

# TIGHTBEAM 282

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This is issue **#282** 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

**John Thiel; 30 N. 19<sup>th</sup> St.; Lafayette, IN 47904**

*Tightbeam* 281 was a really outstanding issue. I hope you continue publishing at this level of quality. The formatting is grand. I'm really liking the presentation of books by their covers. Though the letter column is not as successful as the rest of the issue; I hope that improves for you.

I've a few comments on the reviews. George Phillie's review of the TROY RISING books shows the character Tyler Vernon as appearing at a science fiction convention as a cartoonist. Then it shortly says, "As a writer Vernon is steeped in the creative traditions of John Campbell, EE Smith, and other founders of modern science fiction". Did the convention transform him from a cartoonist to a well-versed writer without the reader knowing about it? The Troy books seem to go into the science fiction establishment as part of the action, even a source part, which is interesting enough to comment upon though I haven't ever seen the books.

I'll be looking for THE BERLIN PROJECT; I remember Benford as being military-connected from having seen his fanzine VOID. He was discussing the atomic bomb in there.

The Red Gambit series seems to draw considerably, even overmuch, on real-life facts for its alternate history.

I'd ask of Tom Feller what a zombie virus is; he flashes it past quickly and seems to regard readers as being au courant on this plague, but I'm not familiar with it. Maybe I've successfully avoided a contact with it.

THE MONGREL MAGE sounds like it has really primal action in it, with Mages of Chaos and Mages of Order. It sounds like a very interesting novel on the basis of this consideration.

Apparently Gary Robe is occupied with something every time a Laundry novel comes past. Stross goes in and out of the spotlight where I have my scan, but his books are frequently presented by the Science Fiction Book Club.

I don't know if the return of the Shadow would do much to upgrade sf's and fantasy's history; it doesn't seem to be very much a part of it. People do recall it a lot; I'm glad you've pointed out what's found in it, because nobody whose comments on it I've read described anything about it except for his laugh.

It seems to me some people are trying to inflate Kipling into a science fiction writer for some unknown reason. He's rather far from being that, his chiefest preoccupation being warfare. He did some fantasies I've read, though this is the first I've heard of science fiction being attributed to him. The plots described would not seem to justify Brunner's claim that he was one of the greatest early influences on sf. I have a twenty volume set of his works.

I'll be looking forward to the next *Tightbeam*.

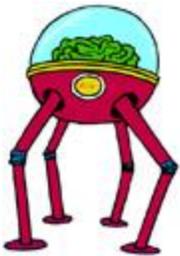
###I would like to see the letter column get more input. I will making an appeal in the upcoming issue of TNFF. It seems odd to me that in this day and age, with computers and email making communication so easy and convenient, that more people aren't sending along LOCs. It's a puzzler to me.

Greg Benford has always been interested in both hard science and the military aspect of SF. This may possibly be because he was a military brat, traveling with his father all over the world to different duty stations. I have to say that while I generally have enjoyed most of his stories, some of them are so heavy into the hard science that the leave me way behind. Luckily he generally adds sufficient action and plot development so that the story keeps on moving anyway.

The Shadow pulp magazine stories sometimes featured science fictional themes, and so did the radio programs, altho those concepts were noticeably less in the broadcast version. The earlier Shadow radio shows, which drew more heavily from the pulp magazine heritage have the most fantastic elements, but even up thru the end of the series bizarre fantastic plots could still be found in the stories. Looking back at the run of those Shadow programs, it often amazes me how much sheer story plot and conflict they were able to cram into those half hour dramas. The Radio Spirits set I reviewed is certainly an excellent introduction to anybody who has any interest in the series.

I think Kipling's fantastic writings were primarily in the fantasy and supernatural genre rather than pure science fiction, altho he write several novels and stories that were directly and specifically science fiction. However I also have to agree with you that a lot of people trying to cram some of his other weird and off-trails stories into the science fiction category are basically fooling themselves.

On the other hand I do have to agree with John Brunner and Jon Swartz that Kipling as a writer exerted tremendous influence on the science fiction writers of the twentieth century, and beyond. The fact is that because of his enormous popularity, Kipling exerted tremendous influence on almost any future writer of any genre who happened to encounter his material. The fact that virtually everything Kipling wrote is still readable, relevant and popular today, a hundred years and more after he originally wrote it, is certainly a lasting tribute to his abilities as both a stellar wordsmith and a creative imagination.###



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

Many thanks for issues 280 and 281 of *Tightbeam*. My new job (yay!) sure has taken a lot of time away from writing. Sure, it's about 8 hours a day, but it is also an additional 3.5 hours for transit. Time has been eaten. However, I do have a day today, which I will devote to writing. Here goes...

280...My loc...well, there's the job, and I have been there just over three months now.

I also have more voice work coming up in the new year, which I can get to thanks a brand nesubway expansion here, due to open this weekend. The book collection is now approximately 20% smaller, and we may have to weed further. Indeed, for Adam West, Batman was his bread and butter until he passed on. Like Shatner, West made fun of himself, and that definitely paid the rent.

Movies...we rarely see any these days, even the ones we say we've got to get to, but of course , yesterday here, was the premiere of Star Wars Episode VIII. So many rushed to see it, and stampede into the theatres, but as much as we want to see it, we will wait until the initial panic is done. We look forward to this one, and we will definitely see it.

Great to see I still get most of the zines listed, but I am so far behind on them. The list is huge, and I do have a pile of paper zines beside me. They will be tackled; when is the ultimate question here. Soon, Real Soon Now. Sooner than that, I hope.

281...Quite the steampunk illustration on the front cover. The skies are full of such well-dressed flyers.

I never did see the television version of *The DaVinci Code*, which probably wasn't distributed here, or was on an expensive TV service we don't subscribe to. The latest Dan Brown is called *Origins*, which is about I know not what, so I am looking forward to a review of that book.

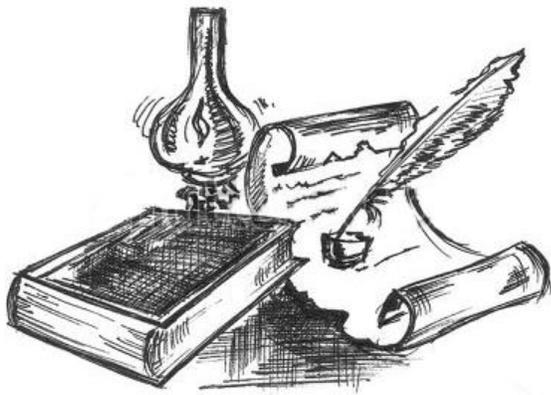
I do not think Rudyard Kipling ever made it to Toronto, but one of the major north-south streets in the west end of Toronto is named after him, and my closest subway station is named after him, too. There's a lot of English influence in Toronto, and he's just one of the beneficiaries.

There seems to be some confusion over the spelling of the hero of the first movie listed, *Quartermass* or *Quatermass*. I will go with the latter, given the poster. The character seems to be quite the British hero, but other than for dedicated readers, he is relatively unknown here.

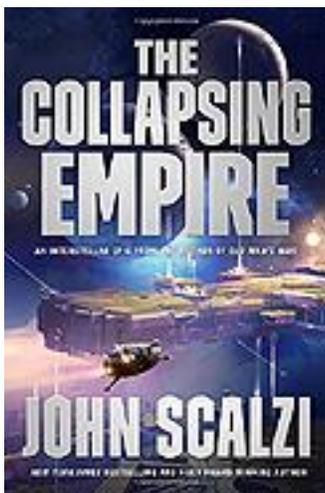
Important dates to come... Yvonne's birthday is on the 19th, and she will turn 65. And, her final day at work is on the 21st, and she officially retires at the end of the year. She can't wait for this big change in her life, and the doing away with hostile and largely unappreciative offices. She will look for work as a consultant or part-time mat-leave replacement, that will help supplement our saving to return to England, probably in 2019. Big changes are coming...meanwhile, I still have seven years to go before I retire.

And that's all for right now...many thanks for these two issues, and we wish you the happiest of celebrations for the end of 2017, and a better and saner 2018 for us all.

###Glad to hear you have landed a regular job again. So far as retiring; will you or Yvonne really retire? Sure, you may quit doing the kind of day-jobs you are currently getting mundane money for, but will you quit doing the steampunk costumes and gadgets, and the 'hobby' crafts that bring in extra bunny-money?? Most people I know who "retire" take a few months off to recharge and catch up on all the sleep they are owed themselves, then they decide that sitting around doing mostly nothing is not for them, and I suspect that will be your decision too.###



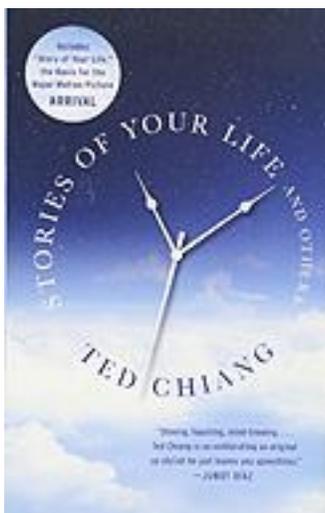
## books



**The Collapsing Empire by John Scalzi—336 pages; Hardback \$25.00; paperback \$10.99; e-book \$13.99**

Set in the 36th Century, humanity has spread out to the stars after discovering the “Flow”, a way to travel faster than light through natural river-like passages among 50 stars. Humans in those star systems live in an empire called the Interdependency. Unfortunately, the Flow is not eternal, and one scientist has discovered that it is on the verge of collapse. To add to the crisis, there is only one Earth-like planet in the empire, and they have long since lost contact with the Earth itself. The rest of the human race lives either in space habitats or on planets that require domed cities, and they need interstellar trade to survive. The main characters are Cardenia, the recently crowned empress, Kiva, the scion of an important merchant family, Ghreni, the scion of another important merchant family and one of the principal villains, and Marce, a young scientist. Some reviewers have compared it to *Dune*, but the prose is not up to Herbert’s level and lacks the epic feel of the *Dune* books. Furthermore, Scalzi uses the F-word more frequently than I like. Otherwise, this book was a lot of fun to read, but be warned: this is the first book in a series, and it ends on a cliff hanger.

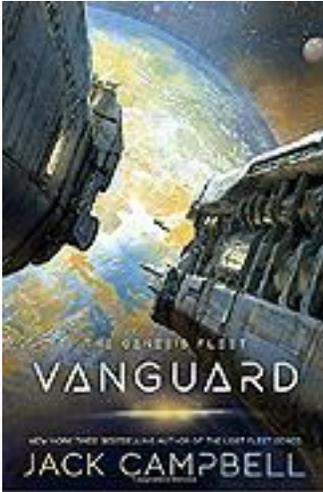
---review by Tom Feller



**Arrival by Ted Chiang—new edition 334 pgs; Paperback \$16.00; e-book \$9.99; the original 1<sup>st</sup> edition hardback now selling for \$75 and up—way up**

When the film by that name came out last year, Penguin re-released Chiang’s 2002 short story collection **Stories of Your Life and Others** under the name of the movie, including the Nebula and Sturgeon Award-winning “Story of Your Life”, upon which the movie is based. The collection consists of his first eight stories, which were written over a period of a little more than ten years, and I believe I had read half of them previously. All of them good, and yet each one is different from the others. If you read them in an anthology under different pseudonyms, it might not occur to you that they were written by the same author. “Tower of Babylon” won the Nebula for 1990, “Hell is the Absence of God” the Nebula, the Locus, and the Hugo for 2001, and “Seventy-Two Letters” the Sidewise for 2000. I regard Chiang as one of the best short fiction writers currently working in science fiction and fantasy, and very few collections have this many high quality stories.

