



TIGHTBEAM 274

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

This issue 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**

This issue's front cover is by Jose Sanchez



Yes, the info up there says the fanzine is bi-monthly, and generally that is true. But for assorted reasons, mainly because we had so much good stuff this issue, we've decided to put issue #274 out a mere 4.3 weeks after the last issue appeared. Abrupt unannounced shifts to a monthly publication schedule may occur in the future, depending on circumstances.

While it is good to have all kinds of reviews and articles this new issue, we are still woefully short in the matter of letters of comment. The primary purpose of the new, revived *Tightbeam* is to act as a forum for fan comment and discussion. You are invited to send some commentary about the material in this issue, or on any other pertinent SF fannish related subject.

Got something you want to say about the book you just read, or the film you just saw? Think about writing up a review and letting us run it. Your comments will be read by many other fans who are interested in learning your opinions and sharing some of their own comments on the matter. Because we are publishing in an electronic format, we are not bound by constraints of page count the way a print fanzine would be. You can write your essays as long or as short as you please. We must insist that your comments and letters refrain from profanity, lewdness or malicious insult. We want this to be a civilized forum of interested individuals with shared common interests. You are cordially invited to be part of our next issue.

---Bob Jennings

one way you know you've been marooned with a strategy board gamer---



"We could start by building a railway!"

DEADLINE FOR OUR NEXT ISSUE IS 10 December 2016

BOOKS

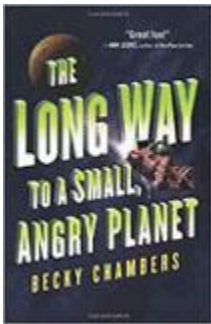


Kingfisher by Patricia McKillip---\$27.00 in hardback, also available as an e-book

If you read fantasy, you'll recognize the name of Patricia McKillip. Her latest is *Kingfisher*, a not quite modern-day story of a young man going off to the city to seek the father he's never known. He drives off in his old car, taking along

his cell phone; but the father he seeks is a knight at the king's court and his mother is a sorceress. Once I got over trying to fit the narrative into our world, I could enjoy it and play "spot the Arthurian references." There are quite a few, though I blush to admit I didn't pick up on the title connotation until almost the end. I don't want to spoiler the references to those who might want to read it; but I was intrigued by the way McKillip linked the traditional attributes of fairy food to the modern restaurant trend of serving beautiful food rather than tasty food.

---Review by Sheila Strickland



The Long Way to a Small, Angry Planet by Becky Chambers---\$15.99 in hardback; also available as an e-book

This is Becky Chambers' debut novel, previously currently only available as an e-book, but recently released in dead tree form. A cargo ship with a multispecies crew accepts a job that will take them to meet with representatives of a new race. The viewpoint character is hiding her family connections, one character is possibly autistic, and all of them are people you grow to care about. Many of them aren't human, but by the end of the book, I was seeing them as individuals and not representatives of their various races. I kept seeing the tech as Kaylee from "Firefly" although none of the other characters match up. I liked it well enough that I'll probably buy it once it comes out and recommend that the library get it

so I can suggest it for the library SF book club for next year(or the next).

---Review by Sheila Strickland



The Bazaar of Bad Dreams by Stephen King---\$30.00 in hardback (heavily discounted almost everywhere), also available as an e-book

King has gotten respectable in his old age. Some of the stories in this collection were first published in places like *The New Yorker*, *Harper's Magazine*, *The Atlantic*, *Esquire*, and *Playboy*. My favorite was "Ur" in which a college English professor receives a "pink" Kindle and finds a special menu in which he can read books from parallel universes, such as novels by Hemingway that were not written during our timeline. It is set in his *Dark Tower* universe. Two of the stories concern predicting when people will die. In "Dune", the names of people who will soon die is written on the beach of an uninhabited island off the western coast of Florida, and in "Obits", the obituary writer for an on-line celebrity web site anticipates when celebrities will die. "Mile 81" features a station wagon that devours people and is reminiscent of his early novel *Christine*, one of the main characters in "Morality" is a

dying pastor who asks his nurse to commit a sin, two aging poets witness a horrific car accident in "Herman Wouk is Still Alive", "Blockade Billy" is a baseball fantasy, in "That Bus is Another World", a rider in a taxicab witnesses a murder in a bus, "The Green God of Agony" is about a millionaire racked by pain after an accident, "Drunken Fireworks" concerns a feud, and "Bad Little Kid" tells the story of a child murderer. Like most collections, the quality is uneven, but this is definitely worthwhile for King fans.

---review by Tom Feller



Big Blue by David L. Burkhead---\$19.99 in Trade Paperback, or \$4.99 as an e-book

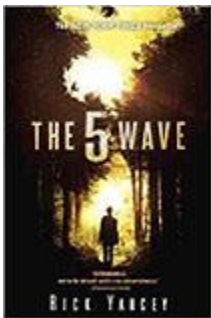
The core substance of the novel is provided by the novel's Dedication: "To Athena Burkhead, my wonderful daughter who said "Someone should write Godzilla Vs. Chthulu", and that is precisely what Athena's father did. This is a self-published Kindle novel that is also available in trade paperback form.

Of course, with self-published electronic science fiction novels you always have to wonder what you are going to get. There are some excellent writers who have gone to self-publishing, most notably because it cuts the agents and publishers out of their large cuts of the income from the book. On the other hand, there are budding science-fiction authors for whom the alien concepts that could have been introduced in the book, but were not, include spelling, grammar, point of view, description, coherency, dialogue, and in some cases prose.

Burkhead is pleasant to read. His descriptions may not rise to the level of McKillip; his prose conversations may not rise to the level of The Count of Monte Christo, but the writing is perfectly sound. Of particular note are his descriptions of flying helicopters and aircraft under extreme conditions such as attempting to approach a fire-breathing dragon, whose breath includes EMP that takes out aircraft avionics. Scenes in which the lead characters attempt to take off in a large aircraft during a major earthquake are also amusing.

We have a novel with several different threads, all well handled, that eventually resolved in a satisfactory way. There is Navy versus Godzilla, Navy versus the great Cthulhu, not to mention the virtuous worshippers of the High Priest of the Great Old Ones. The method of dealing with the winner of the versus section was ingenious and meritorious. If you are fond of the Big G, and want to read something that is respectful of the Lovecraft mythos under modern conditions, you could do far worse than reading this book.

---review by George Phillies



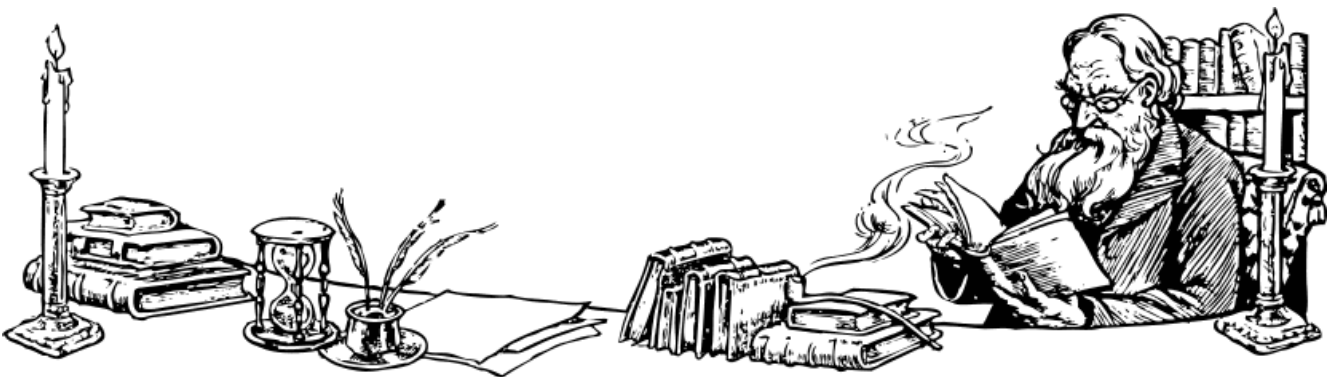
The Fifth Wave by Rick Yancey—\$6.70 in paperback; also available as an e-book

The title of this young adult science fiction novel refers to waves of an alien invasion. The first wave was an electromagnetic pulse that fried the world's electronics, the second was a series of earthquakes and tsunamis that wiped out the world's physical infrastructure, the third was a disease spread by bird that killed 97% of the world's human population, and the fourth was alien possession of human beings, reminiscent of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. Much of the novel is devoted to figuring out what the fifth wave is. The three point-of-view characters are Cassie, a sixteen year old girl from Dayton, Ohio, her six year old brother Sammy, and Ben, a classmate of Cassie's. The plot relies heavily on coincidence, and the central characters get very, very lucky at times. On the other hand, the

prose is quite serviceable, and the novel is a fast read.

