

don't make sense or fit together into a believable story. This is not a good movie. This is a bad movie with good imagery. One wonders what it could have been if it had actually had a coherent story plot.

Caltiki—The Immortal Monster

Review by Bob Jennings

The feature film of the evening was “Caltiki—The Immortal Monster”, a 1959 Italian science fiction/horror/monster film. The film was produced by Galatea Films who had released “Hercules” in 1958 to great box office success, then followed up with “I Vampiri” which also did well in European markets. Moving into the science fiction field seemed like a natural, especially with accomplished director Riccardo Freda doing the directing with his friend Mario Brava handling the cinematography.

The story deals with an archeological expedition in Mexico that uncovers an overgrown Mayan city and a hidden temple dedicated to Caltiki, a vengeful Mayan god about which little is known. One of their party goes insane and dies, leading them to investigate a sacrificial pool beneath the temple.

Diving into the pool they discover skeletons with plenty of jewelry and gold originally adorning the sacrificial victims. Abruptly abandoning their scientific interests, the surviving members of the expedition decide to dive and grab as much of the gold and gems as they can, so they can get rich quick. Alas, avarice and abandoning their scientific interest proves to be a Bad Thing, as something in the pool strikes the greedy diver, puncturing his diving suit. As he is hauled up, the expedition sees he is being consumed by some sort of jelly-like mass. They chop it off him, but it is clear whatever it is has attached itself to his arm and neck, and is slowly digesting him. He is in danger of experiencing an agonizing death.

Rushing their friend to Mexico City for modern medical treatment does no good; the problem is beyond the realm of medical science. The leader of the expedition has brought back some samples of the jelly-like substance for study, leaving some at the university lab, and taking a glob with him to his palatial home on the outskirts of the metropolis (apparently archeology paid much better in Mexico during the 1950s than I previously suspected).



Investigation reveals that the blob-substances react to radioactivity and grow rapidly under its influence. It is a uni-cell metabolism that seeks to constantly grow, rather than sub-divide. It turns out that a strange comet that appears only once every 850 years is rapidly approaching, and its radioactive tail passing across the surface of the Earth will invariably cause the blob to grow to gigantic proportions unless it is destroyed.

There is a soap-opera style back-story that goes with all this as well. The greedy diver Max Gunther lusts after Prof. John Fielding's beautiful young wife who was along on the expedition. He already has a sexy companion, but he has grown tired of her, even tho she is passionately devoted to him. The blob that destroys his arm drives him insane. He escapes from the hospital and crashes into the home of the beautiful young wife with rape and murder on his mind. Since the prof is off investigating things and drawing

disturbing conclusions about the blob-beast, Fielding decides to settle for violent rape.

This leads to lots of scenes of the madman chasing after Ellen Fielding clad only in her negligee, but, the comet has apparently hit the horizon, because the specimen piece of the jelly-monster breaks out of the glass case in the Prof's study and begins to grow enormously right before our eyes. In fact, it fills up the entire house, while the beautiful wife with her small daughter in arms race around with the lustful Fielding and the blob very close behind.

Prof Fielding alerts the military of the danger. The military forces arrive with flame throwers, tanks, and lots of troops to battle the monster. During the confrontation somehow or the other the wife and daughter are saved by Fielding who urges them to jump into bushes beneath a second story window (this, despite the entire house being filled with the blob and most of the outside also being heavily covered by with it). Gunther gets consumed by the monster blob, the army manages to finally kill it off, the house is completely destroyed in the process, and all ends well, or so we are told.

Am I the only one who remembered that the original blob was still out there, resting and ready to grow in that sacrificial pool beneath the ancient Mayan temple? Am I the only one who wonders how this jelly-creature can grow so enormous so rapidly while feeding only on comet radiation that doesn't affect human beings or any other creatures, and doesn't even light up the sky?

Despite a more complex and involved plot than most monster movies of the period this was not a particularly impressive outing. There was some excellent cinematography for this film which helped in creating a strong suspenseful mood, and all the acting in good, but the story, despite moving along at a rapid pace, doesn't hold up all that well. The special effects were good enuf for 1959, but also do not age well. The problem is that by 1959 the audiences had already seen this same type of story too many times before for it to have the kind of emotional impact the producers hoped for, and by 2020 the blob-monster story plot has become almost a cliché.

