



# TIGHTBEAM #276

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

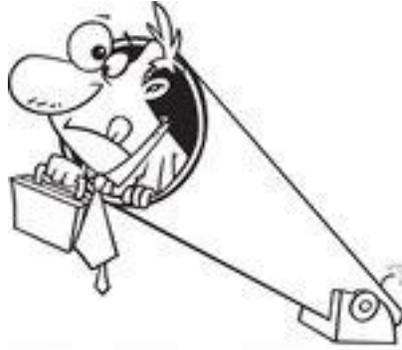
This is issue **#276** and is edited by Bob Jennings. Letters of comment are solicited from everyone reading this; also, reviews of books read, movies seen, and convention experiences recently attended, and any other fannish material that would be of interest to our members is also requested. Please contact Bob Jennings at—

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You may learn more about the N3F by going to our website at [n3f.org](http://n3f.org)

# LETTERS



**Lloyd Penney; 1706-24 Eva Rd.;**  
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Thanks muchly for *Tightbeam 275*. I am still way behind with loccing, about a month's worth of zines are waiting for me, so time to attack.

Fandom thrives on criticism and controversy? In many ways, I hope not. I am not expecting sweetness and light, but if there must be criticism, let's make it constructive. I guess with my own attitude, I really couldn't do fanzine reviews the way people wanted them. I am just happy that people are still producing zines; the feedback will determine which direction it goes, but a harsh review just pushes people away. We are our own biggest problem.

My own loc...we did see the *Fantastic Beasts* movie. Did we see the newest *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* movies? Nope, saw *Hidden Figures* instead, Yvonne's found out firsthand how much of an old-boys network the space industry is, and we also found out that the space industry is American, and non-Americans can keep their distance.

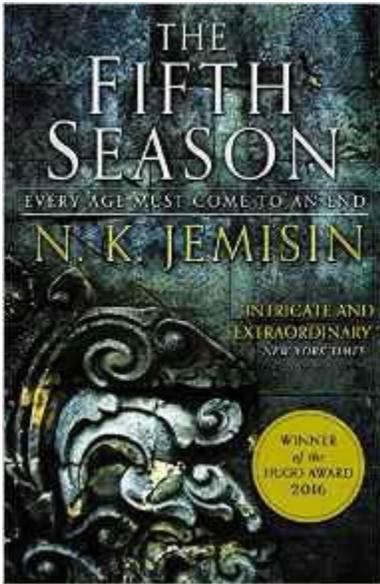
*Fahrenheit 451* may have not aged well, but the basic message will soon be relevant again, given the new administration in Washington. I see that Orwell's 1984 has become a best-seller again, and the double-talk coming out of the White House makes it relevant again.

If you have enjoyed the various Abbott and Costello movies in the past, and you're on Facebook, you might like to look up Lou Costello's son Chris, who easily talks about life with his famous father, and that he was like as a husband and father. Chris Costello is also in touch with Bud Abbott's daughters, and he talks about them, too. Looks like autographed photos are for sale, and I am sure there's some amazing stories to be told.

I think I must fold it up for right now, there's still a pile of zines to deal with. Many thanks for this, hope your Christmas and New Year's were a good time, and we will see you with whichever zine you send my way.

#####The political year so far has been more than strange, I think bizarre might be the best term. The other old novel that has become a newly minted best seller is "It Can't Happen Here" by Sinclair Lewis. Written back in 1934 it seems oddly prophetic in 2017.

As I said in my movie review, some Abbott & Costello material in the movies was funny. My favorite A&C movie is "Hold That Ghost" which has plot as well as comedy. I thot their radio show, which recycled many of their old burlesque routines with new material provided by people who were familiar with their style of comedy, was generally better than their movies. When I was much younger I thot A&C were hilarious. I don't necessarily hold that opinion now that I'm much farther along in years.#####



# HUGO MADNESS

by

George Phillis

For reasons best understood by its supporters, *The Fifth Season*, a novel by N. K. Jemison, published by Orbit Books, was the 2016 Hugo Award winner. The writing is, all things considered, abysmal. The author appears to have identified a set of major stylistic conventions, seemingly only so that she could trample them under foot. One could say that the writing style was ‘experimental’, but if so the experiment should be viewed as a write-off. There are so many problems with the work that it is difficult to choose where to begin.

Let us begin our comments with the positive and ironic. Readers may be aware that the Hugo Awards have become locked in political controversy. There were suggestions that cliques having particular political, literary, or other persuasions controlled the nomination process. There were suggestions that some subgenres, books from certain companies, authors of particular political persuasions...never saw Hugo nominations. In particular, milSF (military science fiction) novels were said to be excluded. There was then a movement, the Sad Puppies, to publicize this issue and generate Hugo nominations for SF works that were supposedly being excluded. A second, separate movement, the Rapid Puppies, appeared, having different leadership and entirely different objectives. I could go on describing this process, including the new Asterisk Awards, but I would rather not put you, the gentle reader, to sleep. Nor would I care to give apoplexy to some other readers.

We come to *The Fifth Season*, chosen by folks who did not support the Sad Puppies.

It’s Military SF. It’s not any military SF, though it does include a naval battle. No, *The Fifth Season* is the oft-deprecated superhero/psionics SF, in which the heroes—I use the word very broadly—are *orogenes*, people with the power to silence earthquakes, move vast slabs of rock, and at one point detonate a transcontinental fault line. The continent splits in twain. Readers will correctly infer that there are negative consequences for the climate. Supporters of the Sad Puppies may be amused to note that their side won by losing; the Hugo went to a MilSF novel.

Some readers will have heard of the literary construct *plot*, the notion that events proceed forward in time in an orderly manner. The antithesis of plot was invented by a German author of fifty years ago, who had his work printed on a series of cards, the cards being packed in a box with the instruction that the reader should shuffle to cards and read them in whatever sequence they appeared. The writing was adequately good that much of the time the reader could survive reading his reader-constructed novel.

Here we have a synthesis. You could, of course, choose to believe that the author has given us a world in which time is incoherent, so that people grow up in a city that has on earlier pages been blown to smithereens. That would be a brilliant literary conceit, a variation on time travel in which time has no meaning. A more plausible interpretation is that the novel has several threads that actually occur seriatim, one thread after the next, but that short segments of each thread are interdigitated with short segments from the other threads. It is possible that if you reread the work, perhaps several times, you will be able to sort out what is going on, but it is not clear why anyone would want to do so.

At the highest level, writing style is described by tense and person. Most SF is past tense: ‘The hero dropped from the tree’. Modern Literature often uses present tense ‘The hero drops from the tree’. That’s a mark of the profound division between modern literary fiction and modern romantic (e.g. SF, western, detective) literature. Present tense gives a sense of immediacy; it is rarely used in SF. L. E. Modesitt’s *Spellsinger* series used a convention in which scenes involving the heroine are in past tense, and scenes involving the villains are in present tense. Modesitt reports that readers did not like this clever literary conceit. However, in Modesitt’s series alternation of tense was the only experiment. Here present tense is one of several experiments.

Jemisin gives us another experiment. She experiments with person.

By 'person' I refer to 'person' as used in a description of pronouns. First person: I climbed to the top of the tree. Third person: She climbed to the top of the tree. And, then, there is authorial omniscient, in which the writer breaks the fourth wall and speaks directly to the reader. The author tells the reader something that no character knew and that was not implicit in the descriptive prose.

If you count carefully, you note that between first person and third person there must be a second person: "You". Second person is used in tale-telling, notably by D&D game masters: "You climb to the top of the hill. Before you is a shepherd's hut, scarcely wide enough for a man to lie down inside. You open the door to the hut. There before you is a thirty-foot-wide white marble staircase, richly inlaid with gold and precious stones. The staircase leads up until it fades into the darkness above." That's second person.

Jemisin gives us entire sections of her book written in second person. These are sections in which the author speaks directly at the protagonist. That's not *authorial omniscient*, speaking at the poor reader. That's *speaking at the protagonist*. "Night has fallen, and you sit in the lee of a hill in the dark. You're so tired. Takes a lot out of you, killing so many people..." That's second person, present tense. The author uses it extensively. If the author had a clever rationale for using second person, she hid it well indeed; I never found it.

Then there is the author's use of wall-breaking, speaking directly at the reader. Contemplate--

"While we're doing things continentally, planetarily, we should consider the obelisks, which float above all this...But the obelisks exist, and they play a role in the world's end, and thus are worthy of note..."

not to mention this line opening a section---

"Back to the personal. Need to keep things grounded, ha ha."

In those lines, you see an exact opposite of the sometimes overstated directive 'show, don't tell'.