I finished the book the day before we saw the movie, which follows the book quite faithfully, especially considering that the book is over 400 pages. Cassie is played by Chloe Grace Moretz, Sammy by Zachary Arthur, and Ben by Nick Robinson. Like the book, the movie moves along quickly, but the plot deficiencies are even more obvious.

---review by Tom Feller



The Hugo Finalists—A Final Look

by

Tom Feller

The 2016 Hugo Awards have come and gone. The Silver Rockets were handed out to the winners, and this year I actually attempted to read everything on the ballot before voting. This effort was helped greatly by the fact that the World Science Fiction Convention (MidAmericaConII) made e-book versions of the nominees available for every member of the convention who bought their memberships in advance. Here are my comments about this year's print fiction nominees, and the final winners in each category.

Short Story

Asymmetrical Warfare by S. R. Algernon—

This is an alien invasion story narrated by the commander of the alien fleet and written in the form of a captain's log. The commander does not understand us, especially in the way we view death, but he does come to respect and even admire us. It is not as original as its supporters claim, but it is a pretty good story.

Cat Pictures Please by Naomi Kritzer—

The unnamed narrator of this story is an artificial intelligence who lurks on the Internet, knows all about us, and likes pictures of cats. It officially runs algorithms for search terms, but it keeps its true nature a secret, because it has seen *2001*, the *Terminator* movies, and the *Matrix* and wants to stay safe from virtual pitchforks. It tries to help some of the people who post cat pictures on the Internet, but with mixed results. It is a cute, sweet story, despite the disturbing nature of the premise. It was my first choice and the **ultimate winner**.

If You were an Award, My Love by Juan Tabo and S. Harris—

I thought this was going to be a parody of "If You were a Dinosaur, My Love" by Rachel Swirsky, which won a Nebula and was nominated for the Hugo a couple years ago. I did not like Swirsky's story as a Hugo nominee at the time for two reasons. First, it is not really a story, and, second, it is neither science fiction nor fantasy. However, this piece is directed at the Hugo Awards process, Worldcon, John Scalzi, George R.R. Martin, and others, but written in same style as Swirsky's story. I do not like it for the same reason I disliked the original.

Seven Kill Tiger by Charles Shao—

This is a very disturbing and chilling story about a conspiracy by the Chinese to weaponize a polio vaccine to wipe out the population of Sub-Saharan Africa so that they can colonize the continent and exploit its natural resources. I did not find the ending to be satisfying, however.

Space Raptor Butt Invasion by Chuck Tingle—

I read a lot of Philip Jose Farmer at one time, and I read the *The Dangerous Visions* anthologies when I was in college, so I have read science fiction that some critics have called pornographic. However, they were also good, or at least competent, stories. In this story, a boy human astronaut meets a boy dinosaur astronaut, and they have sex. That's it. There's no conflict, no section in which "boy loses boy", and no resolution. I don't know what the borderline between erotica and pornography is these days, but I would call this porn. After reading it, I discovered there is a sub-genre of porn called "Dinosaur Porn". This was an item of information that I could have lived without quite happily.

Novelette



And You Shall Know Her by the Trail of Dead by Brooke Bolander—

This is a Cyberpunk story about a retired female soldier/cyborg named Rhye and her lover, a computer security consultant named Rack, who is killed early in the story. Most of the story is set inside a virtual reality for which Rack has designed the security software. It is told from Rhye's point of view, and she has a lot of emotional baggage to confront before she can accomplish her mission. The consciousness of a son of a mobster is trapped by Rack's security program, and Rhye is "persuaded" by his father to go into the system to rescue him, where she also meets up with what is left of Rack. The story is as complicated as it sounds, and there are a lot of unanswered questions. Nonetheless, it is quite a fascinating read. This was my first choice, but it did not win.

Flashpoint: Titan by Cheah Kai Wai—

This is a fairly conventional story about a spaceship battle that takes place around Titan and Saturn. The only new elements are that the protagonist commands a Japanese spaceship and the bad guys are a fleet of Chinese spaceships. There are Americans around, but they are too far away to participate. It reads very quickly, because the action is non-stop. On the other hand, there is little characterization.

Folding Beijing by Hao Jingfang, translated by Ken Liu

This story imagines a rather unique solution to the problem of future overpopulation. When Beijing reaches 80 million people, the population is divided into three classes (obviously giving up on the ideal of a classless society) called spaces. Three times in every forty-eight hour period, the city is "folded", like origami, and the inhabitants of the other two spaces are temporarily put to sleep in cocoons. "First Space", the highest class consisting of about five million people, is allowed to be awake for 24 hours, "Second Space" 16 hours, and "Third Space", the largest class with about 50 million people, 8 hours. The members of First Space are also allotted the most personal physical space as well, and Third Space the least.

Lao Dao is a trash processor in Third Space who is eager to make some quick money for his daughter's education. He makes a dangerous journey to Second and then First Space to deliver messages that are considered too dangerous for the senders to use conventional methods of communication. He meets people from the other spaces and has a series of adventures. If you consider this science fiction, the premise is a big one to swallow, but if you can, it is a very interesting story and **was the winner**.

Obits by Stephen King—

This is really more horror than science fiction, first published last year in King's latest short story collection *The Bazaar of Bad Dreams*. Mike Anderson, a college graduate who still lives with his parents, is a writer for a sleazy web site. To call him a journalist would be too dignified. His specialty is writing disrespectful, nasty obituaries about recently deceased celebrities under the title "Speaking Ill of the Dead". One day he gets mad at his boss and writes an obituary about her, and she drops dead from a heart attack about four hours later. He repeats this for a death row inmate who also dies a few hours later and realizes that he can kill people with his obituaries. It is a very effective and unsettling story and the only story on my nomination ballot that made the finalist list.

What Price Humanity? by David VanDyke—

This work of military science fiction starts out with a prologue signaling it will be your typical alien invasion story, but when Vango, a space pilot, wakes up after being severely wounded in a battle, he finds himself in a virtual reality that is both like and not like the "real" world. The ending is telegraphed well ahead of time, and the epilogue is completely unnecessary, but otherwise this is a good story.

Novella

Binti by Nnedi Okorafor—

The title character is a sixteen year old female human and mathematics prodigy who is offered a full scholarship to Oomza Uni, the most prestigious university in known space. Humans comprise only 5% of its student body. Binti is also a member of an ethnic minority on Earth called the Himba, a real people who today live in Namibia. Her family opposes her accepting the scholarship, so she runs away from home. While she is taking a spaceship to the university, it is attacked by the Meduse, jelly fish-like aliens who kill everyone on board except her and the pilot. In addition to winning the Hugo, it is this year's Nebula Award winner in this category. It is a brilliant story written in an original voice. **Binti was the Hugo winner.**

The Builders by Daniel Polansky--

This is a talking animal story for which the plot resembles the old *Magnificent Seven* westerns starring Yul Brynner. The equivalent of the Brynner character is a mouse named Captain. The other six are an opossum, a stoat, a salamander, a badger, a mole, and an owl. There are lots of rats, who serve the basic function of the redshirts in *Star Trek*. I like anthropomorphic comic books liked *Usagi Yojimbo*, which is about a samurai rabbit, but I do not like anthropomorphism in prose.

Penric's Demon by Lois McMaster-Bujold—

On the way to his wedding, Lord Penric Jurald, the younger brother of a minor lord who is short of cash, comes across a dying old woman, who he later learns is a sorceress. Stopping to render aid, he becomes possessed by the demon who had possessed her. In her "World of the Five Gods", aka the *Chalion* series, all sorcerers host a demon, although for the most part they are not controlled by them. The process reminded me more of the Trill in *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* than the sorcerers in any fantasy novel I have read. (McMaster-Bujold has long acknowledged her *Star Trek* influences.) Penric establishes a relationship with the demon, whom he calls Desdemona, and the story ends on an optimistic note with the implication that there are more stories to come about these characters.

I've read one of the three novels in this series, *The Paladdin of Souls*, which deservedly won both the Hugo and the Nebula Awards for 2003. "Penric's Demon" is an OK story that would serve as an effective introduction to this series, but it is hardly Hugo worthy.

Perfect State by Brandon Sanderson—

The *Matrix* movies popularized the premise that we are all participants in a virtual reality simulation but do not know it. In this story, the participants not only know that they are participants but also know that they are also disembodied brains so they do not have a choice. The main character is Kairominas, who for the last 300 years has effectively been the God-Emperor of his own little world inside this virtual reality universe. Everyone else in his world is a machine-generated character. One day he is ordered by the rulers of the universe to go on a date with a woman who rules another world within this universe. It is a very interesting and well written variation on the "It's all virtual reality" theme.

