



TIGHTBEAM #287

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This is issue #287, July 2018, and is edited by Bob Jennings. Letters of comment are solicited from everyone reading this; also, reviews of books read, movies seen, and convention experiences recently attended, and any other fannish material that would be of interest to our members is also requested. Please contact Bob Jennings at—

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EDITORIAL RAMBLINGS

...will be almost non-existent this time round. We have a full issue, packed with all sorts of stuff, beginning with---

LETTERS



**Lloyd Penney; 1706-24 Eva Rd.; Etobicoke, ON CANADA
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Thanks for another issue of *Tightbeam*, this one 286, and I know I am behind, but I am hopeful this will arrive in time for the next issue. I take a few days off to mentally recharge, and that's when a pile of zines come in. I shouldn't complain; I am glad the zines keep coming in.

I wish I could have given at least a little bit to relaunch *Amazing Stories*, but I simply didn't have it to give. I doubt I will ever see it, so I look forward to your reviews.

My letter... Yvonne did take a short-term job to raise more money for our projected return to England in 2019, and she will admit that she hated every moment of it. She might do it again this coming fall, but she is intent on taking the summer off from any work she doesn't want to do. Mention of Raymond Burr here reminds me that I recently saw the family stone for the Burr family plot, and Raymond Burr is interred with the rest of his family in New Westminster, British Columbia. We did vend at the big anime convention in Toronto, and it was our second-best show ever. We've been married for 35 years, and I just had my 59th birthday.

In this age where science is doubted and laughed off as nonsense, anything that can explain the laws of physics to the public is a good thing. I think we miss Isaac Asimov's charm and intelligence.

Thanks to Jeff Redmond on an excellent short biography of Kurt Vonnegut. I certainly learned more about him, and about some of his novels I haven't seen. He's definitely worth a reading revisit. I wish someone like him could write a satire about the current political circus in Washington.

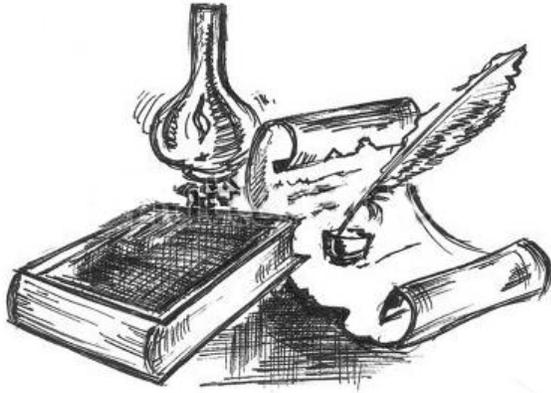
Mostly because it was in Toronto, I went to this year's Corflu, and I did talk to Taral here and there. I think he wishes for more recognition from his peers in terms of awards, and is a little bitter about this. With his past run of zines, I responded to them all, and he seemed pleased with that, but he's a man who is not happy with his lot, and feels abandoned by fanzine fan and furry fan alike.

Tomorrow is a busy day, and also our provincial election day, so it will be interesting to see who will run the province starting the day after. Our right-wing party has elected a Trump-like candidate as their leader, so soon, I might lose the right to complain about your president. Life will be interesting in Ontario, very soon.

Many thanks for this issue, looking forward to the next.

###The first issue of the newly revived *Amazing Stories* is supposed to come out the same weekend as WorldCon, with a big launch at the convention itself. Most of the issue's story content has already been lined up, and probably the printing and distribution end of it as well. I am definitely looking forward to seeing what the new team has done with this venerable old magazine. I'll definitely run a review in *Tightbeam* when I get my copy.

Taral Wayne has had some recent severe medical problems including several mini-strokes. If I were faced with that kind of situation I'd be a bit depressed myself. I do note that he continues to turn out fanzines and fanac anyway.###



BOOKS

Witchy Eye; by D.J Butler; available in hardback at \$17.00, paperback at \$7.99, and ebook at \$5.38

The first book in a new Baen Books series explores an America that never happened. The book is reminiscent of Orson Scott Card's "Alvin Maker" series with a world populated by eldritch creatures and a conflict between magic and technology.