The movie did not do particularly well in Europe when it was originally released. It was imported to the United States in 1960 with the English language version being dubbed in New York Tira Studios who did many other Italian films of the period. The voice synchronization for this film was much better than many of the other Italian movies they dubbed. United Artists handled the US distribution where it showed up mostly as part of monster-double features and on the drive-in movie circuit. It was released in the UK in 1962 using the United Artists prints. It was periodically re-released in Italy and France in the following years, and may have been released to television in Europe as well.

Remembered by students of film mainly as the first sound science fiction film produced in Italy, it was a minor cult oddity for a long time, judged too insignificant to even be reissued when VHS tape became popular in the 1980s. The picture was finally released as a DVD in 2017. By this time the original foreign language dubs, even the British ones, had mostly disappeared. The DVD print had to be reassembled from a variety of scrapped copies of films from the UK and from American collectors.

“Caltiki—The Immortal Monster” is a minor league film, but it has a stronger plot than a lot of other monster movies of the era. Most of the film's flaws are minor. Despite treading very familiar ground plot-wise the picture features decent suspense, crisp, effective film work, good acting, and it provided some light-weight entertainment to while away a winter's evening.

Novels

The Unexpected Enlightenment of Rachel Griffin

by L. Jagi Lamplighter

Review by Jim McCoy



Alright guys, I have a confession to make. Even though I'm most definitely not part of the generation that grew up on Harry Potter, I have an addiction to it. I follow HP Facebook groups. I've gotten both of my daughters hooked on it. I'm a flat out J.K Rowling fanboi to the point that I even know that it's pronounced like "bowling." (Note to international readers: Most Americans don't know that. They pronounce it like the ow in "cow".) So when I picked up a copy of *The Unexpected Enlightenment of Rachel Griffin* by L. Jagi Lamplighter, I was pretty amazed.

The Unexpected Enlightenment of Rachel Griffin is most definitely not a Harry Potter clone, but it has some similar elements that made it feel simultaneously comfortable and exciting. Why? Well, it takes place in a boarding school. The inhabitants of the World of the Wise (as magic users call themselves) also like to ride around on brooms, although Rachel's is definitely unlike any other broom I've ever read about anywhere. And, of course, it is a fantasy story set approximately in modern times. I love that aspect of it.

The titular Rachel is our heroine and she is quite the intrepid young lady. She has been admitted to Roanoke Academy for the Sorcerous Arts a year early (aged thirteen instead of fourteen) and she is raring to go. This is a thirteen year old that I can admire. She works hard, doesn't make excuses and is extremely brave. She's also smarter than your average bear (that's why she got admitted early) and has one hundred percent recall of anything she's seen or heard. She often uses that to her considerable advantage. I like this chick. It's too bad she doesn't actually exist. I'd try to get her to hang out with my daughters.

Rachel is a member of an old-school magical family that's kind of important. She's a member of a noble family and her father is a higher-up in the magical law enforcement community. People know who she is. She's not as famous as some others, but she definitely gets recognized. I kind of liked this aspect of her. Rachel is for sure not the Chosen One per se. There is no legend following her around. She has just enough renown to get the other important characters to notice her and yet still has enough humility to get along with almost anybody.

Rachel ends up in a situation that not many adults would do well at facing and comes out of it a champion. Seriously, one would have to think that perhaps Mrs. Lamplighter has done some reading about Medal of Honor winners from the United States. Rachel has no quit in her. She can go to war at my side anytime. I mean, just as long as she doesn't stand too close. Chick takes a beating like a champ, but I'd prefer not to be taken down as collateral damage just for being next to her.

And it's weird too, because she doesn't come to school to be some kind of hero. Yes, she wanted to have some adventures but I doubt that what she had in mind came anywhere close to how it all shook out. This is a girl who wants to learn all there is to know about magic and enjoy herself along the way. I admire her commitment to learning. She's like Hermione in a way, only more so.

In Harry Potter it's just accepted that every student studies every type of magic. So we see Harry in everything from Transfiguration to Potions. That's not so at Roanoke. The students there are sorted into houses not based on some nebulous personality trait, but on what form of magic they wish to study. Rachel is an enchanter. She plays music and uses it as a focus to cast her magic.

One of her friends is a thaumaturge. He uses objects as a focus. Thaumaturgy has a bit of a rough reputation and it's something that Rachel struggles with when deciding whether or not to trust him. I'm not going to go through all of the types of magic, but I like this system.