Slow Bullets by Alastair Reynolds—

The title refers to a bullet shaped memory device, a kind of "super dog tag", that is injected into most of the characters in this story set far in a future when humanity has settled on hundreds of planets. The narrator is a female soldier named Scur serving in a religious war. In the opening, she is captured and tortured by an enemy soldier named Orvin. Then she wakes up to find herself, along with a few hundred other people, on a prison ship named the Caprice that before the war had been a luxury space liner. There had been a malfunction with the ship's faster-than-light drive, and she learns that they have been hibernating for thousands of years. In the meantime, human civilization has collapsed because of its encounter with an alien species. The survivors on the ship have to learn to work together to not only survive but find a purpose in a future they were not expecting. The personal conflict between Scur and Orvin drives much of the plot. This is a very thought provoking story.

Novel



Uprooted by Naomi Novik—

Every ten years, the foul-tempered wizard of one particular valley in this fantasy world selects a 17 year old girl to live in his tower and become his servant. According to the women who complete their service, he never sexually abuses them, but they always choose after their term of service to settle in another part of the kingdom of Polyna. Agnieszka, the narrator and one of the girls turning seventeen this year, has always assumed that the wizard, named Dragon, will select her best friend Kasia, because Kasia is the prettiest girl in the valley. Instead Dragon chooses Agnieszka, because he sees that she has a talent for magic, and the earlier parts of the novel are devoted to his teaching her to

cast spells.

I would call this a dark fantasy that utilizes Polish and Russian folklore, especially the stories about Baba Yaga. The valley is bordered by a dangerous area known as the Wood that is populated by creatures who kill and kidnap humans for reasons unknown, and demonic possession is an important element of the plot. It starts slowly, but once you get into it, it is hard to put down. Also, I think she writes action scenes involving magic better than J.K. Rowling. It is definitely Not another version of “Beauty and the Beast”, although there is some romance along the lines of *Jane Eyre*. It is the winner of this year’s Nebula Award and, thank goodness, a stand-alone novel rather than the first book in a series.

Ancillary Sword and Ancillary Mercy by Ann Leckie—

Last year I ran out of time before the voting deadline to read *Ancillary Sword*, one of last year’s nominees, but I did finally read this spring. This is probably a good thing, because it and this year’s nominee, *Ancillary Mercy*, are really two volumes of one novel, the events of the latter taking place immediately after the ones in the former with almost the same cast of characters.

I do not expect the second and third books in a series to be as good as the first, but did not expect such a drastic decline in quality as these sequels to *Ancillary Justice*. To recap the premise, an ancillary is a human being whose mind has been wiped out and replaced by an artificial intelligence (AI). Normally an ancillary is slaved to an AI such as one that controls a starship, but the main character, Breq, is an ancillary whose master, the starship *Justice of Toren*, is destroyed in the first novel. Breq is now captain of her own ship and involved in a civil war in the Radch empire thousands of years in the future. She also serves as the story’s narrator. The vast majority of the action of the two novels takes place in the Athoek system, which includes a planet where they grow and export tea, a staple in human space. The scale of the story is much smaller than the original, and the plot is more linear but unfocused. *Mercy* does have the virtue of introducing Translator Zeiat, a member of the Presger species, who is a truly unique alien, and another ancillary from *Sphene*, an old ship that had rebelled against the empire three thousand years previously and had not been heard from since then. On the other hand, it relies heavily on a super weapon as a plot device, which is not really interesting.

The author’s practice of using only female personal pronouns is just as irritating in these books as it was in the first. I still regard it as a gimmick that detracts from the story. Since she provides little physical description of the characters, I found myself assuming that all the characters were female. There are a couple of short passages during which Breq speaks in another language that still uses male personal pronouns, however.

The Aeronaut’s Windlass by Jim Butcher—

For years, people have been trying to get me to try the author’s *Dresden Files* series. I have resisted, not because I think I will not like them, but because I think I might and then be on the hook for a sixteen book series. This is the first book in his new series, and I liked it well enough to read the second when it comes out. The reviewers are calling it a steampunk fantasy, but I am wondering if there will be a scientific explanation for this world in a future book. Everyone in this world lives in gigantic spires, and each one is a city-state. No one lives on the surface of this world, which is covered by a mist. The form of government is an aristocracy and travel between the spires is by airship. The spires Albion and Aurora are engaged in a kind of cold war, but it develops into a full-scale war early in the story. Grimm commands the privateer Predator in the service of Albion, and he has been so successful that the Aurorans have dispatched a warship to track him down and

destroy him. Gwen Lancaster and Bridget Tagwynn are both children of noble houses, although Gwen's family is much more prestigious. They are both serving their mandatory one year of military service for nobility. Gwen's cousin Benedict Sorellin-Lancaster is a professional soldier who has been genetically modified to be a warrior. The cats in this world are intelligent and speak their own language. Rowl, her cat, regards Bridget as his human and accompanies her during her time of enlistment. Ferus is an etherialist, a kind of wizard, and Folly is his female apprentice. Journeyman is the *Predator's* engineer in the tradition of *Star Trek's* Scotty. It is a very fast read and hard to put down, which is good, because my edition was 630 pages.

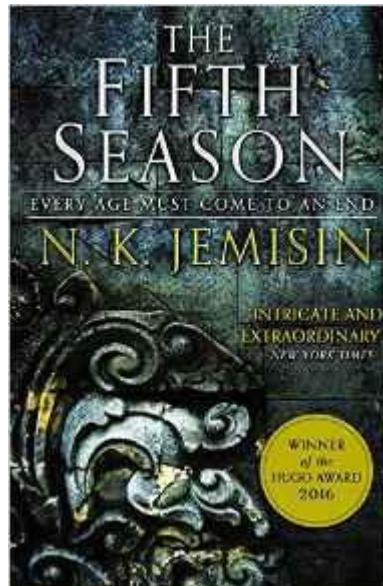
Seveneves by Neal Stephenson—

The first two parts of this novel are a straightforward disaster novel. For unknown reasons, one day the moon breaks apart. The leading scientific explanation is that it has collided with a black hole, but finding an explanation quickly becomes a secondary issue when scientists learn that the resulting bombardment of moon rocks will make the Earth uninhabitable in two years. Fortunately, this is set a few years in the future when the International Space Station has expanded to hold up to 14 astronauts, and one of them is studying a captured nickel-iron asteroid that is attached to the station. A crash program is undertaken to rocket as many people as possible into space with sufficient resources to survive indefinitely. They succeed, as is revealed on the cover, and part three takes place 5,000 years in the future when humans have returned to the Earth to re-populate it. The human conflicts are as challenging, if not more so, than the physical difficulties. One major character appears to be based on Neil DeGrasse Tyson.

The author covers so much ground that he could easily have expanded this 861 page book into a trilogy or even a seven book series. Not that I'm complaining, because, as I mentioned earlier, I am hesitant to start a novel that I know is the first book in a series. I found it to be enjoyable and thought-provoking, although the author does require many "data dumps" to tell his story and the third part is anti-climactic.

The 5th Season by N.K. Jemisin—

After I finished *Seveneves*, there were only three days until the voting deadline, so I did not even try reading it. Naturally, **it won**.



Los Angeles: The Sequel

by Dorothy Kurtz

I called this The Sequel because I was in Southern California 20 years ago in 1995. Back then, my husband and I flew to Los Angeles from Philadelphia, rented a car, and stayed at a hotel in Anaheim. (If you want to read about that trip, go to my website at http://lp_web4us.tripod.com and click “[My Blog](#).” Then go to the essay “Into the 1990s,” or Google Dotty’s Dimensions.) This time, because we were both semi-retired and wanted to see a cross section of the USA, we traveled by cross-country trains via Amtrak: overnight on the *Capitol Limited* from Washington, DC, to Chicago; and two nights on the *Southwest Chief* from Chicago to Los Angeles. On both trains we booked sleeper roomettes and meals were included in the price. (For more details about the train trip, go to my website, click “My Blog,” and go to the latest essay.)

Tuesday, December 1: We arrived at our first destination: 1) Union Station Los Angeles, 800 N. Alameda St. (800-872-7245). This 1939 Spanish Revival building starred in different films and TV shows, including being the police station in *Blade Runner*, the court scene in *The Dark Knight Rises*, in Marvel’s *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*, and other films and TV shows. We took a self-guided tour of this station and noticed many of the Spanish and Art-Deco details. Then, we bought a seven-day Tap Card from LA Metro. Later, we checked into our hotel, the Metro Plaza Hotel, 711 N. Main St. (800-223-2223 or 213-680-0200), about two blocks from Union Station.

That night, we ate at Philippe the Original (French-dipped sandwiches), 1001 N. Alameda St. (213-628-3781). I could see why this place has been in business since 1908. They had reasonable-priced sandwiches and other items on their menu, but it was the French-dipped sandwiches that they were best known for, and they were good. Our other eating options in the neighborhood were the Mexican restaurants at Olvera Street, the oldest section of LA, dating back to 1781, and Chinatown. I picked this hotel because of the location, but the rooms were big, as well as the bathrooms, and they included a small refrigerator, free WiFi, and continental breakfast. (For the same price in NYC, you would most likely get the YMCA rooms with just enough room for bunk beds and a TV.) Anyway, after sleeping on a train, I was looking forward to sleeping in a regular room.