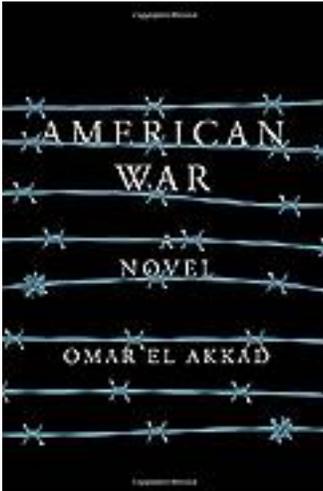
---review by Tom Feller



**Vanguard by Jack Campbell—336 pgs; Hardcover \$27.00; Paperback \$15.00; e-book \$12.99**

This novel is set in the future when humanity has a faster-than-light method of traveling between the stars and has colonized other star systems, but about one hundred years prior to the author's Lost Fleet series. Earth itself is in severe decline, causing a power vacuum that some of the more aggressive former colonies are attempting to fill. One of the newest colonies is Glenlyon which finds itself under attack by Scatha, an aggressive neighbor. Robert Geary, formerly a junior officer in the navy of one of the more established colonies, has to organize a navy for Glenlyon, and Mele Darcy, a former non-commissioned officer in another colony's marines, must organize an army. They are ably assisted by a hacker, Lyn "Ninja" Meltzer. This novel is a good, solid work of military science fiction and meant to be the first in his new Genesis Fleet series.

---review by Tom Feller



**American War by Omar El Akkad—352 pages; hardback \$18.32; trade paperback \$11.65; e-book \$10.99**

The prologue to this novel is set in "New Anchorage", Alaska in the early 22nd Century, when the rising seas has made old Anchorage uninhabitable, and the narrator comments that it rarely snows in Alaska. Most of Florida and much of both the eastern, western, and Gulf coasts are also underwater, and the capital of the United States has been moved to Columbus, Ohio. The U.S. is no longer a great power, and Mexico has even annexed portions of the U.S southwest. The war referred to in the title is the Second American Civil War which lasts from 2074 to 2095 and is triggered when the federal government outlaws fossils fuels. The main character is Sara T. "Sarat" Chestnut, born in the part of Louisiana still above sea level in 2068. After her father is killed by a suicide bomber in Baton Rouge, Sarat, her mother Martina, brother Simon, and sister Dana relocate to a refugee camp near Iuka, Mississippi. There she is recruited by

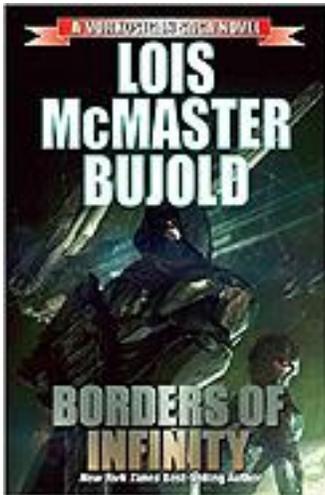
the mysterious Albert Gaines to become an assassin.

I did not find the author's scenario of how we get from today to his version of 2068 to be plausible. Furthermore, if the federal government were to outlaw fossil fuels, I think more than a handful of states (Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina) would be in rebellion. Another serious deficiency is that the author appears to be clueless about Southern culture, especially religion, and completely ignores the issues of race. The Chestnut family, for instance, is mixed-race, but the reader would never know this if it was not mentioned early in the novel. A less serious flaw is that there appear to be no technological advances in the fifty years between now and 2068. On the other hand, his description of refugee camps, drone strikes, torture, biological warfare and massacres of civilians by militias is very disturbing, and the techniques Gaines uses to recruit assassins and suicide bombers is fascinating. Overall, this is an interesting, but deeply flawed, cautionary tale.

---review by Tom Feller

**Borders of Infinity by Lois McMaster Bujold—240 pgs; Hardcover \$30.00; Trade Paperback \$16.00; e-book \$3.99**

Earlier this year Bujold's Miles Vorkosigan books won the Hugo for Best Series. This collection of three Vorkosigan novellas was in the Hugo Award packet, but I did not bother reading it before the voting deadline because I had already read most of the books. As it turned out, I had indeed read the first two

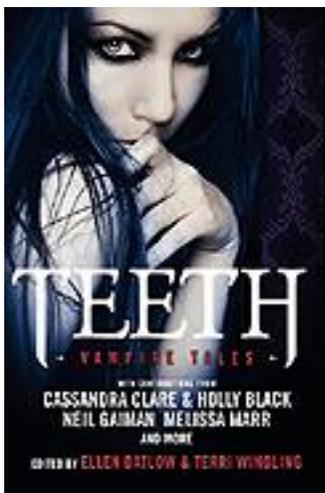


novellas, “The Mountains of Mourning” (1989) and “Labyrinth” (1989), but do not recall reading “Borders of Infinity” (1987).

The first is set immediately after Miles’s graduation from the Barrayaran military academy. His father, an important aristocrat, assigns him to investigate a case of infanticide in a rural area. Structured as a whodunit, it won both the Hugo and Nebula Awards for that year. The other two are set during Miles’s Admiral Naismith period during which he was working undercover for the Barrayaran intelligence service as the leader of a mercenary fleet.

This volume would serve as a good introduction to the series, especially as the first story introduces the reader to the culture and history of Barrayar itself, Miles’s home world, the second to the planet Jackson’s Whole, which is important in the series, and the third to the Cetagandans, who are important as one of the opponents of Barrayar in interstellar conflict.

---review by Tom Feller



**Teeth edited by Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling—480 pgs; Paperback about \$9.99 (varies); e-book \$4.99**

This is an anthology of nineteen vampire stories and poems. Contributors include Neil Gaiman, Suzy McKee Charnas, Catherynne M. Valente, Lucius Shepard, Emma Bull, although I actually found that the better stories were written by lesser known authors. Although the editors discuss the Twilight series in their introduction, the stories are primarily horror rather than romance, which I prefer anyway. The ones that come closest to romance are Tanith Lee’s “Why Light”, in which vampires can marry and have children and Ellen Kushner’s “History” in which a history student dates a vampire who, to her frustration, has a poor memory of historical events. Cassandra Clare’s and Holly Black’s “The Perfect Dinner Party” is written from the point of view of a vampire who became one when she was just a teenager. She is no longer emotionally a teenager, unlike the ones in the Twilight series. Genevieve Valentine’s “Things to Know about Being Dead”

concerns a newly formed vampire who is learning how to survive as one of the undead. Garth Nix’s “Vampire Weather” is set in an Amish-like community in a world in which vampires have let their existence become public knowledge. The vampire in Kaaron Warren’s “The List of Definite Endings” only drinks the blood of people with terminal illnesses. In Nathan Ballingrud’s “Sunbleached”, a boy discovers a vampire living underneath his house. The main character in Cecil Castellucci’s “Best Friends Forever” is a girl who is allergic to sunlight but then meets and makes friends with a vampire.

---review by Tom Feller



**Joyland by Stephen King—288 pgs; Hardcover approx \$24.00 (varies); Trade Paperback \$12.95; e-book \$7.99**

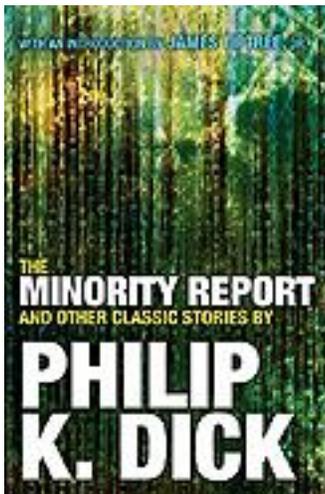
Although this novel was published by Hard Case Crime, a small press devoted to crime fiction, I would call it more of a ghost and coming-of-age story, even if the ghost in question is the victim of an unknown serial killer. The main character and narrator is Devin Jones, a college student who gets a summer job at a haunted amusement park in North Carolina in 1973. He is recovering from getting dumped by his girlfriend. Although he does not find love that summer, he does find deep friendships and solves a mystery.

Joyland, the amusement park, is an old-fashioned park, having more in common with carnivals than theme parks like Disneyworld, Six Flags, and their imitators. According to the narrator, it went out of business in 1975. Among the characters he meets at the park are Madame Fortuna, a fortune

teller who has some psychic ability, Bradley Easterbrook, the owner of the park, fellow college students Erin and Tom, who become two of his best friends, Eddie Parks, a curmudgeon who is Devin's immediate supervisor, and Lane Hardy, the friendly operator of the Ferris Wheel. He also makes friends with people outside the park, including his landlady Mrs. Shoplaw and especially Annie, a beautiful woman ten years his senior, and her son Mike, who is afflicted with Muscular Dystrophy but also has psychic abilities.

The story is reminiscent of Ray Bradbury, especially *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, because of the amusement park. It also reminded me of King's "The Body", which was adapted to film as *Stand by Me*, because, it is a coming-of-age story. I would consider this one of King's minor works but still worth reading.

---review by Tom Feller

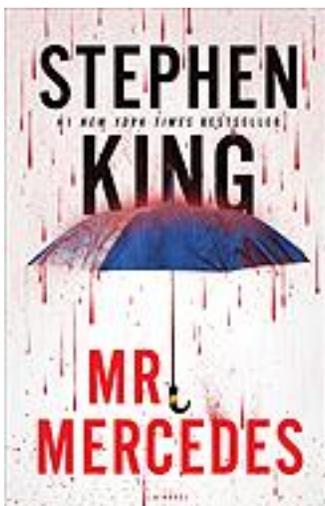


**Minority Report by Philip K. Dick—394 pgs; Trade Paperback \$16.00; NO e-book version**

This story collection came out shortly after the 2002 film *Minority Report*, which was loosely based on the 1956 story by the author. It consists of eight stories Dick published between 1953 and 1969 including two other Dick stories that became movies: "Imposter" (story 1953, movie 2001) and "We Can Remember it for You Wholesale" (1966), which has been loosely adapted twice as *Total Recall* (1989 and 2012). I discovered Dick when I was in college and read *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* about ten years before *Blade Runner*, the movie adaptation, came out and think I have read about 8-10 books by him. "Second Variety" (1953) and "The Electric Ant" have a similar idea questioning whether the people we meet are really human beings or some kind of android/robot/replicant. I have found it interesting that an author who was unknown outside the science fiction genre during his own life became one of

Hollywood's favorite science fiction authors. I think the appeal lies in the paranoia that many of the stories feature. In both "Imposter" and "We can Remember it for You Wholesale", the main characters realize that they have been implanted with false memories. In "Faith of our Fathers", drinking water has been laced with hallucinogens, and in "War Game", a children's board game similar to Monopoly has been weaponized. In the title story, the scientific discovery and application of pre-cognition leads to a suspension of many civil liberties such as due process and criminal trials by juries, and the main character thinks he is being framed by his wife and a younger man. Although the stories were clearly written in the Fifties and Sixties in that the characters use devices such as typewriters, they are full of wonderful ideas. There are coin-operated robotic psychiatrists in "Oh to Be a Blodel!", an interesting twist on O. Henry's "The Gifts of the Magi", although Dick demonstrated that he knew next to nothing about genetics and probability. Overall, this is an excellent collection. Note: While I was writing this review, I found out that there is another short story collection entitled *Minority Report*, but I can recommend the other one as well just based on the list of stories.