In a world where you can specialize in very narrowly defined fields in the world of the Unwary (those are non-magical type folk) it makes sense that a mage would specialize in an area of magic too. Concentrating on one area often makes someone better at what they do than studying an area in general would. I like the way this works. Of course, I've got something similar in my current Work in Progress so I may be a bit biased.

Her cast of friends is also pretty amazing. You've got some royalty. Add to that a touch of dragon-killing commoner. Throw in a dash of that one dude from the other side of the tracks and the occasional surprisingly on our side guy and it really is a good time. The cast mixes well and is believable. These kids are something else.

WATCH OUT!! FLYING FLAMING SKUNK!!!!AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!!!!!!

Sorry, flashback. Where was I?

Oh yeah...

The action in this book is awesome. There are some wicked fights and some terrifying visions. The Unexpected Enlightenment of Rachel Griffin is not a story for the faint of heart. Things move quickly. Sometimes stuff explodes. It's not always clear what kind of magic is being used by who.

This is a Young Adult novel, but it's supercharged. When things get moving, they go quickly. There is very little time to stop and breathe. Don't get me wrong; I like a nice relaxing read every once in awhile, but I much prefer something that doesn't let up and that's The Unexpected Enlightenment of Rachel Griffin.

Also, a word to the wise: The title page clearly states that The Unexpected Enlightenment of Rachel Griffin is based on the works of Mark A. Whipple. I feel like I should make some type of comment on how well I see those works reflected here, but I haven't read them. That much having been said, I had absolutely no problem following the story and look forward to reading the rest of the series.

4.75 out of 5 Talking Dragons

Sercon

Fredric Brown Bio-Bibliography

by

Jon D. Swartz, Ph.D.
N3F Historian



Fredric William Brown (October 29, 1906 – March 11, 1972), born in Cincinnati, Ohio, was an American science fiction (SF) and mystery writer. He was the only child of Karl Lewis Brown, a newspaperman, and Emma Amelia (Graham) Brown. Both parents died when he was in high school.

Brown briefly attended both The University of Cincinnati and Hanover College in Indiana. He married his first wife, Helen Ruth, in 1929; they had two sons – James and Linn – before divorcing in 1947. He married his second wife, Elizabeth Chandler, whom he called Bethie, in 1948.

Brown spent his twenties in a “deadening” office job. His move to work on the Milwaukee Journal as a proofreader was a much-needed change of scene for him, and also introduced him to genre authors such as Robert Bloch and Stanley Weinbaum; in addition, he joined the Milwaukee Allied Authors Club. Brown then began writing fiction himself. His first

short story, “The Moon for a Nickel,” was published in the March, 1938 issue of Street & Smith’s Detective Story Magazine.

Brown was known for his use of humor and for his mastery of the “short short” story – stories of one to three pages, usually with surprise endings. Humor was often present in his SF and mystery novels as well.

The first SF story he had published was “Not Yet the End” in the prozine Captain Future (Winter, 1941 issue).

Writing Habits

According to his wife Elizabeth, Brown hated to write and did everything he could to avoid it: Play his flute, challenge a friend to a game of chess, or play with his Siamese cat Ming Tah. If Brown had trouble working out the plot for a story, he would go on a long bus trip, where he sat and thought, sometimes for days on end.

When Brown finally got around to sitting in front of his typewriter, he produced work in a variety of genres: SF, mystery, fantasy, black comedy – and sometimes all of these genres were present in the same story.

He loved puns, as shown in some of the titles he used for his stories, with “Nothing Sirius,” “Pi in the Sky,” “Paradox Lost,” “Cause and Defect,” and “A Little White Lye” among my favorites.

Popular SF Works

His classic novel, *What Mad Universe* (1949), is a parody of pulp SF stories. It has been described as both “a critique of its genre and a superior example of it.” His novel, *The Lights in the Sky Are Stars* (1952), told of an aging astronaut who tried to get the space program back after funds for it had been cut off.

Brown’s short story “Arena” was used as the basis for an episode of the same name in the original series of the *Star Trek* television series. It was also adapted in 1973 for an issue of the comic book *Worlds Unknown* – published by Marvel Comics. “Arena” was also voted by the Science Fiction Writers of America as one of the top twenty SF stories written before 1965.

Brown occasionally used the pseudonym Felix Graham; and he sometimes collaborated with his friend, fellow genre author Mack Reynolds.