The story begins when a young girl with magical talents is the target of an abduction attempt at the Nashville tobacco market by loyalists of the current Emperor of Appalaichia, Thomas Penn. Sarah Calhoun is the granddaughter of a powerful mid-Tennessee clan elder, and her extended family does not take the attempted kidnapping lightly.

Sarah is revealed to be adopted and is somehow connected with Penn's bloody ascension to the throne fifteen years earlier due to the assassination of the old king, Kyres Elytharias, and the descent into madness of the Empress Hannah. Penn claimed the throne as Hannah's brother and the next in line. In the story's theology, mankind is split into two sub-species: the Firstborn and the Children of Eve.

The philosophical underpinning springs from the ambiguity in Genesis with dueling creation stories in the first two chapters of the book. In Genesis 1:27-28 it says "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them male and female. God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'" Notice, there is no mention of the names of the created mankind, no Garden of Eden, no Tree of Life, and no fall from grace.

Contrast that with the second creation story of Genesis 2: 7-25 which tells of the creation of the Garden, Adam, Eve, the Tree of Knowledge, and the command not to eat its fruit.

This is the basis for the theory that God created humanity twice. First in great numbers but without Original Sin and again when populating the Garden of Eden with two specific people: Adam and Eve. There is some sense in this approach as it explains some puzzling aspects of creation; the biggest of which is who did Adam and Eve's offspring marry? This interpretation solves that by there already being a human population outside of Eden.

In Butler's world, the Genesis 1 people are the Firstborn. They have a high propensity for magic, have blue-tinged auras, sensitivity to silver, and, maybe, have no souls, according to The Reformation. For good measure, there is a third branch of humanity, the beastmen who are still made in the image of God, but with animalistic features, even more access to magic, green auras and no souls.

Sarah is actually the secret daughter of Emperor Kyres and Empress Hannah. Penn was behind the plot to assassinate Kyres, and his treachery unleashed a sort of death magic that allowed Kyres to impregnate Hannah from halfway across the continent with triplets. Hannah managed to keep the pregnancy secret from Penn, and when the children were born they were whisked



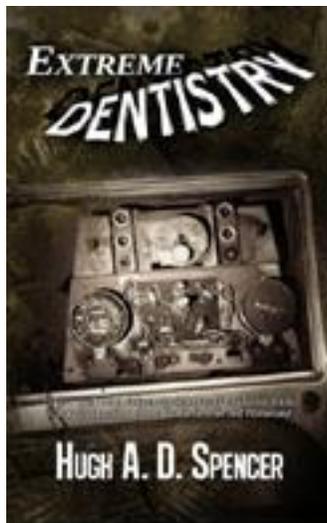
away from the palace in Philadelphia by loyalists and hidden out in the provinces. The three babies were all born with distinctive defects. Sarah has one eye that is swollen shut inflamed and useless. After she survives the abduction attempt Sarah and several companions set out on a foot journey to New Orleans where the only surviving member of Kyres guard escaped with Sarah's infant brother and sister.

The group must negotiate their way across a wild backcountry filled with dangers both magical and mundane. Along the way they accumulate allies and the attention of the blackest of magic in the form of a pack of undead tazers (as in Lazarus, get it?) led by The Necromancer himself, the evil Oliver Cromwell and his most loyal henchman, Robert Hooke. They must fight a sprawling battle in New Orleans to free the captive Sir William Lee, the surviving King's General, and later a magical showdown at the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi to establish Sarah's legitimacy.

Witchy Eye is an entertaining romp in an America that never will be and yet is internally consistent. Butler doles out revelations about his world sparingly without a lot of lecturing. Sarah and Company are interesting protagonists in that they are not perfect and whose success is not certain. With the loose end of Sarah's two hidden siblings out in the wilderness somewhere and the interplay between various forces of good and evil, it's not certain that everyone will make it to the end. Indeed, at the end we have Sarah still searching for her siblings on the assumption that they will be happy to see her.