The only other author who comes to mind as using that terminal ha ha phrase is the late John Darger, whose novel *In the Realms of the Unreal* (there is also a full title; it is much longer, as befits an 8-10 million word novel.) uses it with some frequency. There are good reasons to suppose that Darger's perspective on the world was not the same as ours.

There are obligatory sex scenes. I counted off-hand three, though one is a second hand account by a minor character. There are several rationales for obligatory sex scenes. They can significantly advance the plot or develop characters and their interactions. The finally-consummated affair between Honor Harrington and her commanding officer, in one of the Honor Harrington novels, fits the character-development model. On another hand, there are sex scenes so graphically described as to be selling points, particularly to younger teenagers. Jean Auel's Cave series, which is a wonderful discussion of life in the post-glacial stone age, also had graphic scenes that were a major lure for young adults. As an undergraduate once remarked to me, in the Junior High School Library book the scenes were easy to find, thanks to the paper clips. The series was a huge amount of work to develop and write; we should not complain if it also used a few relatively classical sales techniques.

What about the sex scenes in *The Fifth Season*? The first extended scene does show how totally awful the local culture is. (It gets much worse.) Two of the lead characters are orogenes. They have been ordered by the government to reproduce with each other. Neither of them is at all interested, so making things work requires, ummh, graphic description not to be repeated here. "Think of England" may sort of work for some women, but for men...it's more complicated. The other scene, well, the author's ideas on 'insert tab A in slot B' are unlikely to be a major source of sales to teenagers, and, no, I was not particularly referring to the gay male component.

In order to report on the core plot, I would have had to figure out what it was. I was never quite clear until the end on the relative order of the interleaved sections.

In conclusion, the Fifth Season is severely deficient in basic issues of SF writing. The use of present rather than past tense grates. There are good reasons why second person is not used in extended works, and they are visible here. Authorial omniscient was used well by the greatest of Victorian authors, Edward Bulwer-Lytton (who, as may be recalled, wrote an influential science fiction novel). Its use in this work is as an antithesis to the doctrine 'show, don't tell'. The underlying society is an abomination down to the cannibalism apparently still practiced by the ruling class. As an amusing aside, there is a societal fixation on hair texture as a

description of a person; the author handles this bit well. The plot lines are incoherent, though with effort I believe a determined reader can untangle them. To give credit where it is due, the closing line--in which one characters asks another if she knows a specific fact--is brilliant. The volume is in no sense a match for Starship Troopers, The Forever War, Cyteen, or any of the other novels that have received a Hugo. There are people who claim that the style is 'experimental' and therefore meritorious. Unfortunately, these are the people who are subject to the misapprehension that 'experimental' and 'good' are synonymous, a belief forever disproven by this work.

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# BOOKS

**Down and Out in Purgatory; by Tim Powers; Hardback; 120 pages \$21.95 retail; e-book version \$5.99**

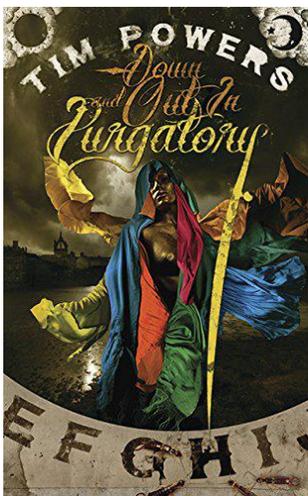
A new work by Tim Powers is always something to look forward to, and this one gives me something to nominate in the Novella category for this year's Hugos.

Matt Holbrook has spend the last several years hunting down his nemesis, John Atwater, to kill him in revenge for Atwater's murder of Matt's

true love. The problem is that by the time Matt finds him, Lee is already dead. Matt then contacts a medium to send him over to The Other Side so he can demolish whatever remains of Atwater's soul. To do that Matt must die in a way that leaves him as a highly lucid spirit in the afterlife.

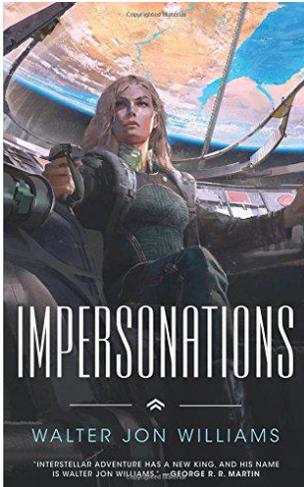
For Matt the chance of reigning in Purgatory and extracting revenge on Atwater is worth giving up any chance of serving in heaven. Tim Powers is a master of running with supernatural themes and constructing stories around them. "Down and Our In Purgatory" packs a lot of story into a small package, and it's a really cheap download from Amazon.

---review by Gary Robe



**Impersonations; by Walter Jon Williams; Trade Paperback; 256 pages; \$17.99 retail; e-book versions \$3.99**

This is the fifth book in The Praxis universe in which the mighty race that controlled the galaxy for millennia either go extinct or pass on to the next level. On the resulting power vacuum various client races are vying to take their place. In the previous book Caroline Sula is a hero because she put down just such a power play by a wannabe successor. She is also out of favor with her chain of command because she won the battle without permission from higher-ups. As punishment Sula is exiled to be the station commander of the Port of



Earth space station. Intrigues pile on as Sula discovers that there's something fishy happening in the Oort Cloud. Her life is in danger because she's not really Caroline Sula. She murdered the original Caroline Sula while they were in college in order to take her place in the elite of The Praxis. Her façade is in danger of exposure when one of her "relatives" decides to visit her on earth.

Even tho this is the 5<sup>th</sup> book in the series, you could probably pick this one up without having read the previous books. Williams does a good job of weaving in Sula's past and the political situation in The Praxis into the narrative of the story without resorting to lecturing. Of course if you've missed the series starting with "Dread Empire's Fall", there's nothing stopping you from going back and catching up.

Williams' space opera is more concerned with characters and political maneuvering than space battles, so The Praxis series stands out among space operas and is very comfortable sharing shelf space with Bujold's Vorkosigan Saga. "Impersonations" is a really good title for this book because almost all of the characters turn out to be imposters of some type. It's a lot of fun following Sula as

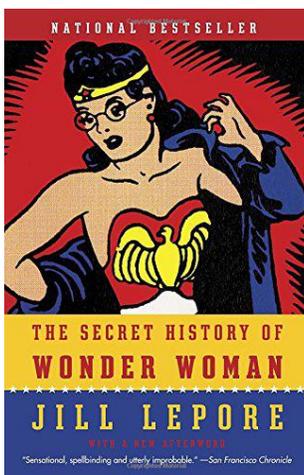
she unmasks them while fighting to maintain her own assumed identity.

---review by Gary Robe

**Railsea by China Mieville with illustrations by the author; Trade Paperback; \$12.00 retail price; NOTE---the e-book price is more expensive than the discount price for the print version at most seller sites.**

The title of this book refers to a "sea" of railroad tracks, and on this world, railroad trains are driven as if they were sailing vessels. This is a young adult science fiction take-off on *Moby Dick*, *Treasure Island*, and *Kidnapped* with many in-jokes and satirical scenes for older readers. The main character is Sham Yes ap Soorap, a surgeon's assistant who functions as the Jim Hawkins character from *Treasure Island*. He serves aboard the *Medes*, which hunts giant moles that resemble *Dune's* sand worms, and its female captain is chasing a particular mole named Mocker-Jack who supposedly ate one of her arms years previously. The plot moves very quickly, the characters are memorable, and the author's linguistic style adds to the pleasure.

---review by Tom Feller



**The Secret History of Wonder Woman by Jill Lepore; Trade Paperback; \$16.95 retail; NOTE—the e-book price is more expensive than the discount price for the print version at most seller sites**

The title is somewhat misleading. This book is really a biography of Wonder Woman creator William Moulton Marston (1893-1947) and his two wives, Sadie Elizabeth Holloway and Olive Byrne, a niece of Margaret Sanger who was the founder of Planned Parenthood. All three were strongly influenced by the early suffragists and feminists, especially Emmeline Pankhurst, and the author does a good job on showing those influences, especially feminist utopian fiction, on the early years of Wonder Woman. Armed with three degrees from Harvard, including a Ph.D. in psychology, Marston was the inventor of the first lie detector test, although the version actually used by police departments and government agencies was invented by one of his competitors. He had also written one novel and several screenplays before trying comic books and had been a consultant for Universal

Studios when they were starting to produce horror movies. Except for her appearances with the Justice Society, Marston, under the pseudonym of Charles Moulton, wrote all of Wonder Woman's adventures up until 1944, when he was stricken with polio and had to hire an assistant, and was still writing them up to two days before his death from cancer in 1947. He also hired Harry G. Peter, an illustrator for suffragette publications, to be the first artist to draw Wonder Woman. One of the early criticisms of the stories is that almost all of them featured

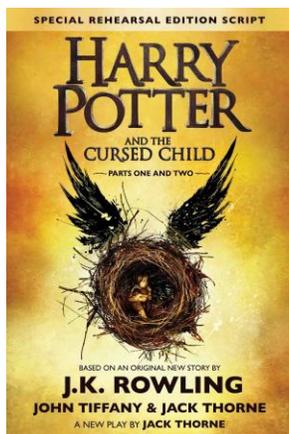
bondage in one form or another, which was one of Moulton's pre-occupations. He is also a polyamorist in that he lived with Holloway, Byrne, and sometimes a third woman named Marjorie Wilkes Huntley during the last twenty years of his life and had two children each by first two. His legal wife, Holloway, worked outside the home as an editor and actually supported the family because Marston's multiple business ventures failed and he was unable to hold academic appointments for more than a year. Officially the "housekeeper", Byrne stayed home and raised the children, although she did occasionally write articles for *Family Circle*. It was an article by Byrne, writing as Olive Richard, that brought Marston to the attention of M.C. Gaines, the first publisher of DC Comics, who hired Marston as a consultant to defend comic books against charges that they celebrated violence. Then in 1941, Marston persuaded Gaines to publish the adventures of a female superhero, who became Wonder Woman. I found the book quite fascinating and highly recommend to anyone interested in the history of either feminism or comic books.