Brown’s Principal SF Books

What Mad Universe (1949)
Space On My Hands (1951)
The Lights in the Sky Are Stars (1953) [aka *Project Jupiter*]
Angels & Spaceships (1954) [aka *Star Shine*]
Martians, Go Home (1955)
Rogue in Space (1957)
Honeymoon in Hell (1958)
The Mind Thing (1961)
Nightmares and Geezenstacks (1961)
Daymares (1968)
Mikey Astromouse (1971)
The Best of Fredric Brown (1976) [published posthumously, as was the book listed below]
The Best Short Stories of Fredric Brown (1982)

Uncollected Works

The Proofreaders' Page and Other Uncollected Items (2011) was an attempt to assemble as many uncollected works by Brown as possible. The principal contents of this book were 109 of his newspaper columns -- *The Proofreaders' Page* -- twenty-four humorous advice columns, and some of his published poetry.

Edited SF Anthology

Science-Fiction Carnival (1953) [with Brown’s introduction, notes, and short story, “Paradox Lost” -- edited with Mack Reynolds]

Non-Genre Novel

A non-genre novel by Brown, *The Office* (1958), was a character study of the lives of seven people who once worked together in a small office. Brown based this book on his office work experiences early in his career.

Awards/Honors

Brown was nominated for the 1946 Best Short Story Retro Hugo and the 1946 Best Novelette Retro Hugo.

He was awarded the Cordwainer Smith Rediscovery Award, posthumously, in 2012.

His novel, *The Fabulous Clipjoint*, won the Edgar Award for outstanding first mystery novel in 1948.

In addition, his 1945 short story “The Waveries” was described by author Philip K. Dick as “what may be the most significant – startlingly so – story SF has yet produced.”

Personal Information

Brown had a lifelong interest in chess, poker, and the works of Lewis Carroll.

According to some authorities, he was also a heavy drinker.

He suffered from respiratory problems most of his life, and in the early 1950s moved to Taos, New Mexico, in the hope that the climate there would improve his health. Taos boasted a large colony of writers; and his good friend, and sometimes collaborator, Mack Reynolds, lived there at the time.

Critical Comments

Like most pulp writers, Brown often wrote at a fast pace in order to make a living. Because of this, some critics found his writing to be uneven.

His friend and fellow writer, Walt Sheldon, described Brown as “A genius of sorts.” Fellow mystery author Bill Pronzini has written about Brown: “[His] view of the world, of the entire universe, is paradoxical and slightly cockeyed.” Popular author Donald Westlake once wrote: “Fredric Brown had one of the eeriest and most fascinating minds of his time.”

Brown said of himself: “I was an office worker until 1936 (age 30), when I became a proofreader, and started selling stories. Worked at both proofreading and writing, off and on, until 1947; since then have been a full-time writer. Have written slightly more in the mystery field than in science fiction, but prefer the latter.”

Some Concluding Remarks

The first Brown SF story I read was probably “The Star-Mouse,” reprinted in the Dell anthology *Invasion from Mars Interplanetary Stories* (1949), an early paperback SF anthology that also introduced me to the work of Nelson Bond. Brown’s story and Bond’s story (“The Castaway”) had originally been published in *Planet Stories*, a SF prozine I didn’t read at the time.

I had heard of the other authors collected in this Dell mapback – including Asimov, Boucher, Bradbury, Heinlein, Leinster, and Sturgeon (and also the artist who did the striking cover, the

popular genre artist Malcolm Smith) – but neither Brown nor Bond. I soon rectified my error, however, and included works of both these authors in my future SF reading.

Brown has developed a considerable cult following since his death, and his SF and mystery works have been reprinted many times. He has a large fan base, especially in France, where there have been several movie adaptations of his stories.

Something else about him – and something with which I can readily identify – is that his given name was often misspelled in print (usually as Frederic or Frederick), even on some of his own works!

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Note: In addition to the above, several Internet sites were consulted.

Short Stories

If You Take My Meaning, by Charlie Jane Anders

Published by Tor.com

Review by Robert Hullender

Alyssa seeks out the aliens who can give her an augment that will let her exchange thoughts and feelings with other humans. But why does she want it, and what is the cost?