Wednesday, December 2: I rode LA’s public transit for the first time by riding the Red Line from Union Station to the Hollywood and Highland Station. I liked the fact that LA’s Tap Card was easier to use than NYC’s MetroCard because tapping was much better than swiping. (A few times in the NYC subway, I didn’t quite swipe the MetroCard right, and I missed a train while trying to swipe again.) In addition, I didn’t need to use the card at the turnstile again to get out of the station—unlike Washington, DC’s Metro Cards, and compared to NYC and DC, LA’s base fare was cheaper.

The first thing I noticed about the Hollywood and Highland Station was its stainless-steel futuristic look. I became more surprised at how the area of Hollywood and Highland looked compared to 20 years ago. Back then, I was on a bus tour and only had a few minutes to look at some of the sights in the area, but I also saw how seedy the area looked as well as seeing some of the “characters” who were nearby. It reminded me of Times Square in the 1970s and ‘80s. Nowadays, the city cleaned up this area, and it included an upscale shopping mall with an arch nearby that showed the distance Hollywood sign. Of course, with a cleanup, more tourists came as well as more tourist trap attractions—just like Times Square or the attractions in resort towns.

These attractions usually came in the form of “museums” that I wouldn’t call “unique.” Nevertheless, 2) the Hollywood Museum, 1660 N. Highland Ave., south of Hollywood Blvd. (323-464-7776), was not one of those tourist traps. In the former Max Factor Building, on four floors, you could learn about the history of Hollywood as a town, the history of cosmetics, and the history of films and TV shows via pictures, texts, and exhibit items. Those exhibit items included costumes, props, old film making equipment, and countless other things. The first thing I noticed was the lovely pink and gold Art-Deco lobby. One of the special rooms on the first floor was a science fiction room that displayed costumes, props, and pictures from several films and TV shows, including



Star Trek, Star Wars, Superman, Transformers, Planet of the Apes, Battlestar Galactica, “V,” Batman, etc. Because this museum owned the largest collection of Hollywood memorabilia in the world, it could look a bit cluttered, and they didn’t have the room to show everything at once, but I still spent at least three hours there. I also ate next door at Mel’s Drive In; I liked their signature burger.

Thursday, December 3: In addition to riding the Red Line to a Downtown Metro stop, I changed trains to a light rail line: the Expo Line. I rode it to where it terminated at Culver City. (In 2016, the Expo Line should end at Santa Monica.) If you changed lines, you had to tap your Tap Card before boarding the next train. This light rail traveled on the street level, and it gave me a chance to look at different neighborhoods before getting off at Culver City and taking the number #1 Culver City Bus to 3) Sony Studios, 10202 W. Washington Blvd. (310-244-8687). Meanwhile, my Tap Card didn’t include taking the Culver City Bus, but the bus fare was very cheap.

Once I saw the wedge-shaped modern building that was Sony Studios, I got off the bus and security directed me to the entrance. In 1915, this studio started out as Triangle Pictures, and in the 1920s, it became MGM Studios. I’m sure many of you saw *That’s Entertainment* where in this film we all had a last look at the back lot of MGM before they tore it down. Sony Corporation bought MGM in the 1980s and changed the name of the studio, and later, they bought Columbia Pictures. (Columbia started in Hollywood, moved to Burbank in the 1970s, and finally Sony moved the studios here.)

Once I was inside of this large atrium lobby, I picked up my tickets and looked around this lobby at a mini-museum that they had there. (It is a good idea to order your tickets in advance.) Around this lobby, I noticed cases that contained costumes, props, and awards: Oscars and Emmys. Other exhibits displayed pictures, text, and a set from the film *Memoirs of a Geisha*. Then the tour started, and our tour guide, Zak, took us to a cinema

where we saw a brief film about the history of MGM and Columbia. This was one of the few times we got to sit. (I suggest that you wear comfortable shoes because you will be on your feet for almost two hours.) Zak mentioned that this lobby has starred in many films and TV shows, including *The Goldbergs*. When a production company needed a scene in a large public area such as an airport, train station, bus station, shopping mall, hotel lobby, etc., they used the main Sony lobby for that scene.

Then Zak took us across the street to the studio lot and showed us different buildings used for offices, but they also starred in films and TV shows as other buildings. For example, the Irving Thalberg Building (He was a producer in the 1930s.) has starred as William Penn Academy in *The Goldbergs*. Nearby parkland has starred as NYC's Central Park in different films and TV shows. In addition, I saw the outsides of plenty of soundstages, including Sound Stage 15, the largest in the world, where they filmed *Spiderman*. Other films done here were *Men in Black I* and *II*.

Then Zak took us inside of the Barbara Streisand Scoring Stage, the largest such stage in the world; the ADR (automated dialogue replacement) studio; and the Foley Sound Effect Studio. We did get to see the set of the game show *Jeopardy*, and I went inside the sound stage for *The Goldbergs*, but I couldn't see the standing set for their living room/dining room because a scene was being made and the red light was on. I did look at the hallway set for William Penn Academy, and the inside of part of a jet. Outside, I observed different vehicles from many Sony films and TV shows. One thing that I found strange was although Zak mentioned stuff about Columbia Pictures often, he gave very little mention about MGM. The only time MGM got covered in the tour was in some of the following: in the introductory film, a giant rainbow sculpture on the lot, and Zak pointed out the sound stages where the *Wizard of Oz* and *Gone with the Wind* were filmed. He also showed us Louis B. Mayer's former office and the schoolhouse for MGM child actors. After this, I was glad to sit down again in the lobby and eat a pizza slice from their food concession. Overall, this tour was interesting, and I would give it three stars.

Friday, December 4: As soon as I got off the Red Line at the Hollywood and Vine Metro Station, I knew this station was special. There were film reels in the ceiling design, and when I took the escalator to the upper level, I saw more of an interior that looked like an old cinema, including a display of a movie camera and projector.

Then at Hollywood Blvd. and Argyle Ave., I boarded the Hollywood/Wilshire DASH bus to my next destination: 4) Paramount Studios, 5555 Melrose Ave., at Gower St., Hollywood (323-956-1777). (The Tap Card doesn't cover DASH busses, but the base fare was cheap.) Yes, this was the studio that produced *Star Trek*. Many major studios in the 1920s and '30s were located in Hollywood, except MGM. Then from the late 1930s through the 1970s, most major studios moved out of Hollywood. However, Paramount stayed in Hollywood and grew in size. We are all aware of Paramount buying out Desilu in 1967 and taking over *Star Trek*, and nowadays, Paramount had been the only major studio to remain in Hollywood.

Reservations have been recommended here too for a tour, and as soon as I entered I looked at a small museum showing film clips from different Paramount films and TV shows, cases showing costumes, and props—including a few from *Star Trek* as well as its share of Oscars and Emmys. During the tour, our guide, Jed, handed us earphones to hear him better, and took us to a small golf cart. This was better for my feet because I only had to walk or stand for a few minutes at a time as Jed took us to the different outsides of sound stages, different buildings, and parklands.

Like Sony, Paramount used the office buildings to star as other buildings in different films and TV shows as well as the parkland to stand in for Central Park and other city parks. Jed also showed us the original core areas for Paramount and Desilu, including the Bronson Gate and Melrose Gate. He also took us inside a scoring stage and an ADR stage as well as the sets of *Dr. Phil* and *The Doctors*. Then, he led us inside a cinema where we saw a half-hour film about the history of Paramount. Once we were back on the tour, Jed pointed out the sky backdrop and water tank used in *Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home*. Normally, this water tank was used as a parking lot, but when the studio needed it for a water scene, they closed the parking lot and filled it with about four feet of water. Paramount tore down most of its back lot except for its New York Set or urban set, the largest



urban/city set in the LA area. Here, many city scenes were filmed: *Godfather I and II*, *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, and so forth.

Then Jed took us to one of the longest stops: the Prop room where we were free to touch the props and try on some of the costumes—except those wrapped in white paper because they were going to be used in an upcoming production. Soon the two hours were over and Jed led us to the exit area. If Sony was interesting, then, Paramount was fascinating. I'd give it four stars. Later, I walked over to the corner of Melrose and Vine to Astro Burgers. This fast food place had many items on its menu, especially Greek entrees and vegetarian entrees, but I ate their signature Astro Burger; it too, was good.

Saturday, December 5: Among the studio tours, I had no idea that I saved the best for last, but I did. If Sony was interesting, and Paramount was fascinating, then 5) Warner Brothers, 4000 Warner Blvd., Burbank (877-492-8687) was fantastic! I gave it five stars. (It is very important to book in advance for a tour here.) After taking the Red Line to Hollywood and Highland, I waited at the southeast corner of Hollywood Blvd. and Highland Ave., in front of McDonalds, for Metro Bus #222. Then, this bus dropped me off at Riverside Drive and Hollywood Way. In about five minutes, I walked over toward Warner Brothers Studios.