I was really glad to have read Alan Smale's "Clash of Eagles" trilogy so I was familiar with Cahokia and the mid-American Indian tribes. Having that background made some of the places and characters in this book more familiar. I'm looking forward to the continuation of the series.

---review by Gary Robe



Extreme Dentistry by Hugh A.D. Spencer; available as a paperback at \$14.99 or an ebook at \$2.99

This was one of the premiums given out to supporters of the new *Amazing Stories* kickstarter campaign. I picked this particular book because its Canadian author had a reputation for writing humorous science fiction. The title itself is certainly off-putting. I don't know anybody who likes going to the dentist, and idea of extreme dentistry automatically fills the average person with a sense of eminent dread and extreme alarm.

This is a story about a middle aged, middle income, lapsed Mormon named Arthur Percy, who discovers that the modern world and the human race are under assault from a race of shape shifting vampireic ghouls who are genetic parasites that are linked in a communal intelligence known as the Hive.

In the early part of the book we learn that Percy has had a history of unfortunate dental problems, including Hot Mouth, an extremely painful, nearly debilitating condition, and a situation where he had to have a root canal done without antiseptic. This has eventually brought him in contact with Dr. Calvin Stewart, a devout Mormon dentist who discovers something else about Arthur Percy (besides his dental problems), and decides to do something about it.

It turns out that Percy is a victim of the Hive denizens, who in addition to sucking out brains and guts, also like to live off the stress, pain and extreme emotional pain of certain human victims they keep around as tame cows. Dr. Stewart is part of a widespread campaign launched by the Mormon Church and certain other Christian religious denominations, to deal with the threat of the Hive and to find ways to eliminate it. Extreme dentistry is just one of the tools they utilize.

The Hive offshoots congregate and control certain places where many humans routinely gather, where disappearances will not be noticed, primarily malls and amusement parks. The harvesting to human victims has reached epidemic proportions and a crisis is fast approaching, as the Hive entities are more than ready to fight back, slaughtering their opponents and keeping the bulk of the human race happily ignorant about the true horror of the situation. Stewart begins a series of special drug treatments that will free Percy from the domination of his Hive handlers, and also enlists him in the ranks of the Resistance.

This is a story with great potential, but unfortunately it is not a story that Spencer was able to deliver. He seems to be one of those writers who start with a good idea and an interesting character, then lets himself wander around hoping a story plot will naturally fall into place. Unfortunately with this novel, it does not.

The early third of the book detailing the life history (and assorted dental problems) of protagonist Arthur Percy is very well done, and is also very humorous, with a few laugh-out-loud lines delivered in the process. After that, humor disappears, and so does any semblance of plot control.

The story is told from the viewpoint of two and sometimes three or four different people, with extensive use of flashbacks. This is extremely disconcerting, often confusing, and does nothing to advance the overall plot structure. It is clearly a device to pad out the pages of the book and probably meant to keep the writer amused while he tries to think of what should be happening next.

Along the way the reader learns a lot about the Mormon life style and the Mormon sense of ethics and daily behavior. This also does nothing to advance the plot structure, and it often seems Spencer has lost track of the plot entirely in his efforts to talk up the benefits of the Mormon life style.

A bit over midway thru he introduces the character of a female college professor who was one of the first people to recognize the existence of the Hive and its methods of operation.

Spencer decides that she is a bi-sexual nymphomaniac, and proceeds to provide many pages of conversation with the lady while she describes her sexual appetites and exploits in some detail. What does this have to do with the plot of this book? Absolutely nothing. Spencer got diverted and in his free wheeling, random writing style, decided to go where his unconscious led him. The plot changes completely as the story moves thru the last half of the book, with the protagonist becoming an embittered victim seeking vengeance against the Hive and its minions. The story rambles widely, and does not gel or gain any kind of coherence at any point.