---review by Tom Feller

### **Coraline by Neil Gaiman; Paperback book; \$6.99; e-book version available**

I first read this story when it was nominated for the Hugo Award and recently re-read it. I liked it then, and I still like it. The title character is a young girl who is an only child. She and her parents have just moved into an old house that has been divided into apartments. A pair of retired actresses live in the basement, and an old man who trains mice lives in what had originally been the attic. There are two apartments in the main part of the house and what used to be a doorway between them has been bricked over. The other apartment is vacant, but one rainy day Coraline opens the door and finds that the bricks are no longer there. When she walks into the apartment, she finds people who look like her parents but have pale white skin and buttons for eyes. Eventually she discovers that they want to possess her and her parents, and she has to figure out how free her parents and to escape. Gaiman targeted the book towards children, but later discovered that adults actually found it scary as well.

---review by Tom Feller



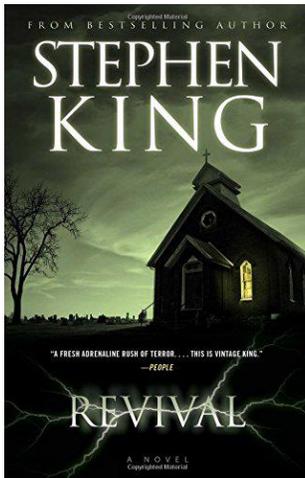
**Harry Potter and the Cursed Child, Parts I & II, by J.K. Rowling, John Tiffany, and Jack Thorne; Hardback; \$29.99 retail; NOTE—the e-book version is more expensive than the discount price for the print version at most book seller sites**

This is the published script ("Special Rehearsal Edition") of the plays that are currently running on London's West End. They are set 19 years after the Battle of Hogwarts, the climax of the 7<sup>th</sup> Harry Potter novel. Harry has now married Ginny Weasley, and works at the Ministry of Magic, and they have three children, James, Lily, and Albus Severus, all of whom are attending Hogwarts. The younger son, Albus, is struggling with his father's fame and is rebellious. At school, Albus has joined house Slytherin rather than Gryffindor as did Harry, Ginny, and their other two children, is a poor Quidditch player, also unlike Harry, and his best, and only, friend is Scorpius Malfoy, the son of Draco Malfoy, Harry's nemesis during his days at

Hogwarts.

Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger are married to each other, and their daughter Rose is in the same class at Hogwarts as Albus and Scorpius. Ron runs a joke shop, but Hermione is Harry's superior at the ministry. Professor McGonagall is now the headmistress at Hogwarts, and Neville Longbottom is one of the professors, although he is not actually a character in this story.

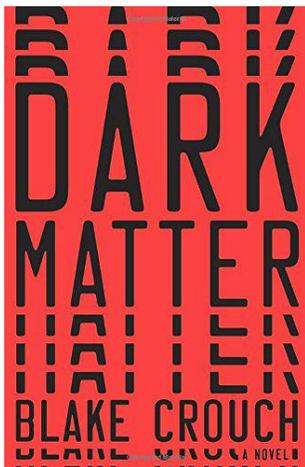
The plot is a time travel story in which Albus and Scorpius attempt to save the life of Cedric Diggory, a character who was killed in the fourth novel and film *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, but they find that they change history for the worse and spend the rest of the two plays trying to fix it. This story really does not stand by itself, but requires that you at the very least have seen all eight of the movies and preferably read all seven of the novels. I would recommend it only for Harry Potter completists.



**Revival; by Stephen King; Trade Paperback; \$17.95 retail; NOTE—the e-book version is more expensive than the discounted retail price at most book selling sites**

This novel, King's 55<sup>th</sup>, is the story of Jamie Morton and his life long relationship with Charles Jacobs. They first meet when Jamie is a six years old in 1962, the youngest of five siblings, and Charles is the young minister of Jamie's church in Maine. A few years later, Charles's wife and young son are killed in an automobile accident, and readers familiar with King's early work will see similarities to *Pet Sematary*. Jamie grows up to become a professional guitarist with a substance abuse problem while Charles leaves the church to become a carnival and amusement park performer, and then later becomes a tele-evangelist. Charles's hobby when Jamie first meets him is electricity. At first, Charles's tricks seem harmless, but then one of the tricks cures one of Jamie's brothers of deafness to the surprise of Charles himself. He later uses the tricks for his magic act in the carnivals and parks, but when he becomes a tele-evangelist, he uses what he has learned as the basis for faith healing. By the end of the story, Charles becomes much more like Frankenstein rather than a conventional villain, and there are characters in the novel named "Mary", "Shelley", and "Victor". Jamie is the subject of a one of Charles's experiments, which appeared to be successful in curing his substance abuse problem except for a few side effects. This work is very much in the tradition of Lovecraft to whom there are a few references in the text. It is a good, solid addition to King's body of work describing the life of a baby boomer from Maine a few years younger than King himself as well as the power of religion.

---review by Tom Feller



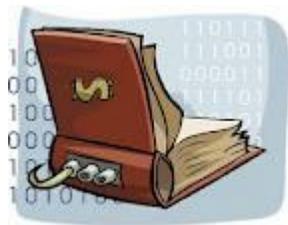
**Dark Matter by Blake Crouch; Hardback; \$26.99 retail; e-book version available**

My earliest memory of reading a story that used the "multiverse" premise was an issue of the *Justice League* comic book in which the superhero team of "Earth-One" and the Justice Society of "Earth Two" joined forces. The late George Alec Effinger, the first professional writer I got to know personally, won his Hugo for "Schroedinger's Kittens", a story that also uses this premise. Even the *Star Trek: The Next Generation* episode "Parallels" assumes it. So the premise of this new novel is hardly original, but the author executes it with considerable skill.

Jason Dessen is a moderately successful physics professor at a small college and is happily married to his wife, Daniela, and they have a 15 year old son, Charlie. Then Jason is kidnapped and transported to a parallel world where he chose career ahead of love and instead became a superstar physicist who figured out how to travel between the universes. The Jason in the other universe eventually came to regret his decision, but his scientific discovery enabled him to attempt to change it. The plot is driven by the original Jason's attempts first to escape this other universe and then to return to his home universe. Its target audience is a mainstream reader, because it slows down the story at times to discuss quantum physics and the theory that every time we make a decision, even minor ones, we create a whole new universe. Otherwise, it is a fast read, and the conclusion is satisfying, although ambiguous.

I did not realize until after I read this book that I was already familiar with Crouch's work. His *Wayward Pines* trilogy was adapted to television, and his Hetty Dobesh series are currently forming the basis of the series *Good Behavior* on TNT. My wife and I have watched a few episodes of each.

---review by Tom Feller

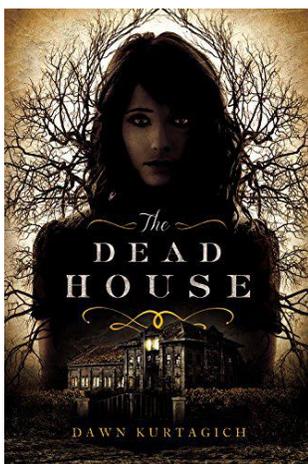


# E-BOOK BROWSING

by

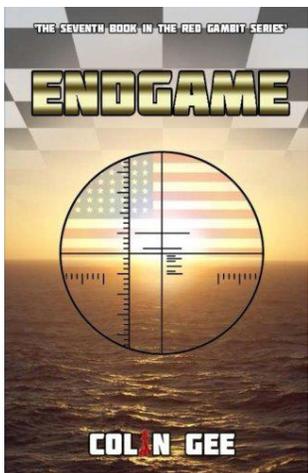
George Phillis

This list of reviews will emphasize things I pulled off Kindle and Smashwords.com at a few dollars each. There is certainly a range of quality here.