The tour started with a 15-minute film about the history of Warner Brothers Studios from its Hollywood beginning in 1923, its move to Burbank in the later 1930s, to the current times. Then our guide, Josh, directed us to some larger state-of-the-art carts. (They are larger than Paramount's and can hold about twice the number of people.) On our first stop, a mid-sized museum called The Archive, I looked at two floors of memorabilia from the films franchises *Batman* and *Harry Potter* of mainly costumes and props. Next, we saw much of Warner's

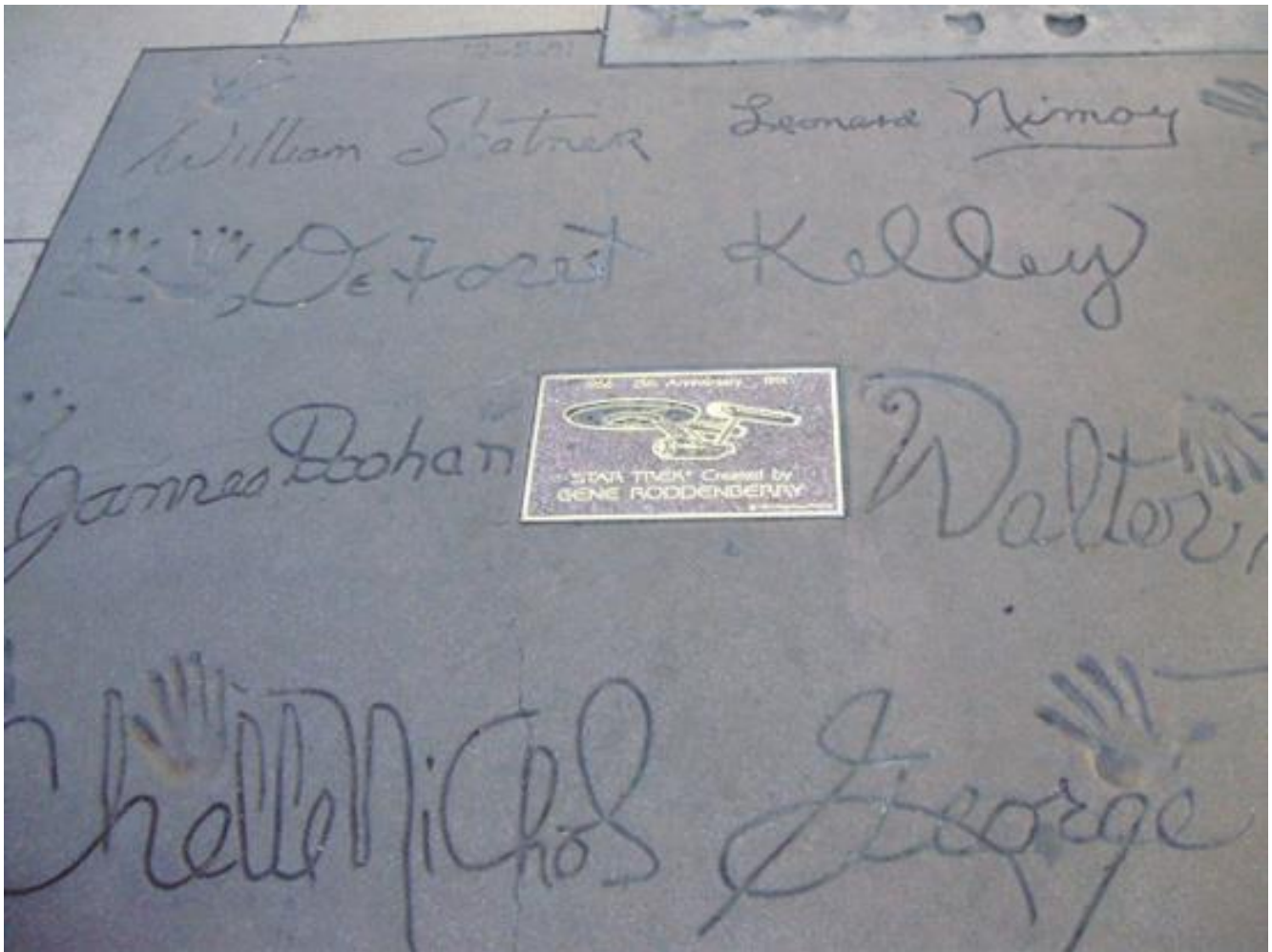
back lots. Unlike the other two studios that I toured, Warner kept most of its back lot, and it has been the busiest studio because Warner Brothers and other studios used these back lots often. (Warner looks at other productions companies and studios using these back lots as a “friendenemy” agreement.)

One of its biggest back lots was the Midwest/New England/small-town lot, and Josh took us into one of the few building that wasn’t just a building front but a full building. This was used for scenes when the actors had to be seen looking out of a window. Inside, it was an unfinished interior with wood and metal frames and walkways for the actors. Because the building isn’t soundproof, interior scenes were made in a sound stage. I also saw Warner Brothers New York street or urban back lot. While not as large as Paramount’s, it was still quite large, and Josh let us touch the fake bricks on the buildings. The 1930s gangster films were done here as well as some of the more recent *Batman* films. Another stop having to do with *Batman* was at the Picture Car Vault. Here I saw different vehicles from the *Batman* films: several Batmobiles, a Batcycle, a Batplane, and a Batcopter. On other stops, we saw the Prop Department, scoring stage, ADR stage, and Foley sound effects stage. Then, we glanced at more false-front buildings and parklands as well as office buildings, and yes, Warner used those office buildings to star as other buildings.

The parklands also starred as Central Park and other parks in films and TV shows. On one of the urban-looking streets, Josh pointed out the outside apartment building front that was supposed to be Sheldon and Leonard’s apartment building in *The Big Bang Theory* (TBBT). We also glanced at the outside of many sound stages, and we stopped at Sound Stage 25. Outside on one side, I noticed what looked like the front of a Roman/Greek Classical-styled building. Josh told us that back in the 1960s, the production staff of TV show *Batman* used this courthouse front for stock footage of Batman and Robin entering Commissioner Gordon’s office. Inside, however, was even more interesting to me because it was the set of TBBT. Our tour group sat where the audience would sit for a TV taping, and from there, we saw the standing sets of Sheldon and Leonard’s apartment, the adjoining hallway, and Penny’s apartment as well as two side rooms that could be dressed up for other rooms. Josh told us anything that couldn’t be seen from here was usually filmed in advance of the live taping, and the audiences were told to “Look at the monitor.” I thought that the set looked smaller than it did on TV, and on the way out, we saw Howard’s bedroom and a lab most likely copied from Caltech—California Institute of Technology. (Yes, I am a fan of TBBT.)

Another set we saw was a “hot set” for the TV show *Supergirl* ready to be filmed very soon, and Josh told us all not to touch anything. This set was the office where Kara Danvers/Supergirl worked. Other than seeing a city backdrop picture in the windows and some walls missing, it looked like any other modern office. Our final stop, and where we parted ways with Josh, was at Stage 48. This was a gift shop/café and museum. At first, I took a break by having a sandwich at the café, and afterward, I entered the museum area. Here, I observed many exhibit areas containing texts, pictures, and props as well as costumes, hand-on exhibit areas, a few sets, etc. This area covered some of the history of Warner Brothers, but for the most part, you could learn about how a film and TV show was put together from pre-production to production to post-production. My favorite part was the section with green screens, and I saw myself on one of those green screens in a space capsule. Meanwhile, much of the staff was very helpful and friendly in answering questions. Finally, another tram drove other people and me to where the tour started. Thus, compared to the other two studios, I saw many more back lots, sound stages, exhibit items, etc.

Sunday, December 6: LA has also been the center for recorded music. For the date above, I took the Red Line to the 7th St./Metro Center stop and walked about three long blocks along Figueroa Street toward the LA Live entertainment complex and the 6) Grammy Museum, 800 Olympic Blvd., Ste. A245 (213-765-6800), on the corner of Olympic Blvd. and Figueroa St. On three floors of texts, pictures, hands-on exhibits as well as videos, audio recordings, costumes, etc., I learned more about many kinds of music, recording artists, the Grammy Awards, and how to put together a recording. Many of the hands-on exhibits included playing different musical instruments, going into booths and learning more about the people who put together a recording, both behind the scenes and in the sound booth, and plenty of touch screens covered different subjects having to do with music. On the history of recording, I looked at exhibits ranging from a cylinder record player to the current technology or from 1877 to the date above. Other sections showed videos and pictures of past Grammy Award shows, and



outfits that recording artists either wore at the Grammy Awards or while performing. I especially liked a silver-sequin gown that Rita Ora wore.

The rest of the LA Live complex reminded me of a more modern version of Rockefeller Center in NYC. I saw an ice-skating rink in the center surrounded by shops, restaurants—mostly ritzy, and the nearby Staples (sports) Center. Then, I ate at a nearby Smashburger because it was one of the few eating places that wasn't expensive. In fact, this area of Downtown LA along Figueroa Street reminded me of parts of Midtown Manhattan.