---review by Tom Feller



**The Bill Hodges Trilogy by Stephen King**

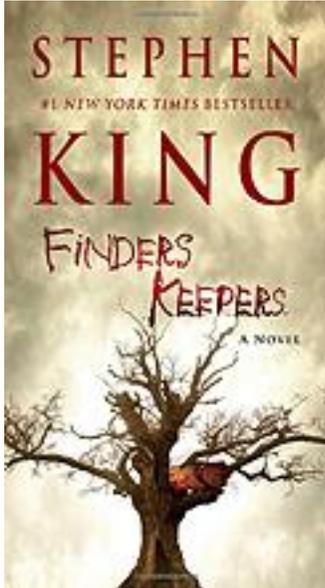
For a long time, King has been at such a point in his career that he can write anything he wants, including this hybrid crime/paranormal/sci-fi trilogy. The first novel, *Mr. Mercedes* (2014), is a pure crime novel with no supernatural, paranormal, or sci-fi elements, and it won the Edgar Award. The second, *Finders Keepers* (2015), is primarily a crime novel, but toward the end there are hints of paranormal activity. The third, *End of Watch* (2016), on the other hand, is primarily a paranormal/sci-fi thriller with phenomenon such as telekinesis, telepathy, and even mind control.

The prologue of the first novel describes an event that drives the action of most of the three novels. It occurs in 2009 in an unnamed Ohio city on Lake Erie, which was already part of the rust belt prior to the Great Recession of 2008. Prior to the opening of a job fair, hundreds of people are waiting in line in the hope of

finding a job. Then without warning, a stolen Mercedes Benz SL500, a twelve cylinder sedan, plows into the line, killing eight people and injuring fifteen. It is a testament to King's skill that he introduces two characters, gets the reader to become emotionally attached to them in just a few pages, and then kills them off.

The main protagonist of the first and third novels and a major character in the second is a 62 year old, divorced and retired detective named Bill Hodges. He had been the lead detective on the case but had retired after 40 years while the case was still unsolved. Bill is not handling retirement well. He is watching a lot of daytime television, such as Jerry Springer, eating junk food, and contemplating suicide, when, in 2010, he receives a letter from the driver of the Mercedes. Hodges does not report the letter to the police, but instead begins his own investigation. He is assisted by Jerome Robinson, a Harvard-bound African-American teenager who mows his yard and maintains his computer, and Holly Kibney, a forty-something cousin of the woman whose Mercedes was stolen and who just happens to be a computer genius.

The driver of the Mercedes was Brady Hartsfield. (This is not a spoiler. He is named on the back cover of the first book.) He is a 28 year old underachiever who has never had a girlfriend and still lives with his alcoholic mother, a sexy and still attractive woman who has a problem with boundaries. Brady works two jobs. As an employee of an electronics superstore, he makes house calls helping people with their computers and other gadgets. This brought him into contact with the woman whose Mercedes he stole. His other job is driving an ice cream truck and selling ice cream and other treats to children and adults in residential neighborhoods, and one of his routes takes him past the houses of both Bill and Jerome. Hartsfield makes for an adequate, although stereotypical, villain.

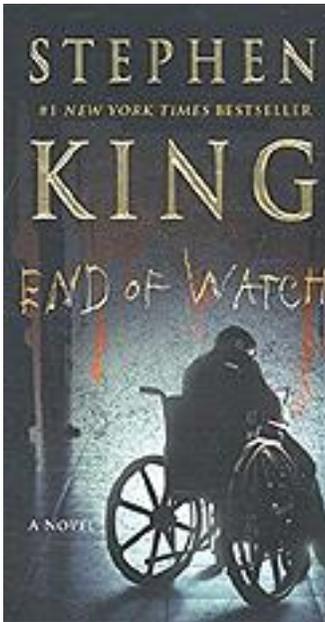


In part one of the second book, Finders Keepers, there are two story lines with alternating chapters. The first begins in 1978 when John Rothstein, a world famous novelist living out in the country in New Hampshire, is woken in the middle of the night by home invaders. He had become a recluse like J.D. Salinger and not published anything in 18 years. There are three invaders led by Morris Bellamy, who is a big fan of Rothstein's. Unfortunately for the author, Bellamy is still angry about the third book in Rothstein's Jimmy Gold trilogy in which Gold, the main character, makes decisions about his life that are not to Bellamy's liking. After Rothstein gives them the combination to his safe, he and Bellamy have an argument which ends when Bellamy shoots and kills Rothstein. Fan violence is a subject that King has visited from time to time in his stories, such as Misery and Lisey's Story and about which he has some personal knowledge. When the police searched the apartment of Mark David Chapman, the murderer of John Lennon, they found a copy of one of King's books that he had personally autographed for Chapman with the inscription "To My Number One Fan".

The invaders find over \$20,000 in cash and about 160 notebooks containing 18 years of writing in the safe. (Rothstein uses the same kind of notebooks that King used after his near fatal accident in 1999, because it was too painful for him to sit at the computer and type.) After fleeing the scene of the crime, the invaders stop at a highway rest area, where Bellamy kills his two co-invaders. Bellamy then returns to his house in the same city where Mr. Mercedes took place and hides the money and the notebooks. He plans to live off the money for a time and read the notebooks at his leisure, but the same night he gets drunk and commits a rape for which he is arrested and sentenced to life in prison. He is never connected to the three murders and paroled in 2014. He is a much more interesting villain than Hartsfield, and this is a rare instance in which I felt that the second book of a trilogy was the best.

The second story line starts in 2009, and the Saubers family, consisting of a father Tom, mother Linda, son Pete, 13 years old, and daughter Tina, 9 years old, is now living in Bellamy's old house. Tom is unemployed, having worked in real estate and losing his job in the 2008 real estate bust. He is waiting in line for that job fair to open when Hartsfield kills and wounds all those people. Mr. Saubers is one of the "lucky" ones, only suffering a disability that requires extensive physical therapy. Since Saubers was unemployed, he had no disability insurance, although I did wonder why he had not applied for Social Security Disability, and Mrs. Saubers has to support the family on her teacher's salary. They often argue about money. Pete discovers Bellamy's hiding place and secretly mails about \$500 each month to his parents. He also reads the notebooks, which consist of Rothstein's unpublished poetry, short stories, and two Jimmy Gold novels, and becomes a

fan. His interest is much healthier than either Bellamy's or Chapman's in that he wants to read other authors such as Philip Roth, Saul Bellow, and John Updike, and go to college and major in English.

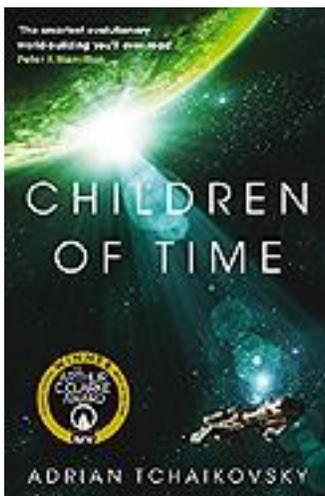


In Part Two, characters from Mr. Mercedes return, including Bill, Holly, and Jerome. The title of the book comes from a skip trading and re-possession service that Hodges is now running, and Holly is his right-hand person. Jerome is attending Harvard but back home for a vacation. Hartsfield resides in a traumatic brain injury clinic in an apparent vegetative state, because of an injury he suffered when he is caught toward the end of the first book. He is not considered sufficiently competent to stand trial, of course, although Bill thinks he is faking. In Part Three the story lines all come together.

In the third novel, End of Watch, we learn that Hartsfield's doctor has been giving him an experimental drug NOT approved for human testing. Hartsfield then regains consciousness and gradually learns that he has not only telekinetic and telepathic abilities, but also the ability to control the minds of other people, including his doctor. It's an old idea, but King makes it work.

When one of the survivors of Hartsfield's rampage with the Mercedes, a quadriplegic, dies in an apparent murder-suicide, Bill's old partner invites him and Holly to the crime scene, where Holly notices some things that the detectives do not. After her observations are dismissed by the police, she persuades Bill to privately investigate the event, and the cat and mouse game between him and Hartsfield resumes, although who is the cat and who is the mouse is uncertain.

---review by Tom Feller



**Children of Time by Adrian Tchaikovsky—609 pgs; Hardback is out of print and very expensive; Paperback approx \$9.99; e-book \$8.08 (at Amazon)**

David Brin's Uplift Series had an enormous influence on this novel, which won the Arthur C. Clarke Award for 2015, and there are numerous references to Brin and the books. It is set in the future when humanity is spreading out to the stars but at sub-light speeds using hibernation ships. In one star system, a planet has been terraformed and seeded with Earth life-forms. It is named Kern's World after Arvana Kern, who conceived and led the project. The plan had also been to seed it with primates infected with a nanovirus which would accelerate evolution in the direction of intelligence. Unfortunately, the plan was sabotaged by a rival political faction in whom all but one of the humans working on the project is killed. The primates never make it to the planet but the nanovirus does.

There are two story lines that touch briefly in the middle of the story and then come together again at the end. On Kern's World, intelligent Jumping Spiders become the dominant life form defeating both another species of spider, Spitting Spiders, and ants, all of which were infected by the nanovirus. Because of their short life span, the spider story line is essentially a series of short stories in which the main female character in each generation is named Portia. She is usually a warrior, but in at least one chapter, she is a scientist. By the way, this is a species in which the female kills the male after mating. The story line in one of the chapters is essentially one of "male liberation".

Meanwhile back on Earth, the political conflict that inspired the sabotage became an all-out war. The resulting nuclear winter caused an ice age, and the human population declined to about 10,000 people until it began to recover. It was 2,000 years before human beings return to the terraformed planet in an "arkship" named Gilgamesh with both the passengers (thousands of them) and crew in hibernation and with the intention of colonizing Kern's World. Because their life spans are increased by the use of hibernation, the two main human characters, historian Holsten Mason and engineer Isa Lain, are present throughout the book.

---review by Tom Feller

## AND NOW FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT---

Yes the Christmas season has come and gone, yet even in the depths of a long, cold, miserable winter, with a recent blizzard dumping tons of the white stuff on us, questions still remain about this festive holiday and its traditions. These questions demand rational answers, and so, as a public service, we are happy to present the following interview which sheds much needed light on a holiday tradition.

### INTERVIEW WITH SANTA'S REINDEER WRANGLER by John Scalzi

Q: Your name and occupation, please.

A: I'm Naseem Copely, and I'm the Reindeer Corps Manager for Santa Claus.

Q: What does that title mean?

A: Basically I'm responsible for recruiting, outfitting and caring for the reindeer who pull Santa's sleigh on Christmas. If it has anything to do with the reindeer, I'm the one in charge of it.

Q: Why would you need to recruit? We already know who the reindeer are. Dasher and Dancer and Prancer and so on.

A: Well, that's the first misconception. The canonical names of the reindeer aren't of the reindeer themselves. The canonical names describe the role of the reindeer.

Q: I'm not sure I follow.

A: So, it's like this: You have a football team, right? And a football team has a quarterback and full backs and half backs and centers and such. And in the role of quarterback, you could have Eli Manning or Andrew Luck or Aaron Rodgers or whomever.

Q: Okay.

A: So on a reindeer team, there's a Dasher and a Dancer and a Prancer and so on. They're roles. They're positions. And the position of Dasher, as an example, is currently held by a reindeer named Buckletoe McGee. And before her, it was held by Tinselhart Flaherty, and before her, Ted Cruz.

Q: Ted Cruz.

A: Yes. No relation.