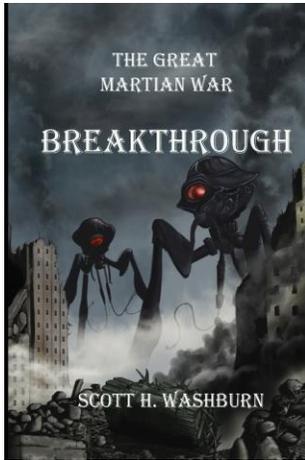
***The Dead House* by Dawn Kurtagich** is a tale of psychological misfortune featuring that *rara avis*, a person with multiple personalities, a creature found primarily in Hollywood films. At least, for most of the book the reasonable reader will conclude that that is what is going on and that the protagonist is not quite in her right mind. Toward the end of the book life perhaps becomes more complicated. The volume is told as a series of documentary and commentary elements, including diaries, reports, and a finding of a criminal tribunal of some sort. As time goes on we come to understand the horrible event that at the end of the book has already occurred. The style is somewhat the opposite of narrative. The reader must reconstruct the actual events from what the characters think to themselves, have prepared in reports, and so forth. It's a bit challenging to read, but is extremely well done of its sort.

***Vulcan's Kittens* by the N3F's Cedar Sanderson** is a coming-of-age story of a not-quite-teenage girl with somewhat odd parents. Linn is apparently approaching eighth grade and is left by her mother to stay with her grandfather. There is a certain amount of discussion of living in the wilderness, including an extremely detailed and exact discussion of how you clean a rabbit after you have managed to kill it. Then matters turn for the worse. Matters become stranger and stranger. Linn must escape, somewhat on her own, and eventually end up in a much more interesting area. She experiences the realistic hazards of moving unprepared through the wilderness. She has to adapt to living with a truly strange group of people, many of whom readers familiar with mythology will recognize as being other than people.



**Colin Gee has written a series of novels on a hypothetical third world war starting in 1946. The most recent book is Endgame.** How does the war start? The British had prepared a set of war plans for the hypothetical contingency of an extremely early war starting between Russia and the West. In the book, Stalin gets his hands on these very extreme contingency plans, which are properly grouped with the American war plans for war with Canada as prepared in 1934, assumes it is an actual action plan soon to be put into effect, and comes to the reasonable conclusion that Russia should attack first. There is then a fine description of the war, with credible characters on both sides, some better than others, a considerable amount of military back-and-forth, a truce that ends being broken due to internal politics of an unexpected sort, so at the end of book 7 it appears that warfare may become unpleasant indeed. A certain number of historical characters who become much better known later appear in credible roles at this time. The descriptions of the individual battles down to the platoon and company level are extremely well worked

out. There are also several romantic elements.



**Breakthrough by Scott Washburn** has the author two-thirds of the way through his series on the second Martian invasion of earth. The novel could be viewed as a sequel to H.G Wells *The War of the Worlds*, except that we actually get to see the war as opposed to seeing the lead character being buried in a house while the war is being resolved. This time the Martians invade the entire planet. We primarily see the Martians in the United States, facing President Teddy Roosevelt. It is sometimes noted that the Martians of Wells had these wonderful war machines and made somewhat limited use of them in a variety of respects, notably that they did not recognize the utility of the blitzkrieg attack (which of course had not been invented at the time) and so they advanced extremely slowly in machines that were approximately as fast-moving as modern tanks. Washburn's Martians do not have this problem. The current novel is *Breakthrough*. The Martians have captured a substantial chunk of the Rocky Mountains and then use blitzkrieg tactics to break through the quite substantial American defensive lines and force America to fall

back to the line of the Mississippi. Millions must flee. The country is cut almost in half, except for the fortifications of the Panama Canal. The Martians have their own internal politics which we get to see. American inventors come up with all sorts of ideas for combating Martian war machines, some of which are better than others and some of which are dismissed. The shotgun on the wall features a very young Robert Goddard and Colonel Munro, discoverer of the Munro (shaped charge) effect, attempting to sell the hero on what will doubtless turn out to be the bazooka. The hero is very hard-working, must deal with the likes of Tesla and MIT, manages to have enough time to marry his beloved in a wedding led by Teddy Roosevelt, and life becomes more interesting. No I have not told you most of the plot, which is seen at the level of individual participants.

**Washburn also gave us *Fires of Memory*.** We have a novel featuring sorcery against 18<sup>th</sup>-century black powder weapons. There is much back and forth. There is good internal politics. The characters tend to stay consistent in their behavior. The situation is really highly unbalanced in favor of one side until the very end.



**Dirk Van Den Boom *The Emperor's Men*** is another novel in the format of modern people being transported to a much earlier time and being obliged to do something about the situation. The creative piece of this is that the men are not Americans, they are Imperial Germans from just before the start of World War I. They arrive on his Imperial Majesty's protected cruiser *Saarbruecken* in the Mediterranean and confront Imperial Romans who have just managed to lose the battle of Adrianople. There are all sorts of plotters. The Romans have a great deal of internal politics. The cruiser had on board a reinforced company of German infantry along with various bits and pieces of equipment, because it was in the process of being trans shipped to German Africa just as World War I was about to start. There is romance. There are quaint Roman customs, seemingly well-researched. There are people doing really stupid things. And, fortunately, we are just far back in time enough that a significant number of the German officers of course

are fluent in Latin or Attic Greek. It is a fun read, somewhat hindered by the difficulty that the author apparently is not a native writer of English and could've used the support of an editor.

There is also a second book in this series; titled *The Emperor's Men 2: Betrayal*.





# Kryptonian Delight

by

Tom McGovern

Supergirl and I had a bit of a bad start, you know? Back in 1959, when she was first set to debut as a character (and yes, I had read the previous incarnation of a magical Super-girl conjured up by Jimmy Olsen in *Superman* #123), DC pushed very hard to create interest. There were full-page ads in every DC comic, months in advance, announcing the premiere of a new character in the May, 1959 issue of *Action Comics* (it was issue #252, but back then in my world, comics were identified solely by the date – it was years before I started keeping track of them by issue number). I couldn't wait to read it! The next time my father took me along on a trip to Sweet's Pharmacy (a 7-year-old's Mecca for comic books at the time), I went directly to Mr. Sweet and personally requested that he hold aside a copy of that issue for me. He dutifully wrote a note to himself, and I was satisfied that I had that need taken care of; Mr. Sweet would surely come through for me.

And I waited. And waited. It seemed to be taking an awfully long time for that May issue to

come in. Then, finally, one day, on one of our routine trips to Sweet's, I ran to the comic shelves and – horror! There, in all its glory, was the June issue of *Action Comics*! I went to Mr. Sweet and asked what had happened to the May issue he was going to hold for me, and he replied that he didn't exactly know what the problem was, but somehow that issue had never come in. Not only had Mr. Sweet not received it, but I had also been watching for the issue to appear at the other local comic-buying venues, just in case, and it had apparently never shown up at any of those either.

In retrospect, I know what must have happened. The distributor of magazines, including comic books, in the town where we lived must have been approached by a collector who knew of the upcoming key issue and offered to buy out the whole stock, directly from the distributor. The distributor saw an opportunity to make a decent-sized sale, at retail, for goodness' sake, and without the inconvenience of actually having to deliver any of the issues to their retail clients. It was a no-brainer. To heck with all those disappointed seven-year-olds.

I never did get a copy of that issue. I read the story later, of course, since DC in those days did a lot of reprinting. I'm pretty sure the Supergirl origin story was in one of the early 80 Page Giant issues, which I loved and devoured, since, at eight years old when the Annuals/80 Page Giants started coming out, even the reprints from a few years earlier were new stories to me.

In any event, I bought *Action* #253 and picked up the Supergirl story from there, and it soon became one of my favorite DC series. I remember the seemingly never-ending Lesla-Lar continued story, the first continued story I recall that was ongoing for several issues of a comic – a technique that became quite familiar a few years later with the rise of the Silver Age Marvel Comics. I even remember another story where Supergirl played a fairy godmother to entertain the kids at her orphanage and taught a misbehaving boy a lesson by tying him to a tree with strands of her unbreakable hair. That one gave me a tingly feeling that I didn't quite understand, for some reason.