In the end the writer invents some unexplained, super-doooper technology machines that grind up the evil hive monsters in the malls, and then tries to wrap up a wildly incoherent story plot, not successfully either. The whole novel was confusing, inconsistent, and lacks both structure as well as any kind of plot that moves thru to a logical conclusion. There are dozens of story inconsistencies and unexplained elements that the author decides to ignore, and apparently hopes that the reader will too.

I can't recommend this book to anybody, at any price. On the other hand, I read the novel all the way thru, every single page, and I read it thru rapidly. Why you may ask, if the story plot was this crummy? Because Hugh A. D. Spencer happens to be a natural born writer, with an engaging narrative style that is almost magnetic in its charm. When he is clicking along the pages fly by, and he invests his characters with depth and genuine personality. His descriptions are usually excellent. He is not particularly adept at action scenes, so he tends to avoid them whenever possible.

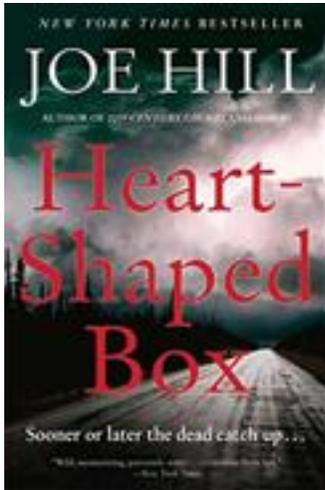
Spencer has a dynamic and charismatic writing style. What he does not have is a sense for plot. This particular story is irritatingly erratic, inconsistent, and often nonsensical. What Mr. Spencer needs to do before he does any more writing is to first develop a basic plot, all of it, with a beginning, middle, and an ending. Only then should he sit down and write the story.

Maybe he has figured that out already. This particular novel was written in 2014, and it is now 2018. That's four years for the writer to confront his primary writing demons, and correct them. On the other hand, Mr. Spencer is not a full time professional writer. He has a real world job as a professor of anthropology at McMasters University, and does not depend on fiction for his livelihood. But I'm willing to give him another shot, based entirely on the strength of his engaging wordsmanship. His newest book is titled "Why I Hunt Flying Saucers and Other Fantasticals", up on Amazon as an ebook for \$2.99. I will be reading it in the coming weeks, and I'll let you know if Mr. Spencer had managed to develop plot structure to go with his fascinating writing style.

---review by Bob Jennings

On Ghosts and Dads

Stephen King may be aging, but there's a new generation arising to carry on his tradition in the person of his son, Joe Hill. I'm finding myself becoming a fan of Hill's work and have been actively seeking out his writings. I thoroughly enjoyed the novels NOS4A2 and Horns as well as his comic book work in Locke and Key.



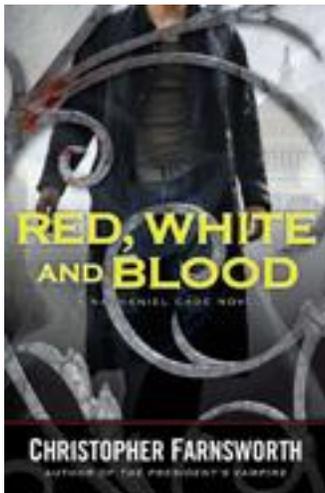
Most recently, I ordered his first (I believe) published novel, “Heart-Shaped Box”, from Amazon, and found it to be captivatingly enjoyable. It’s the story of Judas Coyne, an aging rock star, who maintains a strange collection of bizarre and macabre memorabilia: the cover of the book lists “a cookbook for cannibals... a used hangman’s noose... a snuff film.” Since that is the case, it’s hard for him to resist an eBay listing for a dead man’s suit with the dead man still attached (in spirit, not physically). The suit arrives in the eponymous heart-shaped box, and the scary times begin. The owner of the suit, an old man, begins to show up everywhere that Judas goes, dangling an ominous-looking razor blade on a chain.

What follows is a ghost story of the highest quality interspersed with an exploration of the effects that a father has on his offspring – especially a bad father. That may sound a bit stuffy and pedantic, but it’s not. Hill makes his point about the two bad fathers and weaves it seamlessly into the fast moving narrative. Let me make it clear: this is one of the best ghost stories I’ve ever read, but it’s more than that. It’s a story of revenge, broken families and child abuse combined

with a touching love story and more, all wrapped up in a thrill fest.