Q: All right. So the canonical names are the role of the reindeer, but this leaves open the question of why there are roles at all.

A: Because of varying the weather and various atmospheric conditions, basically. Depending on the weather, one or another of the team will be in lead position.

Q: So, for example –

A: So if the weather is clear, then Dasher is in the lead, because she's fast and good with straight lines. If there's a lot of turbulence in the upper atmosphere, then Dancer's in front, because she's good finding pockets of calm air for Santa to navigate into. "Donner" is the German word for "thunder," so our Donner's up when we have thunderstorms, and so on.

Q: Okay, but what about Cupid?

A: In the lead when we have to sweet-talk our way out of a moving violation citation.

Q: That really happens?

A: Lots of little towns have speed traps, man. They don't care if it's Santa. You see Santa, they see a wealthy traveler who won't come back to town to contest a ticket.

Q: How does that even work? A reindeer mitigating traffic violations, I mean.

A: It's technical. Very technical. I'd need graphs and a chart.

Q: And Vixen? What role does Vixen play?

A: Uh, that role's currently in transition.

Q: What does that mean?

A: It means I'm ready for your next question.

Q: All right, what about the Rudolph position?

A: (Sighs) There is no Rudolph position. Never was. Never will be.

Q: You seem annoyed by this question.

A: None of us up here at the pole are big fans of the whole “Rudolph” thing.

Q: Why not?

A: Well, it makes us look like jerks, doesn't it? A young reindeer is discriminated against up to and until he has marginal utility. I mean, really. Who looks good in that scenario? Not all of the other reindeer, who come across as bigots and bullies. And not Santa, who is implicitly tacit in reindeer bigotry.

Q: I have to admit I never really thought about it that hard.

A: You know, here at the pole we work hard to make sure that everyone feels welcome – it's not just a legal requirement, it's the whole ethos behind the Santa organization. And this one song craps on that for a reindeer who never even existed? Yeah, we're not happy.

Q: You could sue for defamation.

A: No one comes out ahead when you do that. Anyway, Santa has his way of dealing with things like this.

Q: What do you mean?

A: Let's just say a certain songwriter received lots of coal one year. In his car. The one with the white bucket seats.

Q: Okay. The next question: Why reindeer?

A: Why not reindeer?

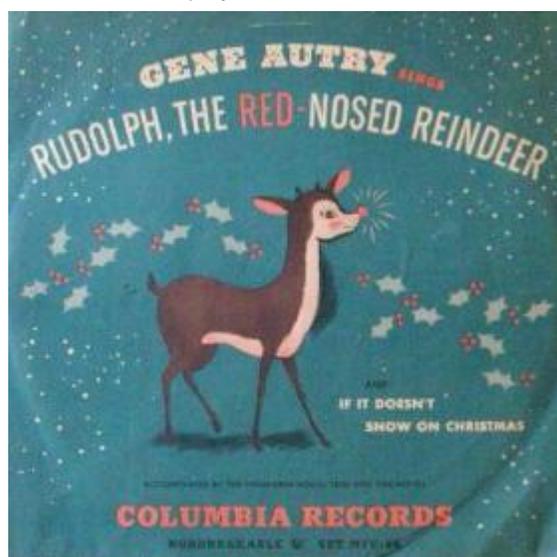
Q: Generally speaking, they don't actually fly.

A: Neither do sleighs, generally speaking, and yet here we are.

Q: We could talk about that. I mean, the general violation of physics that goes on around the whole Santa's sleigh thing.

A: Look, I don't pretend to know the science of the flying sleigh thing, okay? That's not my job. You can ask Santa's physicists about it if you want.

Q: Santa has physicists on staff?



A: Of course he does. He's one of the largest recruiters of physicists outside of NASA. What, you thought all this happened because of magic?

Q: Well, now that you mention it, yes. Yes, I did.

A: See, that's just silly. It's not magic. It's technology. Highly, highly advanced technology.

Q: So technology makes the reindeer fly.

A: No, that's genetic.

Q: Oh, come on.

A: You'll have to interview some of Santa's biologists about that.

Q: Leaving aside the questionable physics and biology of flying reindeer, how do you recruit them? The reindeer, that is.

A: Craigslist.

Q: You're telling me the reindeer can read.

A: Of course not. That's just ridiculous.

Q: Unlike them flying.

A: It's not the reindeer, it's their owners. Laplanders and Canadians have access to the internet too.

Q: So the owners of the reindeer show up with their deer, and then what?

A: Well, the genes for flying in reindeer are recessive, so we have to test for ability.

Q: With a DNA test?

A: With a catapult.

Q: Wait, what?

A: We chuck 'em into the air and see what happens.

Q: That's... that's horrible.

A: Why?

Q: What if they don't have the flying gene!  
A: Then they come down.  
Q: And you don't see a problem with that?  
A: It's just gravity.  
Q: There's that little part at the end! You know, when the reindeer who have been chucked into the air hit the ground at 32 feet per second per second.  
A: What? No. We put up nets, dude.  
Q: Nets?  
A: Nets. To catch them. Jeez, what do you think we are, monsters?  
Q: I didn't know!  
A: PETA would be all over us for that.  
Q: Maybe you should have mentioned the nets earlier.  
A: I would think they would be implied.  
Q: Sorry.  
A: Anyway.  
Q: Okay, so you sorted the ones who can fly from the ones who can't. What then?  
A: Then we take the new reindeer and start training them, using various tests and exercises to see which role they would be best at.  
Q: The fabled Reindeer Games.  
A: Right. Once we know who is good at what, we slot them into the role.  
Q: So how many reindeer are in each position?  
A: Roughly a hundred.  
Q: That's... a lot of reindeer.  
A: What did you expect?  
Q: I don't know, I thought maybe two or three for each position. Like a football team.  
A: That was just an analogy.  
Q: No, right, I get that, but even so.  
A: Look, these are animals. They get tired. And the sleigh crosses the entire planet. You can't have a single team of eight physical animals pull a heavy object that entire distance. That's cruel. You got a swap 'em out at regular intervals. So the couple of days before Christmas we truck them to various



places around the world, and when Santa lands, we make the swap.

Q: Where do these swapouts usually happen?

A: Typically mall parking lots. They swap out and Santa can take a bathroom break. He's drinking lots of milk that night and eating a metric ton of cookies. He's gotta make space.

Q: And no one notices Santa landing and swapping out the team.

A: We're quick about it.

Q: How quick?

A: Let me put it this way: NASCAR pit crews?

Q: Yes?

A: Slackers.

Q: Final question: the reindeer are on the job one night of the year.

A: Correct.

Q: What are they doing the rest of the year?

A: Leipäjuusto.

Q: Gesundheit.

A: I didn't sneeze, you numbskull. It's a traditional Scandinavian cheese originally made from reindeer milk.

Q: Santa's a cheesemaker on the side, is what you're saying.

A: And a damn fine one. His Leipäjuusto did very well at the International Cheese Awards this year.

Q: Did he say "Merry Curdmas" when he won?

A: No.

Q: Maybe he could make Holy Infant Cheddar, whose selling points would be that it's tender and mild.

A: Stop.

Q: "Ho Ho Havarti!"

A: I'm going to have Vixen stab you with an antler now.

**John Scalzi** is a writer of science fiction and fantasy books, screenplays and television programs. He is a winner of the Hugo Award and many other honors. His books can be purchased in retail stores and on book selling sites on the web such as Amazon.com and Barnes & Noble.com. His newest novel is "The Collapsing Empire", reviewed in this very issue of *Tightbeam*. He also maintains a web blog at: [whatever.scalzi.com](http://whatever.scalzi.com) where he discusses many informative and interesting things. He is shown here with his feline lord & master Sugar---



# A WITCH CITY MYSTERY

by

Frederic Van Rensselaer Dey

*reprinted from the August, 1901 issue of The Black Cat Magazine*



JACOB HAWKSLEY was a chemist, having succeeded to the occupation as an inheritance. The Hawksleys had lived and labored at the same location in Salem, for generations, and before that, tradition said, had compounded drugs in the city of London, in the days before the Puritans left England for conscience sake. The quaint old Hawksley shop and dwelling stood, and part of it still stands, near Salem's water front. Beneath its dingy paint and planking, though re-modelled many times, it still retains the stout framework of its colonial days. A generation ago even the old, illegible sign yet hung above its doorway.

Jacob Hawksley, the last of his line, had no assistant and rarely a customer, and, indeed, none but strangers dared to enter his low-ceiled, dingy shop in the early "thirties," when superstition was not so veiled as now, for rumor had woven a web of weirdest horror about the old man and his habitation. Not that he was so very old — three score, perhaps, with a smooth, benignant face, and a shrewd smile for those who feared him most. But tradesmen served him only because they dared not refuse, children fled from him, and strangers, who were mostly mariners, were warned to give his shop a roomy berth.

If but half the wonders related of the round-shouldered, studious-looking little man had been true, they were enough to account for the horror in which he was held, while their foundation on facts was undeniable. Some people said, if any living thing crossed his threshold, it never re-appeared. The grocer opposite, who served the chemist with trembling, told of scores of stray cats and dogs enticed into Hawksley's shop, but they were always homeless, miserable creatures. Ill-natured persons hinted that the old man ate the captured animals, though the butcher declared that Hawksley bought the best of beef and mutton. The charitable argued that the brutes were killed to release them from misery, but immediate neighbors shook their heads at this suggestion, for they remembered many nights — usually wild and stormy — when strange noises of barking and growling dogs, and still more inexplicable animal sounds, came from behind the chemist's door. Never a sign of anything of the kind was heard or seen by day, however, and if the weather permitted, the shop door stood well ajar, while the windows and curtains of the single story above were wide to the world, and canaries sang merrily there in their cages.

Sometimes screaming parrots or frolicsome squirrels took the place of the canaries, and altogether it might have been thought that Hawksley possessed a miniature menagerie but for the fact of lack of space. There were certainly no animals in the upper story, nor room for so many in the cellar as had been traced to the premises, to say nothing of long periods of unbroken silence, so the generally accepted belief made Hawksley a magician, at whose command birds and beasts appeared and disappeared.

Such benevolent actions as were sometimes reported of Hawksley were also attributed to his magical powers. On one occasion, when a friendless child was knocked down by a horse and taken up with a broken leg, it was the old chemist who bore the little sufferer tenderly away, closed the shop door in the faces of a gaping

crowd, afraid to enter, and told them that he would care for and cure the foundling. The very next day the lad came forth completely sound and well, without a scar to tell of the fracture of a limb. Again, an old cripple, bent with rheumatism — a stranger in Salem — stopped to ask alms of the chemist. He entered without fear, and twenty-four hours later departed, erect and agile.

The neighbors called these cures sorcery. The rheumatic beggar could tell nothing of his cure, except that Hawksley had given him something to drink, and that presently he awoke from sleep to find himself free from shooting pains, and well and young again in his feelings. He did not know from his own consciousness whether the cure had taken an hour, a day or a year. He only knew that he was cured and could work instead of beg.

About this time came the crowning mystery. Salem then enjoyed a maritime commerce that rivaled that of any New England port, and the captain of a clipper in the Liverpool trade was seen to enter the mysterious chemist's shop, but, though watched, was not observed to, go out again. Higham, the grocer, who knew Captain Simpson and his son very well, saw the captain call upon Hawksley, noticed that they seemed acquainted, and perceived that they had some sort of dispute, though neither the low tones of the chemist nor the captain's loud and angry epithets gave a clue to the matter under controversy. Hawksley, he noted, wore his wonted calm. While the grocer still watched, the door suddenly closed, and the voices could no longer be heard. An hour later, watching with unrelaxed vigilance, Higham saw Hawksley reopen the door, stand smiling a few moments on the threshold, and then, leaving the door ajar, walk deliberately down the street. But still the captain did not come out.