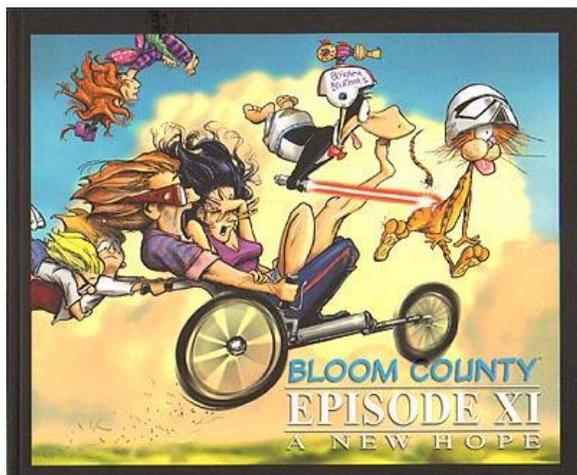
Anyway, Supergirl became a staple character in the DC Universe, having numerous reboots and incarnations over the years. Some were better than others, and I followed some of the series more closely than

others. Kara died in the Crisis on Infinite Earths, was reborn as a different character, but then came back in a new series again as Superman's Kryptonian cousin. She had doppelgangers and near-doppelgangers on alternate Earths, and sometimes ran into them in dimension-spanning adventures. So it goes.

I had some trepidation about the new Supergirl TV series. It's so seldom that they get these things right, you know? I expressed some of that trepidation several times, before I had actually had a chance to watch any episodes of the series. Remember, I don't watch anything on commercial TV; it's Netflix all the way for me. When I saw that Supergirl was available on DVD from Netflix, I placed it at the top of my queue, even before it became available on streaming. I'm pleased to report that I was pleasantly surprised by the show. It presents Supergirl as a young adult, pursuing a career as "Kara Danvers." The personality is right, the look is right, and, unlike some of the other superhero-oriented shows out there, they aren't afraid to show super-powers being used on screen. Even though Clark Kent did use some super-powers in Smallville, one of my biggest objections to the show was the "no tights, no flights" policy. I thought that was a stupid restriction on the writers, especially given that Clark was portrayed as a young adult by the end of the series, who should surely have come into all his powers by then.

Anyway, I like the show and I especially like the characters. My one character-related quibble is with Jimmy – excuse me, James - Olsen. I like the character; I just have an issue with calling him James Olsen. There's no reason for this character to be the quintessential "pal" of Superman; the contribution that relationship makes to the plot is minimal at best. I think they should have simply created an all-new character (or maybe resurrected Dick Malverne from the Silver Age) as someone who is more appropriate for Supergirl. This guy, though a good character, doesn't look or act like the classic Jimmy Olsen character – why apply the name to him and thus eliminate the possibility of introducing a more traditional Olsen at some other point in the series or in some related series?

Calista Flockhart plays Cat Grant admirably. Just flighty and self-centered enough, but just noble enough when it counts. I love her performance. And the character of Winn Schott, Kara's co-worker and son of the villain Toyman, is pretty interesting, too, as he deals with his unrequited love for Kara, who obviously has eyes for James, not Winn. Another great character is Hank Henshaw, aka J'onn J'onzz, the Martian Manhunter. The thing I love is that they haven't distorted these characters as so often happens in comic-related shows. I really feel like I'm watching the characters from the comics, as they were back when I first discovered them. Great stuff, and highly recommended.



**BLOOM COUNTY EPISODE XI: A NEW HOPE;  
by Berkley Breathed; trade paperback; 144 pages;  
\$17.99 retail**

The original Bloom County comic strip ran from late December 1980 thru early August 1989, and was one of the most successful comic strips of the decade. It was also one of the most influential, with an irreverent mix of political satire and social commentary using a broad humor brush.

When the strip ended Breathed said he simply got tired of the grind of having to produce regular daily and Sunday strips, but in July 2015 he brought back a new, updated version of the Bloom County, posted on the internet only. This allowed him to post strips whenever he felt like it, and not to do anything on the days, or sometimes weeks,

when he didn't feel like creating a comic strip. Readers have responded enthusiastically.

This Trade Paperback is supposed to be a complete reprint of the new strip up to the point of publication, but it's not. There are only two strips per page, and a considerable number of the new strips are NOT included in this book. Why they were omitted I have no idea, but it is very unsettling to buy a book that purports to be a chronological reprinting of a comic strip and then discover a substantial number of the strips missing. For the price I expected a lot better. The comic strip is still funny and relevant, but because so many of the new strips are missing, this book is for absolute completists only. You can still read all the back strips on the go.comics website for free. Do that, and pass up this overpriced trade paperback.

**---review by Bob Jennings**

# cinema

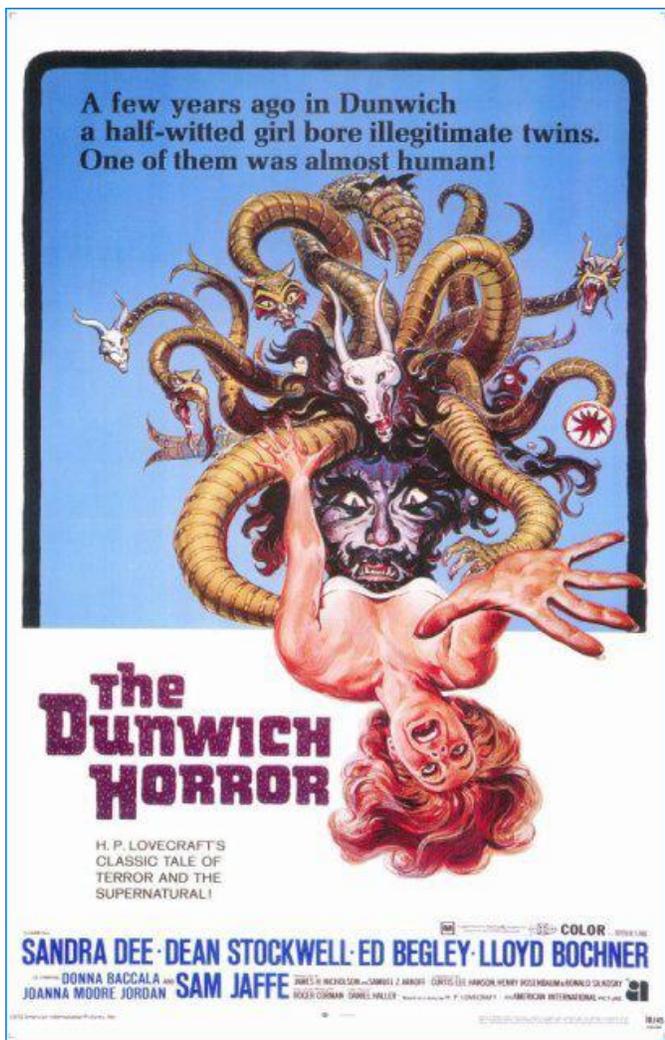
The feature film of the evening was scheduled to be “The Dunwich Horror”, a 1970 movie made by Roger Corman, purportedly based on the story by horror writer H.P. Lovecraft. This movie was financed by American International and packed lots of star power: Sandra Dee and Dean Stockwell were the headliners, with support by Ed Begley, Sam Jaffe, Lloyd Bochner and more. The sets were good, with the backgrounds shot in an old town in northern California. The only things this movie was missing were a decent plot and intelligent direction.

Essentially, the plot is paper thin. Creepy Wilbur Whateley is somehow magnetically sexually attractive to heroine Nancy Wagner. He lures the lady back to his old homestead in Dunwich, where his family is mostly shunned by the locals and whose ancestors were hanged for dabbling in unholy religious rites. His mother had two children during childbirth, one being Wilbur and the other twin was a monster kept locked in the upstairs room of the old house.

Nancy’s school friend along with old professor Dr. Henry Armitage are the good guys opposing Wilbur, stumbling around trying to figure out what is going on while Nancy falls completely under Wilbur’s power. Wilbur wants to impregnate Nancy in some sort of gobbley-gook mystic rite that will somehow open an ancient dimensional portal and unleash the Old Gods who will sweep down and promptly exterminate the human race. What Wilbur gets out of this deal, besides the chance to hump Nancy, is not clear.

In fact, most of the movie is not clear. Overly talky, with disco era light-show style special effects, weird noises and an atmosphere that tries to be sinister but evokes yawns most of the time, the story is ponderous and the telling of that very thin plot is both ineffectual and pretentious. This whole movie might have made a decent twenty-five minute TV program with lots of plot changes, but trying to stretch it out to 90 minutes is impossible, and impossibly dull at the same time.