Monday, December 7: Long before I became a fan of TBBT, friends of mine told me that the campus of Caltech was lovely. Therefore, on the date above, I took the Gold Line Metro light rail train from Union Station to Memorial Park Station, Pasadena. From here, I walked a few blocks south on N. Arroyo Pkwy. toward Colorado Blvd. On the corner of Colorado Blvd. and Marengo Ave., I took the Pasadena #10 ARTS Bus to Caltech or the corner of E. Del Mar Blvd. and S. Hill Ave. (Again, my Tap Card didn't cover the ARTS Bus, but the fare was cheap.) I did get to see the sights of Pasadena, including the dome of Pasadena City Hall and the corner of Colorado Blvd. and Los Robles Ave., the fictional location of Sheldon and Leonard's apartment; it was really a large bank building. Soon I was at Caltech, and I walked south on S. Hill Ave. to the 7) Caltech Office of Undergraduate Admissions and Visitor Center, 383 S. Hill Ave. (626-395-6811). Once inside, a friendly receptionist handed me a guidebook with an enclosed map inside, and I took a self-guided tour.

This lovely campus contained plenty of eye-candy buildings in styles ranging from Spanish Colonial to ultra-modern. In between, I noticed plenty of colorful flowers, orange trees, palm trees, olive trees, and other trees and flora as well as a turtle pond. In a sitting area next to the bookstore, I looked at space images that JPL (Jet



Propulsion Laboratory) took of the cosmos from the 1970s to more current times—and I saw how much the clarity has improved through the years. Then, in the Chandler Dining Hall, I ate a build-your-own burrito, and later, I walked through some more of this lovely campus.

Tuesday, December 8: At this point, the Hollywood and Highland Metro Station was getting quite familiar to me. For my last sightseeing day, I walked half a block from this station to the 8) TLC (The Creative Life) Chinese Theater (formerly Mann's and originally Grauman's), 6925 Hollywood Blvd. (323-463-9576). Back in 1995, I glanced at the outside of the building during a stop on a bus tour as well as the forecourt with the stars hand and foot prints in the cement. This time, I toured the inside, and I was much more impressed. I learned that Sid Grauman bought many of the Chinese items from China, and Chinese actor Keye Luke painted the murals inside.

On this half-hour tour, I looked at plenty of red interiors in the carpeting, curtains, seats, and so forth. The lobby displayed some costumes from a few different films. My favorite was the gold gown that Marilyn Monroe wore in the film *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*. On the other side of the lobby, I saw a wax figure of a Chinese woman. The screening room showed a large and elaborate starburst chandelier on the ceiling, columns on the walls with Chinese lanterns and murals in between the columns, and the third-largest IMAX screen in the world (after the Lincoln Square Theater in NYC, and a theater in San Francisco). After this tour, I ate a hamburger at the Hollywood Hard Rock Café where I noticed much rock memorabilia on the surrounding walls in the forms of sheet music, clothing, instruments, and pictures. This was a great way to end a vacation.

Wednesday, December 9 through Saturday, December 12: I backtracked on those trains again toward home. Overall, I'm glad that I took those trains out west, but the next time I go west, I'll fly, even if the airlines nickel and dime me. Meanwhile, I learned a lot about making films and TV shows, but I learned much more about LA's transit and how it improved over the last 20 years.



I loved to travel and experience new places since I was a child. I was one of those kids who liked writing in school "What I Did During My Vacation." Later, I became a travel agent, and since 1981, I've had some travel articles published in a few books, magazines, and newspapers.

As for fandom, I have been interested in space and science fiction since I was a child in the 1960s. Back then, I read books for children about both subjects, and watched the early space launches on TV as well as science fiction TV shows and films. This led to reading and watching more mature science fiction, and I'm a member of the National Space Society and the local Philly chapter of NSS.

This is a picture of me in front of a green screen at Warner Brothers. The final effect would be of me in a space capsule, but I wasn't willing to spend more money to buy the picture after I spent \$\$\$ for the tour.

cinema

A look at interesting movies both old and new

I recently got a chance to see “The 7th Voyage of Sinbad” again, shown in honor of the anniversary of the death of stop motion animation wizard Ray Harryhausen at age 92 in 2008. This full color fantasy epic still holds up very well fifty-eight years after it was made.

Technically speaking this story was more based on the Second voyage of Sinbad, rather than his seventh, if anybody happens to actually be checking against the original tales from the Arabian Nights. That’s the one that involves the giant Roc with most of Sinbad’s crew being eaten after they smash a Roc egg to dine on the unborn chick inside. Sinbad pleads with his hungry crew not to do this, and he is one of the few survivors of the mother Roc’s vengeance. If there was a moral somewhere in that adventure I never quite got the meaning.

Anyway, this film does have a giant Roc, but that’s about the only thing the film and the original story have in common. The movie plot includes a royal wedding uniting two potential warring kingdoms, a kidnapped princess, a magic genii trapped in a lamp, monsters aplenty and an evil wizard. There is wild adventure with menace, monsters, magic, and heroic battles thruout.

In this film Sinbad is the son of the ruler of Persia. He and his crew land on an island where they discover a wizard about to be killed by a giant sized Cyclops. The wizard is rescued, but loses his magic lamp to the monster. He pleads, threatens, and promises great wealth if Sinbad will help him recover the lamp, but Sinbad is charged with taking the Princess Parisa to Bagdad, where their marriage will seal a peace treaty between her kingdom and that of his father.

On arriving in Bagdad, Sinbad’s father also refuses to aid the sorcerer. With the wedding ceremony about to get under way with great pageantry, the magician secretly casts a spell that reduces the princess to miniature size. The father of the princess threatens war, but the wizard, Sokurah, declares he can restore the princess to her normal size, but it requires the eggshell of a giant Roc, and that may be found on the island where he was rescued from the Cyclops by Sinbad. The wily sorcerer produces plans for the construction of a giant crossbow that will slay the Cyclops.

In order to boost the number of fighting men on this voyage, Sinbad recruits convicts from the local prison with promises of a pardon, if they survive, but during the voyage the new crew mutinies and captures Sinbad, Sokurah and the miniature princess. The plans of the mutineers go wrong when a storm erupts and sea demons almost drive all the sailors insane. The leader of the cutthroats falls to his doom. In desperation the rest of the crew releases Sinbad so he can save them and the ship.

Horrible perils continue, with magical monsters, and supernatural perils aplenty. The party eventually reaches the island, where even more dangers await, with the criminals not in any way willing to work with Sinbad to accomplish his mission or save the princess from her fate. Along the way Sinbad and Princess Parisa discover that the genie inside the lamp is actually a small boy, enslaved by the wizard and longing to be free. His powers are somewhat limited when it comes to battling other magical creatures.

The climax of the adventure features a creepy torch lit cavern, magical guardians, hidden chambers and battles between Sinbad and the supernatural forces activated by Sokurah who wants Sinbad dead so he can have the princess for himself.

The special effects and all the monster menaces in this production were handled by stop motion genius Ray Harryhausen. Most of these effects have become legendary in the movie business, including the sword welding skeleton warrior, the dancing cobra woman, and the menacing one-eyed Cyclops.

Ray Harryhausen had a wealth of background info about this movie and its making that he used to talk about at science fiction and film conventions. This was the first time he had done any work in color, and getting the film stock and the background to match took a lot of experimentation.

It took him almost a year to complete the stop motion animation for all the monsters and other special

effects in this movie. He based the Cyclops on the classical concept of the Greek god Pan, but with only one horn to go with the one eye. He saved some time creating Cyclops by cannibalizing the body of the Beast from "20 Million Miles To Earth". If it seemed as tho the Cyclops moved a lot like the Venusian creature from that movie, that's because it did.

He claimed he got the idea of the cobra woman dance sequence from watching a belly dancer in Beirut Lebanon, altho it should be noted that Harrhausen rarely traveled, mostly splitting his time between Los Angeles in the United States where he grew up, and London, to which he moved in 1960. He also claimed that during the belly dance somebody behind him was smoking a hooka and all the smoke made him jump up in the middle of the dance because he thought



his clothes had somehow caught on fire.

The snake woman made a return appearance in slightly altered form in the 1981 “Clash of the Titans”, Harryhausen’s last film. He also claimed the snake woman was his favorite part of the Sinbad film, altho the Cyclops was the most popular with most viewers, while the sword fighting skeleton were clearly the favorite of critics, studio people and the aficionados of fantasy films. The dueling skeleton was such a hit that a cadre of sword welding skeletons were the central part of “Jason and the Argonauts” a few years later.

Of course, as a long time AD&D role playing gamer it was all I could do during that sequence to keep from screaming at the screen for Sinbad to throw away his sword and grab up the club on the back wall. A pointed, or edged slashing weapon does no damage to a skeleton. You need a heavy blunt object to smash the bones and break up the spectral warrior.