The tradesman was puzzled, but continued to watch, even after Hawksley returned. Then he called one of his clerks to relieve him, and all through that day and the following night the door of the chemist's shop was under observation ; but Captain Simpson did not appear. There was no other means of egress from the building, and Higham, still leaving a watching assistant, and believing that a crime had been committed, went at noon to Captain Simpson's ship and told his story to Burke Simpson, the captain's son and first mate.

What follows of this strange tale is told in the words of Burke Simpson, as he wrote it down afterwards:

I was beginning to think it strange that the old man did not come back to the ship when Mark Higham, the Chandler, came and told me that father had gone into Hawksley's chemist shop the day before and had never come out, so I cleared for the scene at once. A hand was still on watch at Higham's and reported no sail; the old man had not yet got under way.

I crossed the street alone, for neither Higham nor his clerk would go. I knew that Hawksley and my father had been friendly in their younger days, before something — I know not what — had come between them, yet I was surprised that father should go into a place with such a bad name. Though I believed Higham's story, I did not then believe that anything serious had happened. Hawksley looked unlike a murderer.

"I believe you know my father, Captain Simpson?" I said.

"I have known him since we were boys," replied Hawksley. "What can I do for his son?"

"You can tell me where my father is."

"I am sorry I cannot oblige you," he answered calmly. "The captain was here yesterday, shortly after noon. I have not seen him since."

"He left here, then?"

"That would seem to be the logical inference from the fact I have stated. We were together half an hour — possibly an hour — and I have not set eyes on him since."

Then I told the chemist the whole of Higham's story, and how his door had been watched from the moment of my father's entrance, and I added:

"I know there was bad blood between you, and I am going to find out, in some way, what you know about his disappearance."

He looked at me curiously, without replying. I can only compare his expression to that of a cat watching a disabled mouse that tries to crawl away. At the same time he endeavored to get between me and the door, but I was looking for such a move, and headed him off.

"None of that!" I said. "You can't close any hatches while I'm aboard. Now, then, where's the old man?"

He shrugged his shoulders, but kept his hungry eyes upon me. I had to repeat my question.

"I'm sorry I can't tell you," was all he said.

There wasn't a thing I could do, but there was one thing more I could say, and as I said it I watched him closely:

"If anything has happened to my father in this house, you'll regret it. I'll have the watch kept up, and if the old man doesn't turn up on board ship by morning, your den shall be searched, from cellar to garret."

Well, the captain did not turn up by morning, and a close watch of the chemist's shop had shown nothing out of the ordinary. So I went to the city marshal, and induced him and his constables to make a thorough search of Hawksley's place, but not a sign of a living thing, except Hawksley himself, was to be seen. The upper story was just a comfortable living place. The shop was just as it had looked for years. The cellar was full of casks, with movable lids, each containing liquid. Hawksley warned us not to put a finger into one of them, on pain of fearful burning. This made me suspicious.

"A body might be hid in one of these big casks," I said to the head constable. "Let's dump the whole cargo."

At this Hawksley showed the first sign of fright. "Would you ruin me by spoiling the labor of a lifetime?" he cried.

"Then give us something to poke into them," I demanded.

He calmed down and fetched an iron rod, with which we stirred up every cask in the cellar, but not one of them contained anything but ill-smelling liquids.

After spending more than two hours in searching, sounding walls, rummaging cupboards and corners and finding nothing, we had to give up. The constables called me a fool and Hawksley's curious neighbors idiots, and I could only vent my own vexation on the grocer and chandler, at whose instigation I had caused the search. Yet, I found him as firm in his belief as ever.

Then I began a systematic search of the city, offered a reward, and did everything anybody could suggest to get a trace of my father, but nothing came of it. We had begun to discharge cargo when he disappeared, and had finished and reloaded, and still he was not heard from. He had sometimes remained away from his ship a few days at a time, but never without leaving word, and I came to the conclusion that he had been waylaid on the docks — a common thing in those days — and been thrown overboard, and that I should never see him again.

So, when sailing day came, and the owners were willing to give me charge of the ship, I had to go. But before we sailed, I had one more visit from Higham. "Your father never came out of that place again, Burke," he said with the tone of certainty, "and there'll be other disappearances, as sure as you live! Now, I'm going to keep a watch on that shop, night and day, till you get back — and there'll be something to tell."

"What makes you think so?" I asked, his manner was so solemn. Higham leaned nearer, and said in a low voice:

"Hawksley's well off. His father left him plenty to live on. He hasn't taken in a dollar a week, sometimes, these ten years. Then why does he pretend to keep a shop? I'll tell you. He's experimenting! Sure's you're born, he's experimenting, and he must have something living and moving and breathing to try his devilish tricks upon. That's what I think! At first, cats and dogs and birds would do. Now he wants humans — humans! He's got your father and — mark me — he'll want more! And he'll get 'em!"

I thought it over a minute, and then I said:

"Nonsense! If what you hint is true, there would be some trace of it—and there wasn't one. However, if you'll watch the place, I'll be glad, and bear the expense."

Then the clipper slipped her moorings, and the round voyage took us seventy-five days.

So it was into October before I went ashore in Salem again, and bore away for the chandler's shop. Higham seemed to be expecting me, and was all excitement.

"What did I tell you before you sailed?" he stuttered, the moment we were alone.

I answered his question by another equally eager one:

"Has there been another disappearance?"

"Another!" he cried. "Not only another, but four! Think of it, Burke Simpson, five altogether, counting your father. Three last week, and one only last night!"

I was too amazed to speak.

"Let me tell you the whole story," he said. "That place has been watched every minute since you left port, over two months ago, and last night two constables watched with me, and they're convinced at last. The old devil kept quiet as a mouse until last week — probably suspecting that he was watched. But he yielded to temptation at last. Wednesday afternoon a nigger — looked like a cook off'n a coaster — went in, and I'll swear

on a stack of Bibles as high as the South Church steeple that he hasn't come out yet! I reported that to the officers, and got laughed at."

I attempted to speak, but Higham broke in:

"Hold on. The very next day, Thursday, a carriage drove up, a gentleman got out and went into Hawksley's and the door closed. I told the driver that if he didn't follow his master immediately, he'd never see him again. He said I was crazy. After he had waited an hour, he went in. Burke, as sure as you're sitting there, neither of them has come out since!"

"But, good heavens, man —"

"Wait. I ain't through yet. It was about three o'clock when the coachman entered. After awhile the horses began to stray away, and my errand boy held 'em till about sundown, when I got on the box myself and drove to the watch-house. I brought pretty good proof that time, I guess, and two constables went back with me, and what do you think we saw? There was old Hawksley on his step, picking his teeth for all the world as if he had just eaten the two men! He told the officers that the coachman and his master had been obliged to go away on foot, because some one had stolen the horses! The constables were for quitting at that cool yarn, but I made 'em wait till my watcher came over and swore by all that's holy that not a soul but Hawksley had come out all the afternoon. That gave them something to puzzle over till they concluded to search the place on their own responsibility, Hawksley being willing, and I went in, too. I wanted to see with my own eyes, even if it was the Old Nick himself."

"And you found just what I did?"

"Just that and no more. Hawksley declared that he didn't know who the gentleman was, and nobody was reported missing till last night — Sunday. Then the city marshal sent for me, and set a watch of two of his men in my store, and now I guess he'll do something— after what they saw."

"And what was that?"

"The fifth disappearance! It was a sailor-man. Looked like he might be mate of a blue-water craft. You know that Hawksley, pretending to be a druggist, keeps his shop alight and his door ajar on Sunday evenings, and about half-past nine along came this mate, half-seas over — begging your pardon—and blessed if he didn't turn in to Hawksley's before we could make a move, and the old spider shut the door on him in a twinkling. I wanted the officers to go right over, but they must needs wait what they called a reasonable time, so it was half an hour before we pounded on the door, which Hawksley promptly opened, picking his teeth, as usual, and smiling his hyena smile. We asked for the sailor.

"'You're quite mistaken, gentlemen," said Hawksley. "No sailor— no customer at all— has come in this evening.'

"Of course, this bare-faced lie made the constables mad, and they went in at once after the man they had seen disappear, while Hawksley smoked a pipe on the doorstep. Well, they found nothing, but their report to the city marshal made him almost as mad as the rest of us. He's promised to do something by ten o'clock this morning— and if he doesn't the citizens will; there's lamp-posts handy. There, Burke, that's the story, up to date."

It was only half-past eight, as you would say ashore, we having made port by dawn, and suddenly I said to Higham:

"Lend me your pistol."

"Don't do it, Burke," he said, "don't go in there alone!"

But I was determined, and he let me have the pistol, and I crossed the street, banged the chemist's door behind me, and pocketed the key. Hawksley looked astonished, but not alarmed. When I pointed the pistol at him he even smiled, but he said nothing. I was feeling ugly, and meant every word when I said:

"Hawksley, if you don't within ten seconds tell what's become of these people, and especially my father, I'll shoot you dead, and take the consequences!"

"I wouldn't," he answered, calm as a summer sea.

"Why not?"

"Because you would be a murderer."

"It's no murder to kill a shark," I retorted.

"Ah, but your bullet would take five lives besides my own, including your father's!"

I felt obliged to lean against the locked door.

"Then he's alive?" I exclaimed.

Hawksley shrugged his shoulders and thrust his hands out palms upward, like a slop-shop clothier. I was about to repeat the question, when he said:

"I think, Burke Simpson, that this affair has gone quite far enough. I had determined to explain this morning, and I would like to do so to you first. You may trust me. Put up your pistol — I will not harm you. I never harmed any living thing—never — and I will do the world untold good with the greatest discovery it has ever known. Come with me; you shall be my assistant!"

He rubbed his hands joyously as he talked, and though I thought him crazy, I believed him harmless when watched; and so, with the pistol in easy reach, I followed him to the cellar. Near the centre of the floor was half of a whaler's water cask that I remembered having seen there before, but I was surprised when the old man proceeded to dust it out very carefully with a silk handkerchief. Then he surprised me much more by pointing to another smaller cask, and saying coolly:

"Simpson, your father is in there."

I jumped to choke the lie in his throat, reaching for my pistol, but he eluded me, and panting, but calmly as ever, gasped:

"If you injure me you may lose your father. He's alive now, and well — better than he has been since boyhood. You'll thank me for this — though I've kept him longer than I meant to."

"In heaven's name — "I started to say, and stopped. The man was as mad as a hatter.

"Wait; be calm; you shall see. Here, I need your help with this cask. We must pour its contents into the large one I have just dusted. But don't spill the least drop. It might be a finger or a toe, or even an eye. One cannot tell. And don't let the liquid touch you; it would injure you. Easy, now, lift together."

Though I was sure he was as crazy as a loon, I thought it best to humor him, and we gently decanted the contents of the cask into the tub, to the bust dregs. Then he fetched a tin dipperful of liquid from a barrel that stood just a bit away from the wall. I watched carefully, while he seemed to forget my presence as he poured the contents of the dipper into the huge tub—one so large that a man might lie at length in it.