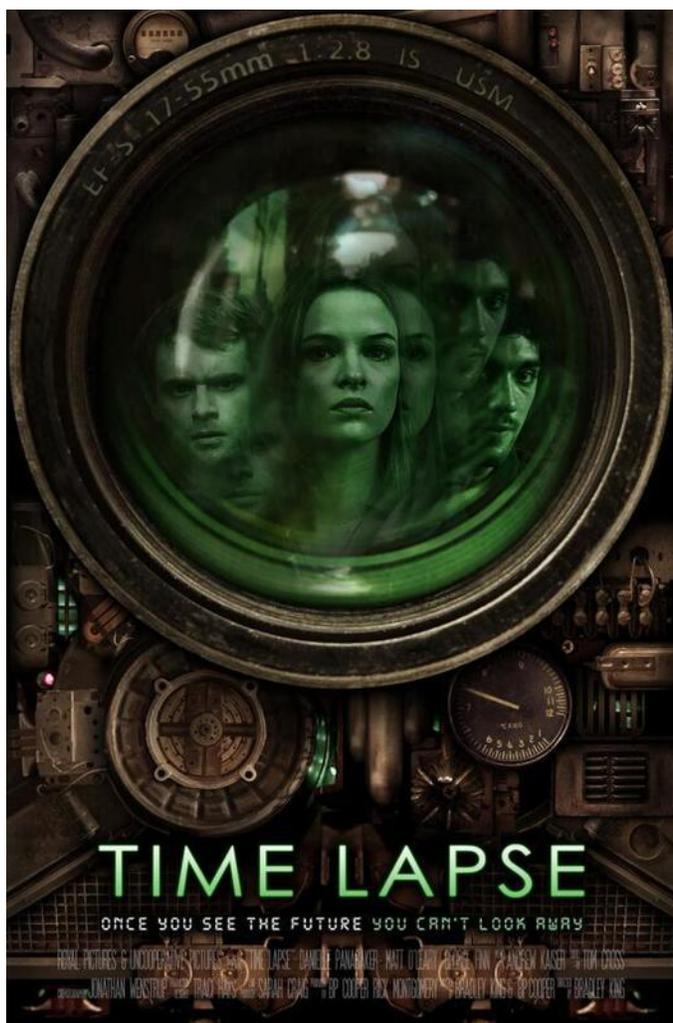
Needless to say, any connection between this movie and the original story by Lovecraft is non-existent. Over the years there have been a number of attempts to turn the stories of H.P. Lovecraft into films and almost none of them have been successful. In fact, except for two short films turned out within the past three years, my opinion is that there has never been a good movie made from the works of H.P. Lovecraft, whose supernatural and horror fiction have become an established part of American



literature.

This particular film was a waste of time and money, and barely made a profit when it was released to theaters back in 1970. Critics have not been kind to it in the years since, but the magic name of H.P. Lovecraft prominently featured when the movie was released on VHS tape, then DVD over the years has attracted the

curious and managed to turn this turkey into a small but consistent profit center for the studio. If you've never seen this movie, don't waste a second of your time on it. Life is too short to waste on truly inept movies.



### Time Lapse (Warning – Mild Spoilers)

I saw this movie on Netflix about a week ago as I write this, and, while I'm not planning to write a full review, I want to make a few comments about it. First, it's not bad. It's well-acted, kind of suspenseful and has a bit of a Twilight Zone-y feel about it. Those are good things. Unfortunately, it had (in my estimation) one major plot flaw, and, even more unfortunately, the plot point containing that flaw was a driving force for the whole story.

The idea of the movie is that three young people are sharing an apartment across from the apartment of an eccentric scientist who has disappeared. "Across from," that is, in the sense that you can see from each apartment into the window of the other. Two of the young people, Finn and Callie, are a couple, and the apartment is also shared by Jasper, Finn's best friend. Finn is an artist as well as the superintendent for the complex, so when Mr. Bezzerides, the neighbor/scientist fails to pay his rent, Finn goes to investigate. What he finds is a weird, very large machine that apparently produces Polaroid-style photos – of Finn's, Callie's and Jasper's apartment. And the kicker is that the photos show events 24 hours in advance. The unfortunate Mr. B is subsequently found dead in his storage unit.

Most of the plotline revolves around the outworkings of having a picture 24 hours in advance and how the main characters are affected by that ethically and in terms of their temporal lives.

Questions are raised as to where the causality lies – are the characters engaging in their actions independently and being recorded by the camera, or are they acting as they do because the camera dictates it? These philosophical questions are handled competently without making the concepts needlessly obscure, in my opinion.

But it's the three friends' early use of this discovery that I find to be less than credible. You see, Jasper likes to gamble, specifically on the horses. He does this through an illegal bookie. So Jasper's first move on learning of his ability to have some knowledge of the future is to allow the camera to take a picture of himself holding up a sign showing that day's race winners – which he is able to see 24 hours before it happens. He starts to accumulate some money based on the repeated use of this method. You can imagine that Jasper's bookie isn't pleased that one of his clients who generally loses money on a regular basis is suddenly winning across the board. As a result, the bookie gets involved with the three friends, and things spin downward from there. Jasper's advance knowledge of the race winners is the catalyst for the rest of the plot.

And that's where I have a problem. That particular point of the plot makes no sense to me. I mean, if you have a technology that allows you to see 24 hours into the future, why would you waste it on winning a few thousand bucks through an illegal bookie, with the completely foreseeable result that the bookie – who, in case you forgot, is a criminal - is going to be less than happy when a losing player suddenly and mysteriously starts taking him for (relatively) large wins? If I were in that position and wanted to make myself rich, I'd simply hold up a sign containing the winning Powerball or Mega Millions number. One time. That's all you would need for

all three of you to be set for life. And it's completely legal, and doesn't involve ticking off any dangerous criminals.

But apart from that one major plot hole, I thought it was a fun movie, certainly worth a watch. If you have Netflix streaming, it's on there. Give it a shot.

---review by Tom McGovern



## Hidden Figures

This is the story of Katherine Goble Johnson (Taraji P. Henson), Dorothy Vaughn (Octavia Spencer, nominated for Best Supporting Actress), and Mary Jackson (Janelle Monáe) who worked at NASA in 1961 as “computers”. At the time, “computers” were female number crunchers. It is based on the non-fiction book by Margot Lee Shetterly and was nominated for Best Adapted Screenplay. They were all originally members of the West Computer Group at NASA’s Langley Research Center in Hampton, Virginia. The West group were all African-Americans, and the East group were all whites. Both groups are supervised by Vian Mitchell (Kirsten Dunst). The period details appeared accurate to me. All the engineers wear white dress shirts with dark ties, and the women wear dresses and high heels. They all drive period cars and used rotary dial telephones.

Johnson was assigned to the Space Task Group because of her proficiency in analytic geometry, but she had to walk half a mile to use the “colored” ladies room and could only drink from a coffee pot marked “colored”. Kevin Costner plays her supervisor and Jim Parson the head engineer, who is both racist and sexist. Costner’s character does not have the time for either. Vaughn taught herself Fortran, a programming language, so that she would be ready when NASA’s new IBM 7090 mainframe would be up and running and make

their jobs obsolete. Jackson, with the encouragement of Karl Zielinski (Olek Krupa), a Polish-American engineer and Holocaust survivor, went to court to desegregate a local school so that she could take the courses she needed to become an engineer.

By the way, Johnson is still alive at age 98. When Henson was cast, they were able to meet in person. Johnson graduated from high school at 14 and college at 18 and was the first African-American woman to attend West Virginia University.

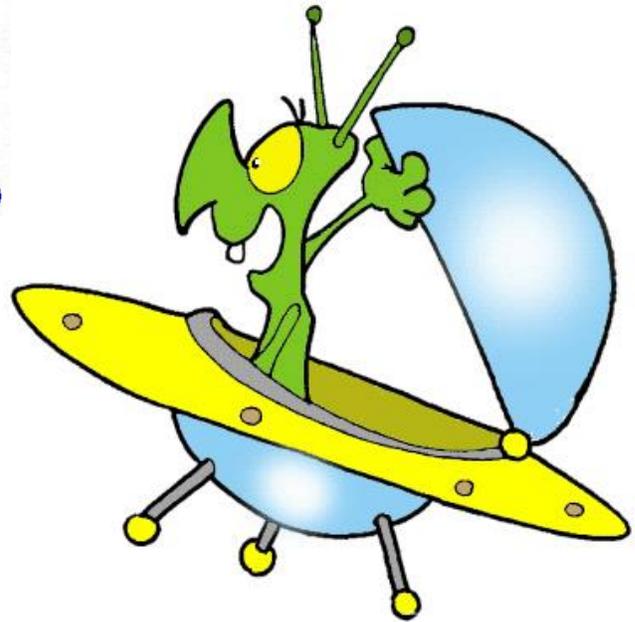
---review by Tom Feller

## Passengers

Because of the previews, I had low expectations for this movie. It is set on a sleeper starship on a 120 year voyage to another star system, and the two main characters (Jennifer Lawrence, Chris Partt) wake up 90 years early. From the previews, the ship appeared much more luxurious than it should have been, and I could see that there would so much emphasis on the visuals that I was not expecting much in terms of story and characterization. Consequently, I was pleasantly surprised. As expected the production design was impressive, especially the scenes in the art deco style bar, which were inspired by the ones in the Stanley Kubrick version of *The Shining*, and it was deservedly nominated in that category. However, there is actually a story, and the actors actually play characters, not stereotypes. The best performance was actually provided by Michael Sheen, as the android/bartender, although why the ship needed the bartender active for the entire 120 year voyage is never explained. It was also nominated in the musical score category, although I do not recall the music as being especially memorable.