And, lest we think that the bad fathers in the story are somehow representative of Hill’s own famous parent, he dedicates the book in this way: “For my dad, one of the good ones.” Hill has certainly inherited his dad’s talent for crafting a story. This book is both a real page-turner and a spooky thriller, so, in more ways than one, it might just keep you up all night. I recommend it highly.

---review by **Tom McGovern**



Cade vs. the Boogeyman

A few issues back, I reviewed “Blood Oath”, the initial novel in the Nathanael Cade series by Christopher Farnsworth. You may recall that Cade is a powerful vampire, sworn to the service of the President of the United States. As such, he fights the nation’s enemies and protects the president at all costs. Since then, I’ve been reading through the rest of the Cade series, short though it is. So far, there have been only three full-length novels and a novelette available as a short e-book – plus the new short novel that I will mention at the end of this review. The third full-length novel in the series is “Red, White and Blood”, and it’s as much a page-turner as the previous entries.

In each of the stories in the series, Cade, working with his human handler, Zach Barrows, has come up against a supernatural threat to the president and/or the nation as a whole. This book is no exception, with Cade and Zach finding themselves in a battle with a seemingly unstoppable supernatural serial killer

called the Boogeyman.

The year is 2012 and President Samuel Curtis is running for re-election, but the Boogeyman is wreaking havoc on the campaign with a series of high-profile killings of people connected in various ways to the president. Zach is working with Candace Curtis, the president’s daughter, with whom he had a tryst in the Lincoln bedroom that led to his being assigned as the handler of the president’s vampire. Zach and Candace are focused on getting the president re-elected, but the murders that are cropping up every few days are threatening the chances of a victory. As if that wasn’t bad enough, it becomes apparent that the Boogeyman’s ultimate target is the president himself.

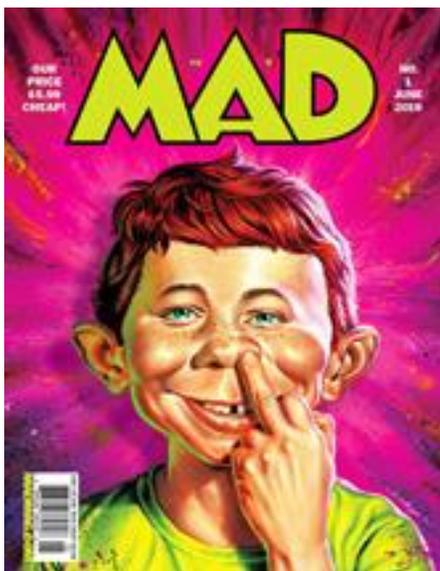
This isn’t great literature, but it’s a lot of fun. Farnsworth has crafted an exciting action thriller that keeps you guessing until the end. The tale ends in a satisfying manner, but there’s an epilogue that turns everything on its head and sets up the story for the next novel – and I was a bit nervous about that because Red, White and Blood came out in 2012, and I was unaware of any follow-ups since then.

But in looking up basic information for this review, I discovered that there is now another short novel available titled “Deep State”. I promptly ordered it and read it, and found myself slightly, but not terribly

disappointed. It's a short book; the main story is only about 100 pages, but there are a few extra features that fill the book out to roughly 150 pages in all. There's not much of a story, really – certainly none of the political intrigue that weaves its way through the other Cade novels. It's pretty much just a high-action account of Zach and Cade taking on yet another threat to the security (and, in this case, the existence) of the nation. Not much is made of the fact that there is a new president who is a murderer and a traitor, and that Cade is nonetheless bound to obey his lawful orders. That would have been an interesting road to go down, but apparently it will have to wait for future novels to be explored (assuming there are any). *Deep State* isn't a bad story; for what it is, it's kind of cool. But it doesn't have a lot of substance.