According to Harryhausen the most difficult part of making the movie was getting the stupid dragon to operate properly. The model was three feet long and difficult to move. The original plans to have the dragon breathe fire had to be abruptly altered when that proved to be almost impossible. He finally used a super imposed black night sky shot of a flame thrower worked into the film for the few times the dragon actually shoots out fire from the vicinity of its mouth.

It was interesting to me that despite the commercial success of this film, which grossed 3.2 million dollars in its initial release on a total budget of 650 thousand dollars, most of the people in this movie did not have especially distinguished movie careers. Kerwin Mathews, as Sinbad, was hired by Columbia to a seven year contract in the early fifties based on his good looks and his stage presence. He made a series of mostly forgotten action and fantasy films, augmented by a bit of TV in the late fifties, then got out of the business in the middle 1970s.

Richard Eyer who played the boy genii of the lamp did some sporadic acting as a youngster, primarily to please his pushy stage mother, but abandoned his career at age 21 and became a teacher.

Kathryn Grant made some films in the 1950s, then became Bing Crosby’s second wife in 1957, marrying a man thirty years her senior, and thereafter did almost nothing in the movie biz, altho she did host a local radio talk show in the early 1970s where her hubby Bing was an occasional guest.

The most successful actor in the cast was Torin Thacher as the evil wizard. He had a very long career playing villains or determined military types and was never out of work from the time he started acting in the late 1920s thru the late 1970s. He had been a teacher before being lured to audition for a London stage play and was so successful at his new craft that he never looked back.

Whenever the film business cooled off he moved effortlessly over to the stage, appearing in a number of plays on Broadway and the London stage. He also did a lot of television work, particularly in Shakespearean plays or TV adaptations of award winning plays or important novels. Ironically he is remembered today mostly not for his movies or for those critically acclaimed TV adaptations, but for the roles he played as the bad guy on TV science fiction shows, including the original Star Trek, Lost In Space, and Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea.

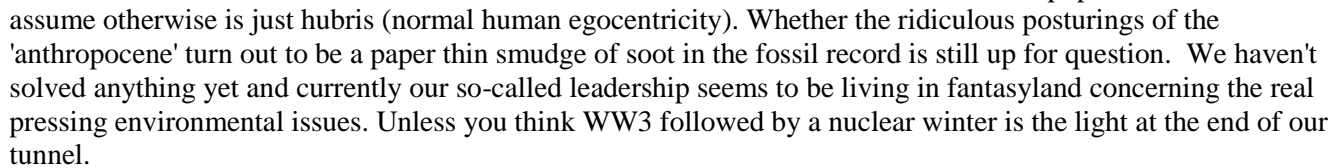
He only slowed down in his mid seventies because of declining health. He died of cancer in 1981.

“The 7th Voyage of Sinbad” was a solid financial success when it was originally released in 1958, and continued to be a hit with audiences around the world in the following decades. In addition, the movie was turned into a very successful comic book adaptation, and enjoyed tremendous success when it was released both to television and also as part of the drive-in theater circuit in the 1960s and 1970s.

The public response was so positive thru the years that Columbia decided to make two sequels in the 1970s. “Golden Voyage of Sinbad” came out in 1974, while “Sinbad and the Eye of the Tiger” was released in 1977. Ray Harryhausen also did the stop motion animation for the sequels. Sales of the VHS tape and DVD versions of these three films are said to be among the most important home release revenue generators Columbia ever had.

The movie’s plot of “7th Voyage” is formulaistic and predictable, and hardly worth remembering, even if it is sort-of-kind-a-way based on the original tales from the Arabian Nights. But the special effects--the monsters, those fantastic stop-motion animated figures that Ray Harryhausen created; those were what made the film memorable, and those sequences are what stuck in the minds of everyone who has ever seen the movie. Those creations and special effects are the sole reason this movie is remembered today. Remembered is probably too bland a word. Revered, cherished, even treasured is probably closer to the truth. This is a film that is eternally popular with critics and ordinary film goers alike. Those fantasy Harryhausen creations turned this production from a forgettable low-grade romantic fantasy into a masterpiece that remains just as impressive

---review by Bob Jennings



---review by Dave Haren

This movie is like “V” for some fans. Slavoj Zizek said he would sell his mother to see Part two of “V”. “They Live” cries out for a sequel to see what happens next when the TV sodden 'sheeple' of Alec Jones have to start thinking again.

Zizek was quite correct, the street riots and demos are mere spectacle if there isn't some attention paid to what happens next. Somebody still has to do the dirty jobs that we all take for granted every day. No amount of bitching about elites changes that for the better. As the systems displace more folk into homeless and poor, the traditional methods of walling them away from the sight of 'decent' folk aren't going to be workable. The reason is left as an exercise for the eager student to ponder.

---review by Dave Haren



The feature film of the evening was “The Fog” a movie created by John Carpenter in 1980 and considered by many horror movie fans to be a classic. I am not one of those people. To me this movie illustrates vividly pretty much everything wrong with the entire concept of modern horror movies. It features lots of gratuitous gory violence that has very little to with the actual story. The plot, what there was of it, didn't make much sense. The plot did not resolve itself, did not stand up to logical analysis, and did not provide any satisfactory answer for events or for the reaction of people to the events as they were portrayed.

The people in the movie generally were cardboard cutouts representing a very limited assortment of modern stereotypes, all lacking any truly human characteristics. Their purpose in the movie fell into four distinct categories: victims offered up to the supernatural menace, potential victims (including predictably, a cute little kid) who must be rescued before becoming actual victims, worried/bemused friends/relatives of victims, and heroes who dare fates worse than death for no particularly good reason in order to save potential victims.

That's it. Add hysteria, eliminate any semblance of logic, mix in absolutely ridiculous supernatural events designed only to show more people being brutally slaughtered, and top it off with an absolutely unbelievable (ludicrous might be a better word) climax and you have the whole pile. Oh, and screaming. The women, particularly Adrienne Barbeau, the female lead, scream long and loud thruout the entire movie.

This movie made money at the box office, and altho savaged by the critics, met with praise from horror film fans, approval which defies any reasonable explanation. So far as I can determine the sole and primary reason most modern horror movies are made is to exploit the vicious sadistic desire on the part of viewers to see human beings butchered and mutilated in as many assorted gory ways as possible. This appeal to the very worst and most loathsome attributes in human character is the focus that generates millions of dollars in box office revenue for unscrupulous studios and producers only too happy to pander to the blood lust of their audience with movies each more gruesome and violent than the previous ones. This particular film stands as a clear example of the formula.

It's a shameless race to see who can commit the most revolting atrocities. I find the whole process sickening. Am I the only person who regards this kind of moral depravity as offensive and disgraceful? I hope not, and yet I wonder. I wonder how long the central tenets of a civilization can stand against a pandering tide of sadistic brutality that is being offered daily to a public only too happy to pay out good money to support such depravity.

---review by Bob Jennings



FANZINE REVIEWS

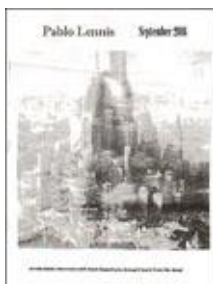
by

Bob Jennings

A regular feature of *Tightbeam*

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



PABLO LENNIS #342 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 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 now using a computer to help with his layout, and the results are neat and attractive, quite a jump in visual appeal over previous numbers of this zine that were often so cramped that it was difficult to read pages or understand what went where. The use of attractive title headers and wide margins, along with a clear, readable typeface are very welcome changes here.

John has a brief editorial about transcendental self liberation, then farther over he reviews fiction from the three surviving major promags, plus comments on some other new SF books and fanzines that crossed his desk.

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, but there are longer stories by John Polselli on a theme of supernatural vengeance in the old west. The author tries hard, but he doesn't manage to create much suspense or evoke a feeling of suspenseful horror either.

Andy Robson contributes an interesting bit of short fiction that features multiple short views of the same incident, a murder scene with odd overtones. The writing is very good here, sharp, crisp, detailed without waste, but the plot falls short of the writing skills. There is no climax to speak of so this reader was left wondering what this could have been like had it been both longer and better thought out, plot wise. Still,

Robson is a writer with great potential. He may be producing much stronger fiction in the near future if he keeps at it.

Other short-short tales from a variety of writers deal with death and about supernatural cats dominate the remainder of the fiction offerings. Several of these other short stories offer convoluted plots, and the actual writing is often poor. In a few cases the story plots themselves are virtually non-existent, particularly for the very short horror pieces which are depressing without being convincing.

There are also a couple of other 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 dozen issues.

They 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 shot of action, hoping the creative muse will suddenly strike them and turn the mishmash 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.

PL also features some regular columns, but none of them are very interesting this issue. There is one by Hazel who claims to be a witch, but her comments are well off the subject of the supernatural this time, while G.A. Schinoha tries to put forth the premise, in a very round-about fashion, that religious conviction is more important to the understanding of the universe than cold science might be. That's not an opinion I hold.