Pro: To start with, Alyssa just wants to be more like Sophie. Getting the grafts will make their relationship even more intimate, and no one seems too concerned about Mouth being left out. Plus she thinks she knows what to expect, so how bad can it be? She didn't grow up with much, most of her life was as a criminal, and she's consumed with guilt over her role in installing the murderous tyrant who rules Xiosphant. Accordingly it's not a big surprise that what she wants from the gift is selfish and very small-scale.

Jeremy has a much more concrete plan for his grafts: he wants to use them to enable a superior form of activism. Why try to convince people with mere words when you can deliver whole meanings to them? He grew up with a life of privilege, which he lost when his family found out he was gay. No surprise, then, that what he wants is very large scale, although it would benefit him personally to some degree.

But the grafts don't work the way either of them expects. Neither realized how much pain would be involved—apparently Sophie failed to transmit that to them, but maybe that's not a surprise, since we don't really experience physical pain again when we remember it. Alyssa tries to kill her-

self (or at least rip the graft out), and Jeremy tries to kill a Gelent—and then each is consumed with remorse, since their behavior was uncharacteristic of either of them.

Once they get past that, they learn that the Gelent are on the path to extinction, and that humans are at least partly to blame. Further, the reason for them creating hybrid individuals is precisely because they need help.

Now Alyssa wants to be an activist. Suddenly she has a cause worth fighting for. And Jeremy wants to essentially be a personal trainer for people getting the grafts in the future so they won't have the awful reactions he and Sophie did. These are both much more reasonable roles for each person, so it's quite satisfying that that's where they end up.

Con: If Xiosphant is so repressive, it's hard to believe they tolerate these grafts. If they persecute gay people, it's hard to believe they don't persecute hybrids.

Second Annual LTUE Anthology

Review by Pat Patterson

The cover art is magnificent, the sort of thing you might want to hang on a wall for friends to view. Donated by a person not previously known by me, a certain Kaitlund Zupanic, there is much to be admired here.

A Game of Stakes Max Florschutz

Victoria, daughter of famous Count Antares, the Wolf, is seeking a husband via a dragon, Dostoy the Mighty. She has established three challenges for her prospective suitors: The first was that a suitor had to be fleet of foot enough— or clever enough— to make it to the Stakes board with Dostoy defending it. The second was that they must beat him in a game. And the third was that she herself would duel them.

Dragon Soap M. K. Hutchins

These are smallish dragons, about the size of a raccoon. And they aren't really ENEMIES: more like pests. They keep stealing radishes. Somebody has been messing around with the ecology, it seems. And the poor folks who live way out in the woods are the people who are paying the price.



Cat Magician by Angela K. Scott

Li Na and the Dragon Scott R. Parkin

Unique among these stories, this is a tiny slice of, at least, a novel. It's more likely that the story will need multiple installments. Li Na, the protagonist, has been tending to the worship of the dragons in her household for her entire life. With the birth of her seventh daughter, multiple threads come together to form a crisis.

High Noon at the Oasis Jaleta Clegg

She'd turned into a horse, somehow. She couldn't recall much of anything that took place before that. But she could smell out magic, and water, and even lies, and somebody was going to pay.



Castle and Moon by
Angela K. Scott

The Wild Ride Christopher Baxter

We have a husband-wife team of something with tusks; we have a wild dragon round-up. Each one is going to grab a wild dragon, ride it to the end, and they hope to use their winnings to buy their own ranch. They might die, though.

Rising Star Michaelene Pendleton

Near the end of a wild pursuit of a mage, a dragon gets slammed through dimensions into the desert outside Los Angeles. And there, she finds a Hollywood agent at the end of his rope.

The Diamond-Spitting Knight S. E. Page

All she wanted was to be a princess. With a tiara, and everything. But somehow, the gifts that pixies give always turn out to be a pain, and she gets imprisoned, more or less, because she spits jewels when she speaks. If ever a fair young maiden needed rescue, it was poor Millet.

Amélie's Guardian Bryan Thomas Schmidt

This is a pure, sweet tale of redemption, birthed by mutual need and affection.

Aer'Vicus Jodi L. Milner A girl and a dragon learn together, and that's a good story; however, a throw-away line grabbed my attention, and is one of the best parts of the entire book. Here it is: "It's as if you are a mouse standing on a corner of the road squeaking as loudly as it can about the surprising lack of cheese in its life." (Joe Monson and Jaleta Clegg. *A Dragon and Her Girl* (Kindle Locations 2497-2498). Hemelein Publications with LTUE Press)

Loyalties Josh Brown

Anessi has fought to keep her people alive, even though most of them have died in the process. When she is sent on a mission to kill a dragon, she finds the end of her quest.