The dedication of the book is what concerns me the most. Farnsworth dedicates the book "To everyone who would not let Cade go quietly into the night." That gives me the impression that perhaps the author's intention was that Cade should do so, but repeated requests from fans impelled him to produce one more relatively short story, several years after the last entry in the series. Perhaps he has grown bored with the character, despite having said earlier that he had at least ten Cade novels in mind. After the twist at the end of *Red, White and Blood*, I'd really like to see what happens next in the story, and *Deep State* didn't offer much insight in that area. Future novels would be much anticipated, but it sounds as if the author just wants to move on to other pastures. I hope that's not the case.

---review by Tom McGovern



The MADness Continues

I've been known to rant about MAD magazine rebooting its issue counts to produce a new #1 issue after 66 years and 550 issues of continuous numbering. I think it's a ploy that's being way overused by the comic book companies and has actually made owning the #1 issue of a comic book nearly meaningless, since every comic, even the long term ones, gets started over with a new #1 every few years. Superman, for example, had a new #1 at the beginning of the New 52 in 2011, then another "first issue" when DC Rebirth started in 2016, and will now reboot once again this year as Brian Michael Bendis takes over control of the character.

So now, reboot madness (er, excuse me, MADness) has come to MAD. There were rumors galore about how the magazine would be changed in the reboot, some of which were apparently circulated by the Usual Gang of Idiots themselves as either a diversionary tactic or an April Fool's joke. Whatever. The first "new" issue arrived the other day,

and while there have been a few interesting changes, I don't see enough of a difference to justify rebooting the numbering, as if this were somehow a totally new creation. It's pretty much the old MAD with a few tweaks.

One of the rumors that I had heard, and reported in last issue's rant, was that the mag would be reverting back to standard comic-book format. That isn't the case. It's still a magazine-sized publication, still 60 pages (including covers), and still pretty much the same in terms of the physical publication. The paper does seem a bit heftier, so I suspect they went with a higher-quality selection there.

And don't worry – most of your favorite features are still there. Movie and TV parodies, *Spy vs. Spy*, *A MAD Look At...*, *MADFold-In* (this last even still by Al Jaffee) – all present and accounted for. Missing, at least from this issue (though they could show up later, I suppose) were the *Fundalini Pages* and *Planet Tad*, two features I had found particularly giggle-worthy, but that lack the long history of the other features I mentioned.

The graphics have changed a bit. The new logo might seem more modern-looking, but it's clearly derivative of (and a tribute to, no doubt) the original MAD comic-book logo from the 1950s. The colors and titles are a bit flashier and presumably more modern, giving the mag a bit more of a contemporary feel. There are some new features as well, though it's difficult to know at this point which will be recurring features and which ones are just one-shot gags. There is a section called "Potrzebie Comics" with several new comic-strip features that seems like it might be a regular thing, and there are some pretty funny entries, including the Justice

League in “Bring Your Sidekick to Work Day” and a trip to Rock ‘n Roll heaven called “The 27 Club.” Some of the other new features were a bit lame, but no issue is perfect.

There is in this issue, however, one point of absolute comic brilliance. Recalling the wonderful MAD comics of the 1950s, there is a parody of a parody. Back in the comic’s original run, Harvey Kurtzman and Bill Elder did a very cool parody of the Archie comics of the day called “Starchie.” This new issue presents “Starchie Reconstituted,” a magnificent parody of that parody, mimicking both the writing and the artistic style of the earlier comic, right down to the little signs posted around the panels with short gags. In the course of the (reconstituted) story, “Starchie” and “Bottleneck” (aka Jughead) find themselves bored with life in general. Their friend “Stilton Oiley” (Dilton Doily) offers to inject some excitement into their lives by means of his new invention, a time machine. The use of the time machine carries the two into the distant future, where they are able to see what their hometown will look like several decades hence. This, naturally, launches them into a full-scale MAD TV parody called “Riverdull” – a scathing look, MAD-style – at the Riverdale TV show. “Bottleneck’s” first words on arriving are “I can hardly see anything! Everything’s so DARK and MOODY!” – Immediately followed by “Starchie” discovering his amazing abs. Folks, this is one of the best-written and funniest pieces I’ve read in MAD magazine in a long time. It’s worth picking up the issue just for this, especially if you loved the MAD comics of the 1950s as much as I did (in reprint form, obviously, since I was born in the same year that MAD got started).