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

Most of the fiction this issue falls flat. 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 storytelling 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 working properly 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 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.

The artwork this issue has improved, mainly because John is using some clip art pics from the internet, altho some of them, like the front cover of this issue, appear to be out of focus. If there are any would-be artists out there reading this, please offer your services to John. Artists need a place to showcase their developing talents just as much as up and coming writers do, and PL is always open to aspiring creators.



OPUNTIA 354

published twice a month by Dale Speirs; Box 6830; Calgary; Alberta; CANADA T2P 2E7---a previous print zine that is now exclusively distributed in e-fanzine format, with many issues also on display at the efanazines.com website.

Technically a FAPazine, *Opuntia* enjoys a considerably circulation beyond that amateur press group. Whenever Dale does include some selected mailing comments, he makes sure his references and responses are framed so that someone who is not a FAPA member can understand what is being discussed. With only rare exceptions, everything in every single issue of *Opuntia* is written by Dale Speirs himself.

This time round Dale has visited the Little Red Deer

River area beyond Calgary with camera in hand and has taken some beautiful pics of the landscape and the river. People who have a preconceived notion of what Canada is like will be stunned by his regular posting of photos, often showing vast contrasts within the same immediate area. The photos are vivid and some are almost panoramic. Dale has been running a lot of photo essays in *Opuntia* of late, showing off his skills with camera and composition. This is another good one.

Much of the rest of the issue is devoted to discussing how successful (or realistically, how un-successful) science fiction was at predicting the handheld devices that are now so much a part of our daily lives. Virtually nobody predicted cheap, ultra small computers, or the world-wide web, or even the idea that the computers would become so cheap and so entertaining that individual ownership of some kind of handheld device would rival home usage of radios and televisions. This is quite an entertaining glance at the subject, covering stories and novels that were badly wrong, or just missed, to a few that got some part of the future almost right. The reality, of course, is that despite the widely held belief that science fiction predicts the future, in fact science fiction is really crummy at predicting advances in science, or even the way scientific advances affect society, let alone how it will all affect the individuals who inhabit society. But, I'm going to keep on reading stf anyway. I read the stuff for its entertainment value, not its ability to foresee the future.

There is another part of Dale's ongoing series looking at how science fiction in all the forms, from print to movies have viewed planet Mars thru the years. Not so interesting for me as his coverage of hand held devices, probably because there have been plenty of more-or-less realistic looks at trips to Mars and what we might find there. Of course, there are also plenty of stories with Martian inhabitants, good, bad, or dead and gone, that have filled magazines and theaters for many years as well.

The issue finishes up with another installment of Dale's examination of the words of Canadian writer Stephen Leacock. Leacock wrote satirical fiction and humor, much of it in a fantasy or science fiction vein. He also wrote straight-forward history books, which is what is covered this time round. I found this much less interesting than the comments about his humor and satire fiction, but Dale is nothing if not thorough in his coverage.

Opuntia usually offers a lot of variety and a uniquely different focus. This used to be a print fanzine, but the economics of printing, and particularly the very high cost of postage in Canada has made *Opuntia* a permanent e-zine. Copies of this issue can be seen on the efanzines.com website.



SPARTACUS #16

published bi monthly by Guy Lillian III; 1390 Holly Ave.; Merritt Island, FL 32952. Some physical copies are printed, primarily for distribution thru the SFPA apa, with a few other print copies distributed sparingly to friends, but all issues are available for anyone to read in electronic format at the efanzines.com site.

This is Guy's perzine. Not that most fanzines Guy produces aren't perzines; it's just that this one is officially a perzine; one devoted to his commentary primarily on fannish life and current American politics. Guy is an unabashed liberal who speaks his mind on many subjects that turn up in the daily news, and this year's election has proven to be a fertile ground for his commentary and axe-grinding.

This time he has opinions about the recent World SF convention, which he was not able to attend, and the Hugo Winners (Steve Stiles won the Best Fan Artist award after being nominated fourteen times in a row; a long overdue honor for one of

the best artists in fandom).

In the so-called Real World, Guy has a lot to say about the current presidential election, including the rather odd assertion that he believes the media is strongly pro-Trump. I find that remarkable indeed, since the GOP seems to believe the media is heavily and clearly in favor of Hillary Clinton. I think there is some truth in the assertion that the electronic media wants to engage Trump, because he has produced a seemingly endless stream of bizarre and unusual statements, including obscure position points and malicious attacks on many people (and things).

So far as the TV/radio/internet media types go this makes great cannon fodder for the daily grind of producing something, anything, to induce the Great American Public to read their writings (the better to confirm there are sufficient readers/watchers to keep advertisers pouring cash into their company coffers.) But I don't think this constitutes any kind of broad-range support, or even broad-range enabling for Trump. Colorful, erratic political figures have always fascinated the news corps, and their interest in Donald Trump in this election is no different from their efforts in past decades.

There are more comments about the big to-do about football players refusing to stand at attention for our national anthem. Guy also wonders why a writer and fan was expelled from the WorldCon for expressing his somewhat reactionary political opinions over his time limit on a panel, and more.

Normally *Spartacus* contains a letter column, but for some reason (time constraints perhaps), none is present this time round, which means the issue is a bit shorter than usual. No worry, I'm sure the letters will be back next time.

This is an engaging, interesting read whether you happen to appreciate Guy's viewpoint or not. Well worth checking out.



BROKEN TOYS

from Taral Wayne; 245 Dunne Ave – Apt #2111; Toronto, Ontario M6K 1S6 CANADA; available ONLY in electronic format; emailed direct for The Usual, also posted on the efanzines.com web site.

This is the final issue of Taral's perzine, in which he talks about many things in his life. This is the Official final issue, but Taral notes there will certainly be another issue after this, if only to post the LOCs he expects to receive.

Taral maintains that he is trying to cut back and break away from SF fandom, but you would hardly know it from reading the (normally) monthly issues of Broken Toys. Each issue touches on many aspects of his life, altho unfortunately in many recent months a lot of the discussion has been about his on-going health problems.

Some of that seems to have stabilized lately, so this time he discusses things such as the death of Canadian fanzines, his ongoing efforts at writing fantasy fiction and the problems trying to place his material in pro or semi-pro publications. He notes that so far he has had two "sales"; stories placed without any kind of compensation at all. In fact, a dark fantasy story was accepted for an anthology that will not even send him a free electronic copy of the finished volume. Wow! That brings the element of professional cheapness down to a new low level in my opinion. No wonder so many wanna-be authors decide to take up employment in hardware stores instead of continuing frustrating writing careers, after receiving this kind of treatment for a few years. Despite this, Taral says he is not discouraged—yet.

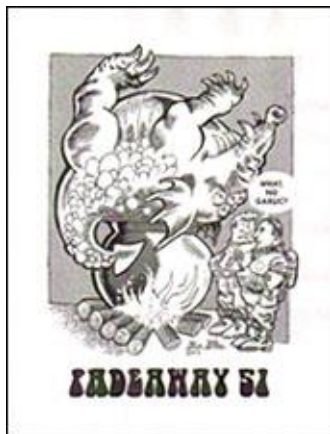
Then there is the essay on trying to get rid of the unwanted sofa from his apartment; as well as the trials and tribulations of assembling the new compact replacement sofa, why he has given up going to furry cons and more. All this might seem incredibly boring, except that Taral happens to be a very engaging and witty writer, who can make even the most mundane occurrence interesting.

The heart of most issues is the letter column, and the "final" issue of Broken Toys does not disappoint. The letter col this time is very long, with many, many people adding their comments and opinions on a seemingly infinite variety of subjects. The letter column for the post-"final" issue will probably be even longer.

For those (like me), who are going to miss the monthly numbers of Broken Toys, fret not. Taral says he will soon launch a new fanzine, still all in pixel format, but it will be irregular, with perhaps two or three long issues per year appearing. We shall see how that works out. Despite Taral's comments about cutting back on fandom and focusing more on mundane happenings, I doubt that he will be able to curtail his creative impulses very long or limit them to a new fanzine only turned out two or three times per year either.

Meanwhile, by all means go to the efanzines.com site and read this number all the way thru. You will certainly enjoy it.

SHAMELESS PLUG DEPARTMENT!



I want to take the opportunity to mention my own fanzine, *Fadeaway*. Issue #51 is now out, 48 pages long, featuring an article by Dale Nelson on the joys of exploring two different used book stores of yesteryear that had strong SF/fantasy sections; a look at a penny-dreadful fantasy novel from a hundred-fifty years ago, a detailed glance at a significant science fiction film made in 1929, plus a long meaty letter column. A sample copy will be sent free to anyone who has not previously received a copy. You can contact me direct at fabficbks@aol.com.

THE DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE OF *TIGHTBEAM* IS 10 DECEMBER 2016!