Ash and Blood Hannah Marie

I'm not sure, but I THINK that this story illustrates the corrupting nature of power. It's certainly gory enough, with a more than ample casualty list.

Therapy for a Dragon Sam Knight

Hmmm. Marjorie, strapped onto an interrogation couch, certainly needs dragon therapy. I'm not quite sure that the therapy is for the dragon, though.

Taking Wing Julia H. West

The little crippled girl, Sofria, sat on one corner of the widest street in Tarnisi. And, over time, she began to speak with the gargoyle perched high above her on the ledge. And it spoke to her, as well.

Lullaby John D. Payne

Any parent of multiple small children knows the middle-of-the-night torture of dragging yourself out of bed to care for one (or more) who is sick, or hungry, or lonely, or wet. Dismal, dismal, dismal. But, at least you have the hope that they will grow out of it. Dragons, though, live for a very, very long time.

Rain Like Diamonds Wendy Nikel

In a time of drought, with the people starving, it falls upon the monarch to heal the land. That's the price of ruling.

Here by Choice Gerri Leen

You had one job: guard the woman who was ready for paradise. Wait; she changed her mind!

Dragon's Hand David Von Allmen

Well, this one is a combo: you get magic, the Old West, and card strategy, all mixed into one.

Take out the Trash Melva L. Gifford

Snicker, snicker. I don't know how many puns are hidden in this little beauty. It really is about taking out the trash, at a magic school.

Burying Treasure Alex Shvartsman

Okay, somehow, we wind up with a dragon on the throne. But this is a SMART dragon, who puts into place significantly enlightened policies which will, eventually, result in prosperity. In the meantime, though, there are some unemployed soldiers around.

Dragon in Distress Mercedes Lackey and Elisabeth Waters

Turns the hero-rescuing-maiden-from-dragon story on its' head, but it's a bit pervy, too. Adults only.

Generation Gap by Thoraiya Dyer appeared in Clarkesworld issue 161

Review by Greg Hullender

Young Wipwai's tribe has always fought their neighbors, but she's secretly made friends with one of them, and they plot a future of peace.

Pro: This is the story of how, as children, Wipwai and Fe a dream of bringing peace to their warring families and what happens as a result.



Cat Mage by
Angela K. Scott

From the start, we know that these folks are relatively primitive for their kind. Elsewhere there's a city where things are not so resource-limited and people can have more than one child per family. Arguably, one thread of the story is the government's attempts to achieve the same thing young Wipwai and Fe a dreamed of: peace in their territory.

Wipwai's choices are severely limited because the old Tower is so single-minded and the old Worker is so brutal. When she becomes Tower, she can only trust Ancient; the others who should have supported her only hold her in contempt. They have their own agenda, and it's not hers.

But the land itself is failing them. More and more it looks as though they really do have no future. Either they need to destroy the other tribe or else join it somehow.

Fe a puts her childish dreams aside, for the most part, although she remains fond of Wipwai and even trusts her enough to bring her people's Child to her. When the Child dies in an accident (partly but not entirely Wipwai's fault), it ironically resolves the problem. The government liquidates Wipwai's tribe and gives their Child to Fe a's people. Note that this wouldn't have been possible without the relationship that already existed between Wipwai and Fe a.

What's remarkable about this story is that even though it ends with defeat for the protagonist, it's clear that the outcome (a single family controlling both territories) is probably the best that could be expected, and Fe a's tribe is far better suited to be the surviving one. Just as remarkable, despite the long time span of the story, there's plenty of tension and excitement in it, particularly towards the end.

Finally, this is the rare imaginary-toads-in-imaginary-gardens story that actually works. Quite an accomplishment!

Con: The story gets off to a slow start. The reader needs a good bit of patience before it becomes compelling.

