiel; 30 N. 19th St.; Lafayette, IN 47904---\$20 yearly or The Usual

PL is one of the few fanzines around that regularly publishes short amateur science fiction and fantasy. This month's issue features the usual mixed bag of material.

The overall appearance of PL has improved dramatically of late. John is becoming more adapt at using a computer to plan his layout, with results that are neat and attractive. This is quite an improvement over previous numbers of this zine that were often so cramped that it was difficult to read the pages or follow what went where. The use of attractive title headers and wide margins, along with a clear, readable typeface are very welcome changes.

John has a brief editorial about nihilism themes that he feels are invading science fiction and fantasy literature these days, particularly horror fiction. Uh, yeah, this is a trend that has been going on for a few years now. More than a few years, actually. Traditionally speaking SF/fantasy/horror fiction has always had a dark and depressing side. Stories about dark and dangerous things, evil people, malicious menace, science discoveries gone horribly wrong, supernatural monsters, these and more have been around almost since the genre began. It may be that unhappy endings are somewhat more common now than they were in the past, but as an old reader of the literature, I personally think the SF/fantasy stories produced during the 1950s were darker and more depressing overall than anything being turned out today. The literature often is an unconscious reflection of the national mood of the national spirit, and if so, then very clearly a great man people these days are uneasy about the way current society is unfolding.

The heart of every issue of PL is the fiction. The short fiction pieces offered this time cover a variety of science fiction and horror themes and the quality varies considerably. Most of the material is very short, and alas, most of it is not good.

An author writing a story slightly more than a page long tries to link supernatural housecat kittens with bright colors and the legend of Atlantis, and fails miserably. There is no real plot, the writing is atrocious and the grammar isn't even consistent. Ugh!

Will Mayo contributes a series of random very short vignettes about a variety of subjects. Some of these are clever and innovative. Others seem like stream-of-consciousness comments trying to pass as fiction. Still, it is an interesting assortment of super-short items that held my interest. I would like to see what Mr. Mayo

could do with a genuine story running five to ten thousand words in length that expands on some of the odd ideas he comes up with.

There are also a couple of serials running in this issue, each one running less than a page in length. I've said this before, but it is worth repeating. The logic of running serials that only print a page or two at a time escapes me here. The purpose of running a serial is to break up novel length stories into chunks the magazine can print over a reasonable length of time instead devoting an entire issue to the epic. These particular "serials" clearly are not segments of a longer novel already in the editor's hands; some of them have been running for more than a two years so far, with no end in sight.

These things are, in essence, on-running blog-like random fiction postings where the writers have no more idea of where their stories are headed than the readers do. This is more than sloppy writing; it demonstrates both a lack of writing skill on the part of the authors and clearly, a lack of genuine imagination on their part as well. They have no idea what their stories are going to be about, so they keep meandering along, adding trivial incidents and an occasional bit of action, hoping the creative muse will suddenly strike them and turn the miss-mash into something worthwhile. It ain't gonna happen folks. Good writers know how to plot and write a story, complete with an ending. Rank amateurs and incompetent writers resort to this kind of endless serial subterfuge.

This issue also has a short article on the philosopher Nietzsche and his influence on both modern society and fantastic literature. This one page effort barely scratches the surface of this subject, but it will probably provide plenty of fodder for future PL letter columns.

This issue's letter column is longer than usual, but seems mostly devoted to people saying how much they liked the stories last issue, with very little critique of the writing and plots that would normally be part of a fictionzine letters department.

John has a long column in which he discusses the fiction from the three remaining print promags, and discusses some of the offerings of the science fiction book club. He is apparently opposed to all the graphic novels the club has added to their monthly mix of material. I'm pretty sure he is in the minority here. My understanding is that graphic novels are consistently strong sellers thru the club, which is why they are always adding more and more titles to the mix, old ones as well as the newest releases.

Most of the fiction this issue wasn't good at all. Some of it fails very badly because the writers either lack communication skills, or, more to the point in this issue, most of the writers don't know how to compose and deliver a coherent plot with a believable ending.

Yet, it is impossible not to admire these would-be authors anyway. They are trying to hone their story-telling skills and they are not afraid to allow their written efforts to see the light of day in a print fanzine. PL's regular letter column usually discusses the stories and sometimes offers constructive criticism. The only way a writer gets to be proficient is to actually write, and the only way an author is going to learn if his or her efforts are succeeding is to allow the public to view the fiction and allow the readers to make comments about the material, letting the praise or the brickbats fall where they may.