---review by Tom Feller

# FANZINE REVIEWS



## 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 as well as some of the pixel format zines that I have received since the last issue *Tightbeam*. Copies of print fanzines intended for review should be sent to---**Robert Jennings; 29 Whiting Rd.; Oxford, MA 01540-2035**

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



**FLAG #18** 8-1/2x11”, 10 pages; originally published monthly, but with a gap of close to a year since issue #17, by Andy Hooper; 11032 30<sup>th</sup> Ave. NE; Seattle, WA 98125; sample issue sent on receipt of a long SAAE, after that The Usual

This is another one-person fanzine. Bucking the modern trend, Andy has declared that all issues of *Flag* will appear ONLY in the printed format. There will be no internet postings and no email distribution of the zine of any kind. This is technically a perzine, since except for the letter column, every issue is written by editor Hooper himself.

This time Andy comments on the loss of many fan friends in the hobby during the past months. Not just depressing for the loss of these interesting personalities, the passing of fellow fans reminds us of the frailty of life, and of our own mortality. This issue is mostly devoted to write-ups with some pictures of the toy and character collectible accumulations of the late Stu Shiffman. Andy is trying

to turn these pieces into money to aid the widow in her efforts to catalog and post Stu’s artwork; and also hopefully to get these items into the hands of people who will cherish them as much as Stu did. The descriptions are interesting, and the collection is varied, with most of the material coming from the 1980s-early 1990s period.

The letter column this time round is expanded and does not seem to be very much affected by the fact that the comments are out of date. The subjects covered are far ranging, providing entertaining, often insightful comments about fandom, science fiction, and the world around us. The issue finishes with a page of very brief comments about some current fanzines.

*Flag* has always been an entertaining read. We can hope that this new issue is the first of a revival of the zine and Andy’s reinvolvement with fanzine publishing.



### THE INSIDER #317

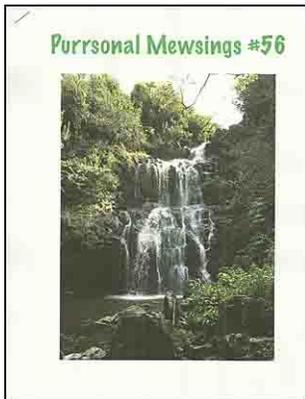
8-1/2x11"; 40 pages; mostly bi-monthly; Richard & Michelle Zellich; 1728 San Martin Dr.; Fenton, MO 63026-2304

This is the clubzine for the St. Louis Science Fiction Association, and altho there are some club notes present, most of each issue is devoted to other things. The regular features include fanzine reviews, a varied letter column, notes on upcoming conventions and fan doings around the area and the nation, and an obituary section that covers the deaths of people involved with science fiction/fantasy in the areas of literature, movies, and fan activity. The obituary section provides plenty of background info that I have not seen presented in other zine venues.

There are other regular features, including a long and usually detailed calendar of upcoming events covering about six months of science fiction/fantasy/fandom related events.

But the bulk of each issue is devoted to science news. Now, you would think, what could be duller than that? Well, you've never seen a science section like this before. There are some weighty articles about new discoveries in the fields of astronomy and space travel, but there are also off-trails reports of bizarre and unusual science events, things in the experimental stage, information on research underway on unusual explorations that seem like the wildest science fiction somehow about to be brought to life. These articles are often illustrated with full color photos, artist's renditions and sometimes even diagrams or charts. It's an odd mix that is usually interested and decidedly unlike what you would expect from more traditional (stodgy) science reports.

It always a strange mixture of the new, cutting edge, fannish, and odd; all stirred together with full color reprints from a wide variety of comic strips and cartoons old and new. Nothing else like it anywhere else, and definitely worth your attention.



### Purrsonal Mewsings #56

R-Laurraine Tutihasi; 2081 W. Overlook St.; PO Box 5323; Oracle, AZ 85623-5323; 8-1/2x11", 12 pages; irregular; available for The Usual

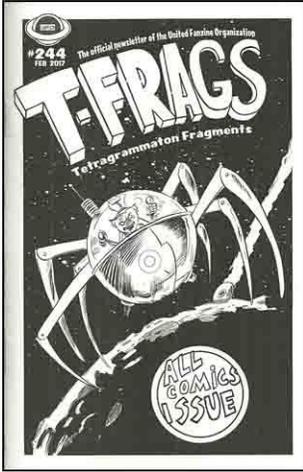
This is the new title for two of the editor's old zines, now combined in hope that she will be able to produce the new title on a more regular basis. This also doubles as the editor's apazine for Stipple-APA.

This issue has a long trip report covering her recent trip to Hawaii. Editor Tutihasi can be an interesting, engaging writer when she wants to be, but far too often these days her zines are devoted to travel reports. These are not convention reports or tales about the joys of a vacation; they are more like trip diaries, with an occasional bit of emphasis on the actual places visited on the trips. There are notes and mentions of when and what she ate, which I frankly find of no interest at all, along with names of people the meals were taken with, total strangers unknown to

me or anyone reading the report. There are some asides and observations about a few of the sights along the way, but not very many. Unfortunately recently issues of this fanzine only seem to come out when the editor has taken a trip. I would much prefer to read her natter and commentary, but she seems to have settled into making *Purrsonal Mewsings* a travelzine. Ms Tutihasi can be an interesting person when she opens up and writes about herself and her other interests, things not related to travel trips.

This issue features a flurry of brief reviews of local plays and movies recently seen, where the opinions and commentary are much better. There is a short letter column included, short because other readers seems to have difficulty coming up with comments about the trip reports that headline these recent issues.

There are also some APA mailing comments, pretty much incomprehensible if you are not a member of that particular group. Each issue always features a generous assortment of illos and photos from a wide variety of sources, both color and b&w. Comments about some of these pics would have been appreciated. The format here is clean and open, with wide margins and distinct type font.



## TETRAGRAMMATON FRAGMENTS #244

5-1/2x8-1/2" fold

over saddle stitched, 28 pages, published bi-monthly by Rob Imes; 13510 Cambridge #307; Southgate, MI 48195; \$2.50 for sample issue, after that The Usual

This is the official OO for the UFO fanzine cooperative. What is that, you might ask? Essentially fans who produce their own fanzines agree to cross promote each other's efforts thru the pages of their own zines and also thru the pages of Tet Frags. It is not an apa; there is no central mailing officer, and there is no set schedule the members must produce their zines on, altho *Tet Frags* itself comes out bi-monthly.

The UFO was developed in the 1970s to help producers of comic fanzines find a way to successfully cross promote their efforts. Back in those days there were literally thousands of different fanzines devoted to comics. The hobby produced amateur comics, histories of comics, offshoots, comic perzines, reprint projects, and a lot more. There have been a lot of ups and downs with the UFO over the years, but it is on a firm footing now, and *Tet Frags* is available to anybody who shows an interest in the publication or the UFO.

Members are encouraged to write reviews, and editorials, commentaries, overviews about their involvement with the world of amateur publishing and their own products as well as those of their fellow members.

The focus right now seems to be primarily on artists and those who are creating their own amateur comic book characters, but the range is varied and there is room for everyone. This entire new issue is an all art number, with short comic strip adventures provided by some of the members. The quality of the material here is varied. Some of the art is quite professional, but most is not. The bulk of it falls into the solid cartoonist style art. The stories generally tend to be super-hero oriented, but with a maximum of seven pages to play with for each submission, the stories are really too abbreviated to allow much more than a bare bones plot with some slam-bam action.

This is probably not the best time for a brand new reader to jump into this fanzine unless you are deeply interested in fan created comic strip adventures. This is not necessarily a criticism, since the commentaries and reviews that are the primary mix each issue are usually interesting and well written, with good art sprinkled thruout, but it seems to me that the prime focus of the UFO may be in the process of changing. This is especially true since the core membership of the group has remained substantially the same over the past three or four years. The UFO requires its members to publish material on a regular basis, and some folks are way behind, so there could be a membership shakeup perhaps shake-out soon. Time will tell of course. A free sample of the zine is available to anyone who wants to check it out.