The mixture produced a marvelous effect. The liquid began to boil and seethe and whirl as if stirred by a mighty hand. In amazement I soon discerned a floating substance that gradually took shape, though the whirl was so rapid that I could not define it, and then, with a swiftness that the eye could not follow, and in a manner impossible to describe exactly, the whirling motion ceased as the whole contents of the tub seemed to leap together. And there before me, lying on the bottom of a perfectly dry tub, was the body of my father.

I blinked my eyes and looked again—but there was no mistake. The miracle was a fact, and my father was alive and breathing regularly.

Hawksley pushed me aside till he had felt the old man's pulse. Then he bade me help him lift the captain out and carry him up stairs.

"When I awaken him, do not tell him what you know; let me do the talking. Heavy, isn't he? Better flesh and better health than he's had for many a year— it's perfect now."

Astonishment kept me silent. We placed him in a chair in the shop, and Hawksley put on his clothes, hidden in a most ingenious locker, and held a vial to his nose. Presently he opened his eyes.

"Hello, Burke!" he exclaimed. "When did you come in? I must have had a long nap, Hawks. Devilish fine one, though, for I feel like a new man. Hawksley's remedies beat the world. He said he'd cure my rheumatism if I'd take his medicine, and damned if he hasn't. Hello! What's all that row?"

It was, as I expected, Higham, alarmed at my long absence, backed by a crowd. I showed my face at the glazed and curtained upper panel of the door, and told them to wait.

When father had stretched his limbs a bit, he helped us, in the same wondering way I had done, to bring to life the four other men confined in casks in the cellar, and when the city marshal and his men came at ten o'clock to make their search they not only found all whom they sought, but those persona assured them that they had come to Hawksley's and remained of their own free will, in order to be cured of their ills.

So there was naught for the officers to do but go with the healed, when they departed; all save my father, who remained with Higham and myself to hear the wonderful tale which Jacob Hawksley had to tell.

"Of course, you think you have witnessed a miracle," he began, "but it was really done in accordance with nature's — and there- fore God's — simplest laws, though it has taken generations to discover them. Many generations ago one of my ancestors began the work, so all the credit does not belong to me. I have only completed the task bequeathed from father to son through two centuries.

But you comprehend the result— man's complete triumph over disease by this process of dissolution and rehabilitation. The foundation was my ancestor's discovery that every substance— iron, gold, or any metal, flesh, bone, gristle, etc.,— may be dissolved by some chemical or combination of chemicals, and his inference was that a universal solvent might by their combination, be discovered. He did not succeed, nor his son nor grand- son, but four generations back that much was accomplished — the solvent was achieved, but the effort to restore the dissolved substances to their original state always failed. If a combination of metals was dissolved, the restorative fluid gave back no alloy, but the separate metals. If an organic substance— that is, vegetable or animal matter— was put in the solution, it could be restored, but unorganized a chaotic mass of tissues.

"My grandfather made the next step forward, and his restoring chemical not only gave back iron for iron, but brass — which is an alloy — for brass, bronze for bronze, spelter for spelter, and so on. But when he dissolved an animal —say a sickly cat — he only recovered a great quantity of separate particles, though analysis showed that they contained every substance that the live cat had contained.

"My father— doubtless the greatest chemist that ever lived— left little for me to do, for he succeeded where his ancestors had failed, and the fluid which he devised would restore a dissolved animal to its original size and shape. Unfortunately, the restored cat, dog or guinea-pig was always dead. He worked to remedy this fault, on the natural supposition that it lay with the dissolving fluid, the invention of his predecessor. When I took up the labor independently after his death —having been his assistant for years — I did so on the hypothesis, which proved to be correct, that the imperfection was in my father's restorative fluid. It came to me as a revelation one day that, on principles which we had again and again proved to be true, the potentiality of life was still present up to the moment when the Restorative was mixed with the dissolved being, and that death therefore was caused by the restoring agent.

"It is twenty years since I experienced that conviction, and it has taken that score of summers and winters to find the complete remedy. You are eye-witnesses of its success, but you are not chemists nor physiologists, so it would do no good to explain to you in the language of science all the details of the glorious process which will be such a blessed boon to humanity, and which I shall immediately publish to the world. The result has even exceeded my highest expectations. For example, Captain Simpson, suppose that the cask in which you have lived for nearly three months could, with its contents, have been pre- served, sealed from the air, a thousand years — which is perfectly possible—and that at the end of that time some one possessing my secret should apply the Restorative, you would awaken as you did an hour ago, full of life and energy, not a day older, and utterly unconscious of the ten centuries of sleep! How would you like to be dissolved again, and try it?"

My father shuddered, but we all laughed when he said drily:

"Thank you. I'd rather take my chances on the broad Atlantic than in one of your casks. That fellow, due in a thousand years, might not keep the appointment, you see."

"I shall not soon forget my own feelings the first time I took courage enough to try my discovery on a human being," continued Hawksley. "You can well imagine them. If I failed, I should differ from a murderer only in intention, and not at all in the eyes of the world.

Fate brought a drunken sailor to my doorstep with a broken arm. I dragged him inside, gave him a sleeping potion, worked rapidly while my daring spirit prevailed, and let the man go again within twenty-four hours, whole and well, and never knowing that his arm had been broken.

You can see how that success emboldened me. I have practised on many that even my friend Higham did not know about. Then, Captain, you came, and told me about your rheumatism, and I judged that at your age a long rest in solution would be beneficial. You are all beginning to understand the whole thing now, but friend Higham, who has interested himself so much in the matter, has not yet seen the operation. Come to the cellar, where I have still a fine Newfoundland dog dissolved, and I will bring him to life for you, Burke, for a present."

All notions of witchcraft blown to leeward by Hawksley's sensible talk, Higham followed us eagerly, and witnessed with bulging eyes the re-embodiment of the great dog. No sooner had the animal sniffed from Hawksley's vial than he leaped to the floor, wagging his tail.

As I patted the pet thus strangely bestowed upon me, the old chemist watched me with an inquiring look.

"Have you faith and courage enough now to do something to please me?" he finally said.

Hawksley laughed the first hearty laugh I had ever heard him utter in the dozen years I had known him by sight, when I said emphatically:

"If it is to submit to your process, I certainly have not!"

"Oh, no, not that," he answered lightly and cheerfully. "On the contrary, I wish myself to submit to it, and I want you to be the operator. You have proved to be a man of firmness, nerve and sense. I have overworked myself in this concentrated study, and I need renovation to do the important work of assuring my discovery to the whole world. Besides, none of you have seen the dissolving process. Come, be our chemist."

I still hesitated, but he continued eagerly: "Though I am not young, my constitution is exceptionally sound, and I shall need but a couple of hours in solution. I will administer to myself the drug that causes unconsciousness, and lie at length at the bottom of this great tub. When I am fast asleep pour over me three pailfuls of the liquid in yonder yellow cask. You may watch me dissolve, or cover the tub with this tarpaulin. In from fifteen to thirty minutes I shall be completely dissolved. Counting from that time, wait in the shop for two hours. Then, from that cask, which you have seen me use several times, pour one dipperful, just as you have seen me do. Then you have only to hold this vial to my nostrils till I open my eyes. It is all very simple. You will do it, won't you?"

"We'll do it, certainly," spoke up Higham, who entered into the matter mightily, and I uttered no dissent.

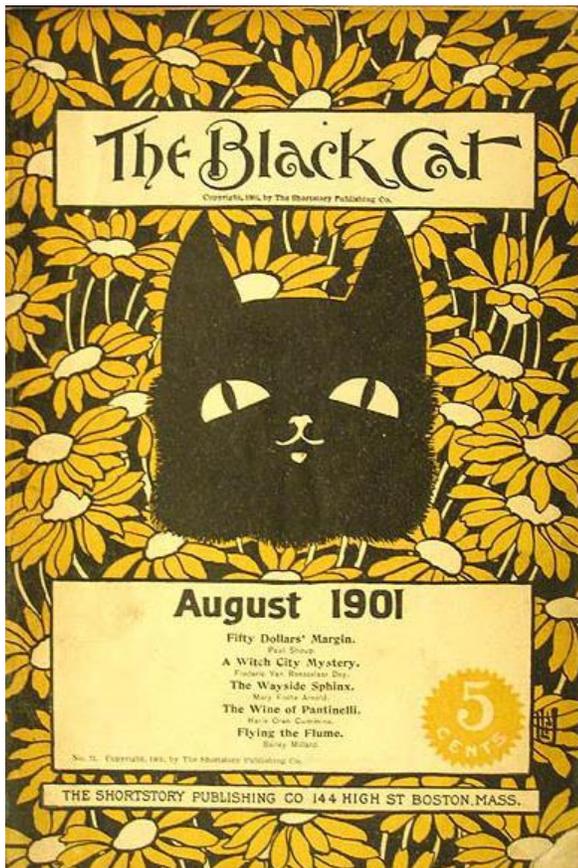
Hawksley peered into the cask of Restorative. "Enough for a dozen small men like me," he said; "but it's getting low."

The goblet of medicine to put him to sleep he fetched from the shop, and when all was ready, and he lay in the big vat, he drank it off and almost immediately lost consciousness, as we could plainly see. Then we proceeded as he had directed, drawing the tarpaulin over the tub, for none of us cared to watch. While we silently waited in the cellar for the passing of a full half hour our hearts beat anxiously — I know mine did — and we were in such a state as to shrink unnerved when, with a loud bark and ponderous rush, the Newfoundland dog dashed among us, pursuing a rat. We leaped aside, and I tried to stop the brute, but he dodged me, and as the rat slid in between the Restorative cask and the cellar wall the great beast followed, like a stone shot from a catapult, upsetting the cask, which was but half full and therefore quite light. It was all over in a moment.

Stupefied with amazement and horror, we stood there and saw the last of the priceless liquid vanish, spilled beyond redemption — soaking into the rotting boards of the cellar floor! My father was the first to recover the power of motion. He sprang to the tub and snatched away the tarpaulin. Nothing but a milky-looking fluid met our eyes. Hawksley had disappeared.

With shaking steps and trembling voices we left that awful place, followed by the dog. We left it just as it was — never to return — but in the upper shop we swore an oath of eternal secrecy.

Here the statement of Burke Simpson stopped, but old newspapers and records show that on that very night Hawksley's shop was burned to a charred framework, and that his opposite neighbor, Henry Higham, the grocer, was supposed to have been its incendiary, in a fit of insanity from which he never recovered.



# cinema

## Doctor X (1932): The Triumph of the Weird



A cannibal serial killer prowls the city streets on full-moon nights. Mad doctors perform sick biological experiments in secret labs. And Fay Wray shrieks in a silky, sheer negligée.

*Doctor X* really wants to push your buttons... whatever buttons you've got. As the film's Hungarian-born director Michael Curtiz (famous for his English-language malapropisms) declared, "It'll make your blood curl!"

After the double box office smash of *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* in 1931, Warner Brothers decided to outdo Universal—which started the horror trend—in terms of shock value. Jumping on the craze for scary movies, the Warner's shrewdly turned out a gruesome chiller all their own. Even in the context of no-holds-barred pre-Code Hollywood, the word bizarre doesn't begin to cover *Doctor X*.

Unsurprisingly, the hardboiled studio of gangster dramas and newspaper comedies brought a radically different, absurd sensibility to the horror genre. Opting against a supernatural thriller or a Gothic adaptation, producers bought a spooky stage play and built an ultra-modern sci-fi whodunit on that framework. Rather than trying to evoke the tenebrous black-and-white poetry of Universal's chillers, *Doctor X* attracted viewers in droves with the novelty of bloodcurdling deeds captured in color.