Zines

Sci FI

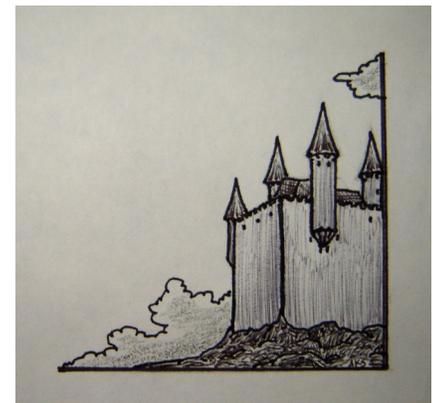
Reviews by Heath Row

Sci Fi Vol. 26 #1 (Spring 2020)

There aren't many magazines like this any more. In fact, there might just be this one. While science fiction, fantasy, and horror literature and media have largely infused popular culture and mainstream magazines such as *Entertainment Weekly*, *TV Guide*, and *Rolling Stone*, the best magazines on the topic might very well be the bookazines focusing on the newest superhero or science fiction movies, franchises, or creators such as Stephen King and Stan Lee. So, four times a year, this magazine is refreshing: a wide-ranging cross-media survey of genre productions—books, TV, movies, and video games. Originally published as a house magazine to promote Sci-Fi Channel (now Syfy) programming, the periodical ranges more widely now. Its content isn't all to my taste, but it keeps me up to date and includes enough of what does interest me that it's a need to read.

This 80-page issue features Patrick Stewart on the cover and includes cover lines about *Star Trek: Picard*, *Birds of Prey*, *The Turning*, *Fantasy Island*, *The Invisible Man*, *The Expanse*, *Project Blue Book*, and other projects. The opening Editor's Log address the recent wealth of genre remakes and reboots, suggesting the longevity and ongoing value of various comic book, film, and TV characters. The TV in Focus section builds on that, offering synopses and updates on shows such as *Arrow*, *The Witcher*, *Marvel's Runaways*, *Black Lightning*, and *Watchmen*.

Feature stories focus on the new streaming *Locke & Key*, *Star Trek: Picard*—I'm still watching season two of *Star Trek: Discovery*, so I haven't started watching the new show yet—*Birds of Prey*, *The Invisible Man*,



Corner Castle by
Angela K. Scott

The Turning, and other items promoted on the cover. Similar to the Editor's Log, some of the best content connects the past to the present. The Invisible Man feature, for example, devotes a half page to the 1933 Claude Rains movie, and the Turning piece considers the Henry James novella and the 1961 movie *The Innocents*, which was also based on "The Turn of the Screw."

The Fantasy Island story draws a straight line to the 1977-1984 TV series. And the Vintage TV end piece considers the show *Forever Knight*, positioning it among other media portrayals of vampires.

The magazine also includes DVD and Blu-Ray reviews (*Joker*, *Ad Astra*, *Doctor Sleep*, *The Lighthouse*, and others), book reviews (a Harlan Ellison tribute anthology, posthumous books by Michael Crichton and Stan Lee, a *Blade Runner* graphic novel, and a collection of Elizabeth Bear short stories), and video game reviews.

With a print run of 21,000, the magazine could attract more readers—Neffers, mobilize!—but the ads are a little more upscale than previous issues I've read. Past ads have focused mostly on self-published and small press material. Advertisers in this issue include Warner Archive (*Shazam!*), Mill Creek (*Ultraman*), Tor—four ads!—Baen, Harper Voyager, *Angry Robot*, and Syfy. Looks like the magazine can't fall far from the tree—and like the mainstream genre purveyors are returning to the magazine, too.

Sci Fi Vol. 25 #5 (December 2019)