I think it is worth stressing again that PL is one of the very few fanzines around that will give new authors a chance to display their craft. If you are a wannabe SF/fantasy author turning out very short fiction you should consider submitting material to PL. Your efforts will be read by people who care about developing writers, and you will receive comments in the letter column about your stories and your writing style.

PL comes out every month, and there is always something in the eclectic mix of fiction, articles, reviews, commentary, to spark your interest, and PL is always open to aspiring creators.



### **ALEXIAD #96**

Joseph and Lisa Major; 1409 Christy Ave.;  
Louisville, KY 40204-2040 by email at [jmajor@iglou.com](mailto:jmajor@iglou.com); mostly monthly;  
available these days only as an e-zine; available for The Usual

This is a fanzine that has been going steadily since 2001. Most of each issue is written by Joe and Lisa, and it contains mostly reviews of books they have read, interspaced with short natter about life, the universe, and everything, including the world of science fiction. There is usually a generous letter column and sometimes a longer article added into the mix.

The format is professionally severe---very small type in four justified margin columns per page with extremely short margins. Headers are small and tight, with an occasional quip added as a leader. Occasional cartoons by people such as Alexis Gilliland break up the text. Alexis Gilliland's art work only appears in *Alexiad* these days, which is a shame.

It should be noted that the book reviews cover a very wide field. Joe and

Lisa read a fair amount of science fiction/fantasy, but they also read other things, particularly history and military technology material. All the book and short movie reviews this time were written by Joe.

Joe seems currently interested in exploring science fantasy books devoted to alternate history. Although some very good stories have been written using the alternative history theme, generally speaking this is not an area that holds much interest for me. Too many of these stories postulate absolutely ridiculous situations, "what if flying saucers dropped water balloons on Hannibal's troops at the Battle of Cannae?", for example. I note that Joe finds several of the setups for a few of the alternate history books he reviews to be ridiculous. Far too many of these "alternative history" novels seem intent on introducing advanced technology into a past period, then thinking about what might have been. What would happen is total chaos and a radical shift in the way events progressed. But really, who cares? Too many of these books read like projected computer generated graphs that might be vaguely interesting to history professors, but fail to provide an actual story plot that could involve a reader.

The issue also has a long science article by Rodford Edmiston titled "The Joys of High Tech". I have to say that my mind drifted pretty early while trying to read this treatise. No doubt science aficionados will be thrilled with the mixture of astronomy and math, dealing with charting the movement of our social system and the movement of distant galaxies thru space, among other things, but it pretty much flew right by me.

The heart of each issue is the letter column, and this number does not disappoint. The editors are particularly concerned that the Age Of Fanzines may be dying. So far as science fiction related fanzines are concerned they could be right. Joe points out, and several letters comment on the fact, that most of the fanzines being produced these days, either in print or pixel format, are edited/published by fans who have been in the hobby for decades, sometimes for five or six decades. Where, he asks, are the younger faneds?

Well, they are producing perzines outside of science fiction fandom. The world of print fanzines is alive and doing very well. They call themselves small press these days, and their relationship to SF fandom is almost non-existent. The paper-net survives nicely despite crushing postal costs and the high cost of printing supplies. In several large cities there are even one day show events and flea markets specifically devoted to printzines. The new perzine editors swap among themselves constantly. And except for an occasional movie or book review, they have absolutely no connection with SF fandom at all. Why the production of fanzines in science fiction fandom is winding down is a subject of considerable speculation, and will probably continue to be in future *Alexiad* letter columns.

The editors also briefly note the steadily declining circulations of the three surviving professional SF magazines. *Analog*, which once routinely sold over a hundred thousand copies per issue, is now down to nineteen thousand copies per issue. *F&SF* only sells eleven and a half thousand per issue. It should also be noted that most of those copies are being sent to subscribers. The age of the science fiction magazine is also clearly in sharp decline. Perhaps there is some kind of connection between these figures and the dearth of new faneds coming onto the scene.

This was another fun/fact/review/natter packed issue, presented in a professional package. There's nothing really like it anywhere else. You have to read *Alexiad* to understand why it has such enduring appeal. This newest issue is posted on the efanazines.com website. Future issues can be obtained direct by contacting Lisa and Joe at [jmajor@iglou.com](mailto:jmajor@iglou.com).

## THE DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE IS May 20, 2018