Yes, that's right: we're talking about a feature film from 1932 shot in color. But a very special kind of color. What we all recognize as glorious Technicolor—

exemplified by films like *Gone with the Wind* and *The Red Shoes*—is a three-strip process, which combines blue, green, and red to reproduce a complete and vivid range of tones. However, *Doctor X* is one of comparatively few full-length movies filmed entirely in the earlier *two-strip Technicolor* process. Expensive and inconvenient, requiring sweltering hot lights, color tests, and special technicians and advisors, two-strip Technicolor still registered colors only as shades or derivatives of red and green.

Although two-strip Technicolor couldn't reproduce the full spectrum of reality, this disadvantage suited the oddball plot of *Doctor X* perfectly. In the words of an original ad, *Doctor X* looks "so different it might have

been filmed in another world.” Since a major plot point involves (slight spoiler alert!) synthetic flesh, the fact that about half of the colors show up in flesh tones—or else a sickly green—amps up the creep-out factor. When the villain finally does reveal himself, the sequence makes us wonder if we’re hallucinating. Electrodes buzz and blink as the man-made monster smears his face with molten flesh putty, all the more revolting in shades of leprous pink-orange set off by ominous green shadows.

Director Michael Curtiz (who’d go on to helm *The Adventures of Robin Hood* and *Casablanca*) wasn’t anybody’s dream boss, marching around the set begrudging the cast their lunch breaks. As Fay Wray recalled, “It was like he was part of the camera. He was steel.” Nevertheless, his expressionistic flair incorporated the two-strip Technicolor palette to masterful effect. Instead of trying to minimize the strangeness of the color process, Curtiz indulged his preference for silhouettes, showy compositions, and jarring angles. All of these elements, in conjunction with the unnatural hues, contribute to the audience’s sense of nightmarish disorientation.

Years before Douglas Sirk styled his celebrated Technicolor delirium, Curtiz harnessed psychedelic hues of rose and emerald to put the viewer into a kind of trance, mentally preparing us to swallow an implausible storyline.

And what a loony storyline it is... When the police suspect that someone from a prestigious research institute has committed a string of heinous cannibalistic sex crimes and mutilations, Dr. Xavier (Lionel Atwill) makes a deal. If the cops keep the matter quiet for 48 hours, he’ll use cutting-edge technology to find the guilty man among his staff and save his institute’s reputation. It’s ethical to do that, right? Meanwhile, wisecracking reporter Lee Taylor (Lee Tracy) crashes Xavier’s remote lair to get the scoop. In the process, he’ll shake skeletons in the closet (literally!), go head-to-head with the terrifying killer, and romance Xavier’s feisty daughter.

With its satirical, sinister portrayal of medical researchers, *Doctor X* betrays an abject disillusionment with—and mistrust of—scientific progress in general and scientists in particular. Only a year before, Colin Clive had portrayed Dr. Frankenstein as a dashing misunderstood genius, a romantic matinee idol Prometheus. By



contrast, Dr. Xavier and his colleagues come across as, at best, eccentrics and, at worst, dirty old men who channel repressed sexual impulses into kinky experiments and flashy lab gizmos.

Curtiz frames the film's most striking shots with some chemical or electrical apparatus interposing between the viewer and the characters. The bubbling flasks or sparkling electrodes in the foreground loom large and dwarf the scientists, making them seem vaguely ridiculous. Even when the laboratory paraphernalia doesn't dominate the screen space, it draws the eye, distracting from the scientists themselves. They are not masters of their chosen field, we understand, but slaves to it, consumed by their fetishized equipment and their dangerous projects.

In its grotesquely comic way, the film suggests that all of Xavier's colleagues, and even the doctor himself, are likely candidates for serial killers. Frankly, the shock isn't that one of them is a murderer. It's that *only one* of them is a murderer! Consider this exchange between two of the doctors, right as they're about to submit to Xavier's physiological examination:

—Were the murdered women... attacked?

—Does your mind never flow into any other channel?

—What do you mean by that?

—I mean that one day your sadistic tendencies may carry you too far, Dr. Haines!



In case you missed it, “attacked” serves as a not-so-subtle euphemism for “sexually assaulted.” Can I get a great big yuck for that dark little peek into the minds of guys claiming to be mankind's benefactors? Without doubt, *Doctor X* hints that perversity instead of goodwill drives scientists to immerse their lives in study and research. Even Dr. Xavier has to rationalize his comrades' creepy behavior to the cops by explaining, “Sometimes, in the overdevelopment of one part of the brain, another part is weakened.”

But even if that's true, does the doctors' collective brainpower justify their volatility? Um, no. At least, that's what the movie seems to conclude.

Ultimately, Xavier's elaborate experiment—designed to unmask the killer by monitoring fluctuations in his heartbeat as he watches a reenactment of his crime—fails spectacularly. Twice. Xavier's theories practically have their own body count!

Whenever I watch *Doctor X*, the movie's dim outlook on the scientific perspective reminds me of Nassim Nicholas Taleb's *The Black Swan*, a fascinating treatise on the power of rare events. As Taleb explains, "Before Western thinking drowned in its 'scientific' mentality, what is arrogantly called the Enlightenment, people prompted their brain to think—not compute."

Sound familiar? Xavier unquestioningly relies on ice-cold logic. And logic lets him down. Big time. Without giving away too much, let's just say that what seems like a perfectly reasonable inference almost proves the death of his nearest and dearest... The unforeseen twist or "black swan" that Dr. X implicitly eliminates from his pool of possibilities returns to haunt him with all-too-real consequences.

According to Taleb, academically bright individuals like Xavier and his lab-coat-wearing compadres often succumb to the "ludic fallacy." That is, they tend to think (erroneously) that we can model life's uncertainties with straightforward calculations and probabilities. In so doing, however, such traditional thinkers ignore the larger, fuzzy probabilities or "unknown unknowns" that enter into any given situation. Meanwhile, the real risks of life are bizarre and off-model. Freak occurrences shape the course of human history much more than we'd like to believe.



To vastly oversimplify Taleb's point, we live in a weird world. So, having a weird mind, one prone to farfetched theories instead of rationality, might be a strong edge for survival. And only by scrutinizing weirdness can we ever begin to understand, well, anything at all.

Which brings us back to *Doctor X* and its real protagonist. The movie might bear Xavier's name, but it truly belongs to Lee Tracy as Taylor, the brash, fast-talking newspaperman.

Taylor's gift for sensational journalism spurs him to speculate wildly and focus on outlier events like the so-called "moon killings." Taylor doesn't command society's respect like Xavier does. However, he saves the day—while all the doctors sit incapacitated by their logic, literally handcuffed by the rules of their experiment.

When I first watched *Doctor X*, I felt that Taylor, with his morbid quips and upbeat demeanor, belonged to another movie. Then I realized that he actually reflects the movie's oddness even better than the nutty doctors.

Despite their own deviant weirdness, the scientists don't allow for the true enormity of the world's weirdness in their calculations. Despite Taylor's outward normalcy, he does. He rolls with the weird and actively seeks it out. His zigzag brain hasn't closed itself off to black swans and freak occurrences.

Thanks to Taylor, I have a new theory about life: you need to live it as though you're in a 1930s horror movie.

No, I'm not suggesting you roam around misty moors at midnight in a lacy nightgown. What I actually mean is, *don't* act like most characters in 1930s horror movies—who have no inkling they're in 1930s horror movies and tend to balk at the idea of monsters and psycho-killers. In life as in film, it pays to contemplate the improbable, to steep yourself in it, rather than scoffing at it. And perhaps no movie defines “improbable” for me better than *Doctor X*.

Funnily enough, every time I tweet this film with the #TCMParty someone complains, “Ugh. I hate colorized movies,” because he or she has automatically rejected the possibility of a color feature from the early 1930s.

Regardless of whether we think it should or shouldn't exist, though, it does. So, in its own way, *Doctor X*—the first horror film shot entirely in color—is something of a cinematic black swan... a triumph of the weird.



*Director Curtiz looks on as Wray gets a lipstick-touch up on the set*



---review by **Nora Fiore**, a professional writer, translator, and content strategist, from her excellent online website *The Nitrate Diva*, which features coverage of weird, horror, and supernatural films, and can be found on the Internet at---  
<https://nitratediva.wordpress.com/>



## Blade Runner 2049: The Next Generation

Although the original Blade Runner was very influential, there has never been a sequel until now. The new film is set 30 years after the original. Harrison Ford (Deckard), James Edward Olmos (Gaff), and Sean Young (Rachael) reprise their roles, although Young only appears using footage from the original and a double using performance capture technology. Ryan Gosling plays K, the new, improved Blade Runner who happens to be a replicant himself, programmed to obey human authorities, and Robin Wright plays Joshi, his human boss. He has a girlfriend, sort of, in the form of a holographic projection named Joi (Ana de Armas). After K retires, i.e. kills, an old replicant named Sapper Morton (Dave Bautista), K stumbles on the remains of Rachael. She was the most advanced replicant of her day, and an autopsy reveals that she died in childbirth, so she was even more advanced than anyone realized. K then is assigned the mission of finding and eliminating the child. Along the way, he comes into conflict with Niander Wallace (Jared Leto), the leading manufacturer of replicants, and his minion, Luv (Sylvia Hoecks), but is actually assisted by the replicant underground led by Freysa (Hiam Abbass). All are good in their roles.

The cinematography and production design are excellent, especially in how they imagine future versions of Los Angeles, heavily influenced by the first film, San Diego,

and Las Vegas. Although not as original as the first film, of course, it is almost as good.

---review by Tom Feller



It

This is one of the few Stephen King novels I have never read, although I did see the 1990 TV mini-series based upon it, and it is also one of the few King novels that my wife did not like, so she never finished it.

In the TV mini-series, Tim Curry played Pennywise, the demonic clown, and in the new movie, he is played by Bill Skarsgaard. The clown lives in the sewers of the town of Derry, Maine (actually filmed in Port Hope, Ontario), and emerges every 27 years to kill children. In the original, the story is set in 1958, but in this version, it is 1989, and the Marquee on the town's movie theatre displays titles such as the 1989 films Batman, Lethal Weapon 2, and Nightmare on Elm Street 5.

Opposing Pennywise is a group of 13 year old who called themselves "The Losers Club" (Jaeden Lieberher, Wyatt Oleff, Jeremy Ray Taylor, Sophia Lillis, Finn Wolfhard, Jack Dylan Grazer, and Chosen Jacobs). None of the adults in town, of course, believe that Pennywise exists. This film is very intense and genuinely scary.

---review by Tom Feller

# FANZINE REVIEWS



A regular feature of **TIGHTBEAM**

by

Bob Jennings

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

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



## **LOFGEORNOST #129**

8-1/2x11”; 10 pages of small type;

Quarterly from Fred Lerner; 81 Worcester Ave.; White River Junction, VT 05001---available for the usual

This is Fred’s FAPazine, but it contains no mailing comments and has extensive distribution outside FAPA. Each issue features a long essay by Fred generally concerning some science fiction theme, followed by natter that is often related to the central essay. From time to time he also runs long travel reports about his vacation excursions. *Lofgeornost* never runs illos of any kind.

This issue’s lead article discusses the possible education of Sherlock Holmes previous to his attending Oxford and becoming a Consulting Detective. Any information about this subject is very sketchy, to the point of being almost non-existent, since the writer of the Sherlock Holmes stories, Arthur Conan Doyle, wrote the stories rapidly, as problem plot short adventures, and mainly for money. His interest was in intriguing mysteries that Holmes could solve by observation

and deductive reasoning, so any personality traits or background information he provided about his detective often seemed to be mere afterthought.