## NICE DISTINCTIONS #30

8-1/2x11"; 6 pages; Arthur D. Hiavaty; 206

Valentine St.; Yonkers, NY 10704-1814; twice yearly; \$1 for a sample issue, after that The Usual; one free copy by email to anyone who specifically asks for the e-version.

Arthur Hiavaty is one of the finest writers and thinkers in fandom when he sets his mind to it. He consistently produces some of the most quotable writing in the hobby, but these twice-yearly issue of his perzine are increasingly devoted to obituary notices, sometimes taking up half the issue. This time the death notices only amount to two and a half pages, but it's a lot of space in a six page fanzine

The central theme this time round, if it could ever be said such a thing existed in these pages, is Arthur's comments about his experience as a proofreader for various assorted publishing companies, and his experience with some 'expanded universe' shared backdrop books written by diverse hands (think Star Trek, Star Wars, AD&D and the worlds that have novels within the established framework).

There are also several pages of short-short comments about all kinds of things, from the repugnance of coleslaw; an evaluation of Ray Russell's short fiction as most of it is being finally reissued in affordable format, and a lot more. And his thots on all of these subjects are delivered with terse, pithy, insightful nuances masterfully well crafted. Really, his command of the English language is a joy to behold.

I'll say it again; Arthur Hiavaty is one of the best writers in fandom. All of his comments are sharp, precise, and well worth reading, whether you happen to agree with his viewpoint or not. I only wish he would write more, as in longer essays, or full fledged articles even, and that he would turn out more material than these twice-a-year *Nice Distinctions* issues.

*Nice Distinctions* generally runs no illos, and never runs more than six pages, which is, not coincidentally, the exact page count needed to maintain Arthur's FAPA membership with this zine. You really have to try an issue to appreciate the quality of this fanzine.



**SPARTACUS #18** 8-1/2X11", produced by-monthly by Guy Lillian 111; 1390 Holly Ave.; Merritt Island, FL 32852; published on paper for distribution thru SFPA (The Southern Fandom Press Alliance); otherwise posted free in electronic form on the efanzines.com web site

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

This issue he has hand wringing and bitterness over Donald Trump's successful Presidential campaign. There is a brief, heartfelt commentary on John Glenn's passing and his life, some brief suggestions for upcoming Hugo and Oscars awards, also a letter column with mostly me-too comments regarding his

last issue's condemnation and doom-saying over the Trump political victory, altho there is a bitter letter from one reader summarizing his feelings of frustration and feeling of danger when the neighborhood in which he lived for many years was overrun by illegal immigrants who spoke almost no English, lived like slobs, and who rapidly turn the whole area into a crime-ridden slum. That's the kind of experience that fosters a deep distrust of unsupervised immigration, and makes people think well of Donald Trump's position regarding illegal immigrants.

Much of the issue is devoted to Guy's memory of discovering a softcore Beacon paperback book during his mid teen years, a fast romp designed to titillate and inflame the imagination of young males on the verge of full maturity like himself. The memory and the title of this book, "The Fling", stuck with him thru the years, enuf so that thru the years he tried to find another copy to check his memories against the print reality of this flight into sexual fantasy. Years and years passed, with no copy ever turning up. The title was apparently not even important enuf to be mentioned on the complete title lists of Beacon Paperbacks. But finally, fifty years down the line, he has managed to locate a copy of this book. He immediate bought it, and... Well, need I even say it? Guy relates that he was very disappointed when he read the book again as an aging adult. Stuff that seemed risqué, dangerous and exciting when he was sixteen, seemed bland, and downright boring on reading it again at age sixty-six. Such is the way of the world. Sometimes our most imaginative sensual memories are best left alone.



**ASKEW #17** John Purcell; 3744 Marielene Circle; College Station, TX 77845; 8-1/2x11"; 8 pages; irregular schedule; send a long SSAE for a sample copy, after that The Usual

*Askew*, John's perzine, is back in small print-only format. This latest issue showcases what is good and what is bad about personality zines. We get very short write-ups dealing with the happenings in John's recent life, primarily his candidacy for this year's TAFF (Trans Atlantic Fan Fund) representative, some book reviews (he loves books in e-form these days), a very short letter column and a few comments about his life scattered here and there.

Clearly the big deal here is his run for the TAFF office; most of the zine is devoted to that, plus two of the pages here are a TAFF Ballot. Fans may vote in the TAFF election providing they make some kind of monetary contribution to the fund (\$3 minimum), which is intended to pay travel, hotel, food and other expenses

involved in a visit to a major convention overseas. This year it is the turn of an American fan to go over to the 75<sup>th</sup> World SF Convention which will be held in Helsinki, Finland later this year. TAFF winners are expected to write up a suitable convention report afterwards which is widely distributed thruout the hobby, but especially to those who contributed some bucks towards the fund.

*Askew* usually has a long and friendly letter column, but the short page count has cut it very short this issue. John invites letters of comment, but because of the very personal structure of the narratives, enjoyable as they might be, letters and remarks from readers have been slow in coming, and generally brief when they do show up. Personality zines that are too inward looking, as is the case here, will continue to have that problem.

I enjoyed the issue, and you probably will too. It's certainly worth a long SSAE to sample John's cheerful writing style.

## SHAMELESS PLUG DEPARTMENT!



I want to take the opportunity to mention my own fanzine, *Fadeaway*. Issue #52 is now out, 48 pages long, featuring an article Gavin Gallahan on H.P. Lovecraft's attitude toward fascism and socialism, a look at a new SF e-book anthology focusing on worthy amateur writers, a tale of bizarre alien technology and its unintentional consequences, 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](mailto:fabficbks@aol.com).



**ASKEWANCE #38** another fanzine produced by John Purcell; available only in e-fanzine form, primarily from the [efanzines.com](http://efanzines.com) website. This issue is dated October 2016

This is an electronic zine, with beautiful full color cover art. You can contact its creator at [askance73@gmail.com](mailto:askance73@gmail.com). The nominal publication schedule is quarterly. The current issue has remarks from the author, along set of comments "Maker Of Winners" by Taral Wayne, a literary analysis of timelines starship troopers by Robin Bright, fanzine reviews, and other remarks discussed below.

John Purcell discusses at length the Hugo awards in particular the Best Fan Artist award that this year went to Steve Stiles. There was a memorial notice for N3F founding member David Kyle, who recently passed away.

Taral Wayne gives us an extended commentary "Maker Of Winners" on being nominated for the Hugo awards for fan artist and fan writer. He is

congratulatory toward Steve Stiles for winning this year, and then goes on to a discussion of the factional fan feud within voters for the Hugo awards. Wayne then gives a fine introduction to the Aurora award, which includes awards to deserving Canadian fen for fanzine activities, organizational activities, and other activities. We are indeed blessed the fandom has created so many awards and here is another set of them. Wayne closes by complaining at great length that he has never received a Hugo award himself, but can proudly say that his contributions of art have helped earn Hugo awards for other people.

"Fascistoid" is a literary analysis of Robert A. Heinlein's *Starship Troopers*. The analysis must be read in full. The author proposes that in the novel the early attacks on earth were effective because people were not angry enough to avoid being killed. I shall quote a representative paragraph:

"As the character, Carmen, in *Starship Troopers*, actress Denise Richards is the pilot of the Rodger Young, a starship that drops its boy sons onto the 'bug world', Klendathu, and so suggests 'biological warfare' involving poisons and viruses, which is what the men of the car with its carbon monoxide poison gas, and the demon driver's spreading of its HIV/AIDS contagion through host womb enslavement of the human futanarian species of women in institutionalized homosexuality in pederasty for war against 'woman's seed', is. Carmen's 'boy sons' readying themselves for a 'drop' are her 'poisons' to be used against the 'bugs', because host womb enslavement of the human futanarian species of 'woman's seed' in homosexuality in pederasty for war against her had, by the late 20th century, resulted in the spread of the 'incurable killer disease', HIV/AIDS, through men's mixing of blood, shit and semen in each others' anuses in rejection of women: 'Men cursed the God of heaven for their pains and their sores but refused to repent of what they had done.' (Rev. 16. 11) What they'd done was develop men's nature as a 'biological weapon' against the futanarian human species, which in Heinlein's

*Starship Troopers* is extrapolated into the threat to Earth's future posed by an eight-limbed 'bug' depicted as an eight-limbed arachnoid."

I leave it to the reader to contemplate the rational interpretations and implications of these remarks, if any

Purcell shares with us his own recollections of Heinlein himself. He follows with an excellent review of a single issue of a single fanzine. There follows a dozen pages of fascinating letters to the editor — I wish I was as successful at getting letters like that — and a list of regional science fiction conventions. The issue closes with a short article lifted from the editor's other fanzine *Askew*. The front and back covers were by Alan White.

---review by **George Phillies**



The Last “Letter of the Day” Cookie Monster  
Would Ever Eat