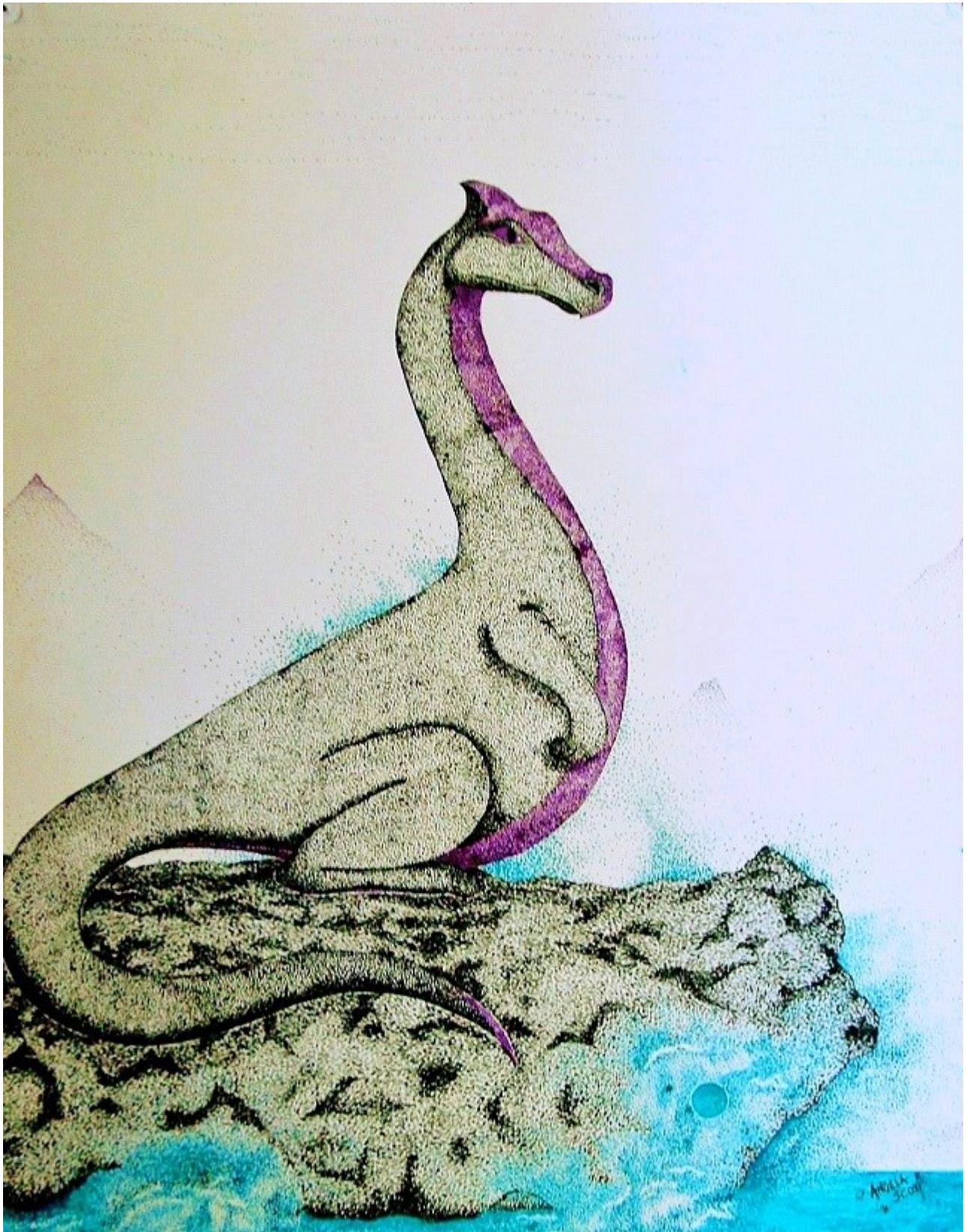
While the indicia in the more recent Spring 2020 issue says the magazine is published quarterly, the indicia in this 76-page issue indicates bimonthly, so the periodical recently scaled back its frequency. This issue features Michelle Pfeiffer on the cover, which sports cover lines drawing attention to *Maleficent: Mistress of Evil*, *It Chapter Two*, *Zombieland: Double Tap*, and *The Addams Family*, as well as other movies and TV shows.

The Editor's Log comments on the FX show *The Terror: Infamy*, which stars George Takei and focuses on the Japanese concentration camps in the United States during World War II. The half-page piece, accompanied by an Ansel Adams photograph of Manzanar, which my family has visited, expresses hope that the camp's setting of the show will inspire viewers to learn more about that period of our history.

The TV in Focus section covers then-recent developments in *Good Omens*, *Stranger Things*, the cartoon *Young Justice: Outsiders*, *Preacher*, *Pennyworth*, and other programs. Feature articles focus on *The Dark Crystal: Age of Resistance*, *It Chapter Two*, the animated *The Addams Family*, *The Terror: Infamy*, *Batwoman*, and other projects.

There are also DVD and Blu-Ray reviews, book reviews (including Bearmanor's Bela Lugosi and the Monogram 9), and video game reviews. While there's less of interest to me in this issue, the article on *The Terror: Infamy* and the American concentration camps was excellent, and it was a pleasant surprise to see the Lugosi Monogram book review.

Despite the decrease in frequency and uneven article mix, there's still plenty of interest issue to issue—and this remains perhaps the best cross-media genre magazine focusing on current productions.



Stippled Dragon
Angela K. Scott