Nevertheless, dedicated Holmes fans and scholars, of which there seem to be a great many around the world, are determined to extract every bit of knowledge about the character they can, even if it means they have

to invent background details that Doyle never even considered. So, Fred gives us a lengthy, detailed discussion about the possibilities of where, when, and how Holmes was educated in his youth, including quotes and references by other Sherlockians on the subject. I enjoy most of the original Sherlock Holmes stories, but I am not a wild-eyed fanatic about the subject, so my attention drifted considerably during this long dissertation. Those of you who are more deeply involved with the character may find this more intriguing than I did.

Fred also has provides some nice reviews of a few books he has recently read, including the reasons why he did not like a couple of them.

The heart of most *Lofgeornost* issues is the long, meaty letter column, and this issue does not disappoint. There are freewheeling comments and discussions here from a wide assortment of people, some of whom only write in occasionally, but all of whom have very definite insights and information or opinions to add to a mixture that discusses science fiction, television, alternate-history fantasies, werewolves & vampires, fan history, and plenty more. This issue's *Lofgeornost* provides a laboratory-perfect specimen of what an exceptional fanzine letter column should look like. It was a pleasure to browse these pages, and I found even those comments that I disagreed with were expressed with clear, calm, and intelligent demeanor. This was really an exceptional reading experience, possibly the best balanced and initiated letter column I've read in a fanzine this entire year.

Fred's fanzine only comes out four times a year, but it is always worth the wait, and as always, this issue was thoroughly enjoyable.



**DASFAX October 2017** 8-1/2x11", 6 pages; published monthly by the Denver Area Science Fiction Association; c/o Tay Von Hageman; 4080 S. Grant St.; Englewood, CO 80113; it comes with a club membership; membership fees are \$15 per year, or available for The Usual.

This is the newsletter of the Denver area SF club. The group is unique in that almost every meeting features a guest speaker, often a popular SF/fantasy author. There are also club wide games, discussion groups, and the meetings are usually followed by a party at one of the member's homes. The first Saturday of each month there is an Alternate Meeting, which is another party hosted by a different club member.

I am not sure what is going on with the Denver club these days. I did not receive any copies of *Dasfax* for several months, then, suddenly, the August, September and October issues all arrived in my mailbox at the same time. Since then, nothing. I hope all is well over in the Mile High City. Since the October issue is the most recent I've received, I'll comment on that particular number.

The heart of every issue of this fanzine is the feature article written by 'Sourdough Jackson', a long time club member, and a long time fan who discusses science fiction and fantasy as part of his "Writers of the Purple Page" series. Indeed, in the past year the rest of the club's contributions to the newsletter seem to have stopped almost completely. Fortunately 'Jackson' seems able to carry the monthly issues entirely on his own. The subject range is very widespread, but usually the focus is on previously published science fiction material, as in, pre-2000, and more often, pre-1975 stuff, but that emphasis is certainly not a hard and fast rule. The observations and analysis are always interesting and often insightful.

This issue carries the second part of a two part article titled "The Flying Saucers Are Reel", which deals with the theme of UFOs and flying saucers in the movies. The author happens to have a genuine interest in UFO investigations, and is part of the Mutual UFO Network which investigates sightings, so he is able to offer a more professional fact-checker background on some of the movies.

He immediately notes that a lot of SF films involving flying saucers are total crap, especially a lot of the el-cheapo efforts from the 1950s and 60s. He passes over those and discusses some other movies that have attracted attention and have maintained longevity in the public eye.

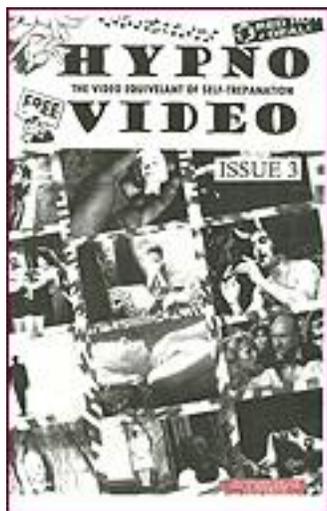
His opinions vary. For example, he finds lots of faults with "Earth Vs. the Flying Saucers", which happens to be a personal favorite of mine, especially with the impressive FX of the saucers attacking Washington, DC. He spends more space discussing "The Thing", and much more analyzing "The Day the Earth Stood Still". He concludes that "Day" was certainly the finest UFO related movie to come along until "Encounters of the Third Kind" was released.

He examines the background of "Encounters" and "E.T.", noting that both these efforts drew heavily from acknowledged writers in the UFO field, including government reports, the work of independent experts, and also the reports of total kooks who authored exploitation contact books written solely to generate a profit. He notes the vast numbers of similarities between the movie "E.T." and the very popular children's book "Star Girl"

by Henry Winterfield, published in the US in 1957, a novel printed in plenty of time for a young Stephen Spielberg to have read it.

This is a very informative long article that provides genuine background information on the influence of real UFO investigations on the movies, suggesting that perhaps if Hollywood paid more attention to the real facts, both the explained and the unexplained, that more movies of the same quality of "Day", "Encounters" and "E.T." might be produced.

This is another interesting and well developed article, certainly well worth reading. *Dasfax* carries another article every issue. You do not have to be a member of the Denver club to get copies of this fanzine, altho supporting memberships are offered at very reasonable rates and would certainly be appreciated.



**HYPNO VISION #3** 5-1/2x8-1/2"; 16 pages, published irregularly by Bill Kobb; PO Box 30231; Pensacola, FL 32503; sample copy \$1.00, after that The Usual.

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

In this issue he discusses his recent viewings of obscure films, most of them horror, and a lot of those splatter films with lots of gratuitous gore and violence. These are the kinds of films that a lot of people, me included, would never go out of their way to watch. From Bill's reviews of most of the titles in this issue, I would definitely go out of my way to avoid seeing most of these films.

For example, he discusses "Cannibal Terror", a 1981 Italian splatter movie supposedly set in some nameless country with lush jungles and savage natives, which he describes as "possibly the worst cannibal movie ever made," and concludes: "You can actually see cars driving by in the background of some of the

'cannibal' scenes. Awful cash-in trash film with zero redeeming features."

That being the case, you might reasonably ask why he even bothered trying to watch the thing? The reason is that for Bill, checking out all the horror, sci-fi, and supernatural pictures ever made is a holy quest. He is on a mission to see every one of them, good, bad or indifferent, and to pass along his judgments on their qualities. In the past his reviews were often very short (deservedly so, considering some of the worthless crap he sat thru), but with this new fanzine he is determined to provide more detail and discuss the good and bad points as well as the overall quality of specific movies.

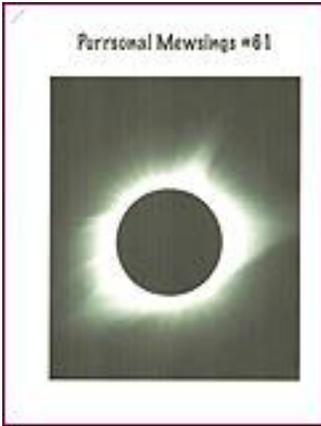
His never-ending quest to locate the good stuff, or at least to recognize some redeeming features in off-trails cinematic obscurities occasionally leads him to stumble across a good picture, often discovered in unexpected places, for unexpected reasons.

For example; this issue he discusses "The Giant of Metropolis" a 1961 Italian made sword & sandal fantasy set in the ancient continent of Atlantis, featuring a tyrant with an insane plan to transfer the mind of his son into a new body and make him a living demigod. Bill notes all the character interactions, and the bizarre, even surreal plot manifestations, concluding that this perfectly predictable story rises above its premise due to the directing, the acting, the unearthly sets, and the weird story movement. In the end he declares that all of this has delivered an almost outré quality that makes this flic truly enjoyable despite its clichéd plot structure.

Most of the other titles he covers this issue, including the documentaries about horror movies, are not particularly good, and most of them are awful. Individual viewer results may vary, as they say. Bill tries to find something interesting and worthwhile even in the most wretched of these films, which is sometimes very difficult, considering how cheapo the production costs were for many of them. A few barely rise above amateur status. Some of the observations he makes are humorous, while some of his others comments are charmingly odd.

Most of the reviews takes up a full page, and come with a photo still from the picture being discussed. Bill is reportedly still continuing his plan to create a list of recent decent horror films. Be it noted that this has been an ongoing project by Bill for years and years now. Since new horror films, both good and bad continue to appear every season, even his latest lists are so fluid that they are pretty much outdated before he can get them into print. Such are the trials of a genre film buff these days.

Always entertaining, the next issue of this fanzine will come out whenever Bill gets the urge to write down another ten or fifteen reviews. Considering how many movies he watches, that will probably be pretty soon.



### **Purrrsonal Mewsings #61**

R-Laurraine Tutihasi; 2081 W. Overlook St.; PO Box 5323; Oracle, AZ 85623-5323; 8-1/2x11", 23 pages; irregular; available for The Usual

This is editor R-Laurraine's perzine, which also doubles as the editor's apazine for Stipple-APA. Each issue features some abbreviated apa (amateur press alliance) mailing comments that readers will find difficult to get involved with. The mailing comments consist of brief remarks related to the past mailing of Stipple-Apa, and are pretty much incomprehensible if you are not a member of that particular group.

In the past editor Tutihasi has devoted a lot of her recent issues to trip reports that often read like an expense diary, with notations of places stopped for gas, foods eaten, when she turned in for the night, when she woke up, even what she had for breakfast. I find that kind of stuff gets old pretty fast.

There are several trip reports this time round, one relating the odyssey she and her hubby took to Nashville to watch the total eclipse of the sun this summer (note the impressive front cover photo). The adventures and experiences encountered mostly override the comments about food and hotel rooms stopped at.

The second trip covers her voyage to her 50<sup>th</sup> year high school reunion, and another brief report on a convention attended. Editor Tutihasi also offers some reviews of new books read and movies seen. These reviews are generally short and to the point.

Each issue always features a generous assortment of color illos from a wide variety of sources, She and her husband are ardent amateur astronomers, so there are some impressive photos thruout of astronomical scenes viewed. There are also many photos of animals and birds they encountered on their travels. This issue features no cats photos, despite the fanzine title (well; there is a pic of a leopard taken at a zoo visited on one of their trips). The color photos in this fanzine are always impressive. This issue also features a solid letter column. The format here is clean and open, with wide margins and distinct type font.



### **TETRAGRAMMATON FRAGMENTS #247**

5-1/2x8-1/2" fold over saddle stitched, 28 pages, published mostly bi-monthly by Rob Imes; 13510 Cambridge #307; Southgate, MI 48195; \$2.50 for sample issue, after that The Usual

This is the official 0-0 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 is primarily on artists and those who are creating their own amateur comic book characters, but there is room for everyone. There are usually some interesting illos thruout, and a letter column.

This issue offers strong articles from members discussing a wide variety of subjects, from dealing with new creative efforts, to how to properly draw word balloons, to properly registering color graphics in different sized page formats. There is also plenty of constructive comment about the latest art and writing efforts of the membership. Much interesting commentary comes from Gavin Galligan, who is very conservative politically. His observations about the casual hypocrisy and ultra-liberal smugness in certain professional comic books is interesting to follow.

This entire issue has fascinating, insightful articles by the UFO members talking about themselves, their involvement with art and writing, and how they are deal with the creative process. A free sample copy is available to anyone who wants to check it out, and it is well worth checking out.