Overall, the magazine is a little different, updated a bit and tweaked here and there. But there’s nothing here that they couldn’t have accomplished if this had been issue #551. There’s nothing here, in my opinion, that’s so different from what they’ve done in the past that it warranted starting a whole new series. The new #1 is just a desperate attempt to sell more issues; are people really falling for the whole #1 thing anymore? If so, it must be the same folks who are willing to buy 20 copies of the same comic book because they print it with variant covers.

---review by Tom McGovern

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The Bag Lady of Rochdale College

(A Worm’s Eye View?)

by Taral Wayne

I guess it’s not a very flattering picture, but Judith Merrill as a bag lady was the image that flitted across my mind while searching for a title. She was said to have been a handsome young woman in the 1930s, but I only knew her much later in life, when her mannish features had been accentuated by age, and a casual disregard for her appearance. Often seen in ill-fitting, dowdy clothes, it was hard not to think of the sort of homeless female vagabond one sees witlessly wandering the streets. Yet Judy’s mind was anything *but* dulled by hard booze and harder knocks

In spite of the fact that I didn’t know Judy well enough to call her by her first name, everybody did ... so I will as well. But I doubt even her friends could deny that her normal attire would fit in around any casual male environment – a shipping dock, say, or a cheap diner on a bleak November night, where

everyone else wears a patched parka with coffee stains on the cuffs and has fingers yellowed by years of the tobacco habit. Nor did Judy live a settled existence, ordered by the clock. Indeed, at times she did not even have a fixed address.

Judith Merrill was the first science fiction writer I met. At the time, I lived in Parkdale, just as I do now. But 1971 was a different era, and I was a different person. While I had always been fascinated with anything to do with astronomy or space travel, in 1971 I had only just discovered science fiction as a genre. A corner grocery down the street from my home sold used magazines for ten and fifteen cents each. One of them, in fact, contained the ad for OSFiC that lured me into fandom. Imagine where we would all be if I had passed up that creased, dog-eared copy of *Fantastic*, and had spend my dimes on *Befuddling Technoscience Tales*, instead?

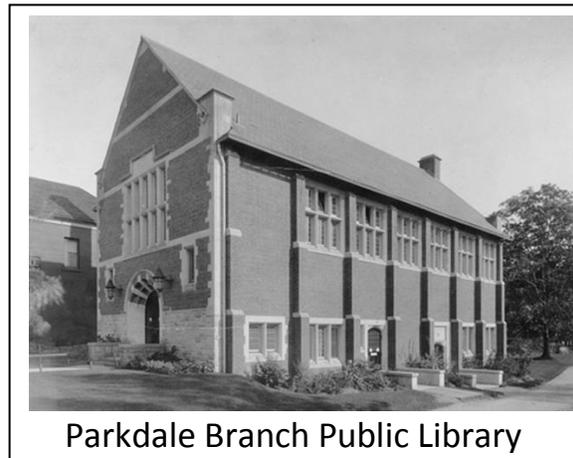
The nearest library to me at the time was a modern reconstruction of what I seem to recall was a Shakespearean grammar school. When I moved back to Parkdale in 1991, I was pleased to see that, except for the addition of an absurd glass and steel entrance, the High Park Branch was much the same as it had been in 1971. By luck, I happened to pick up a pink sheet of paper from a table near the door one day. It said:

At High Park Branch, 228 Roncesvales Ave.

SCIENCE FICTION EVENING
Thursday, March 25th, 8.30 P.M.

Come to discuss your favorite
authors and books with Judith Merrill,
science fiction writer and anthologist
from the Toronto Public Libraries,
Spaced Out Branch.

ADMISSION FREE!
Everyone welcome

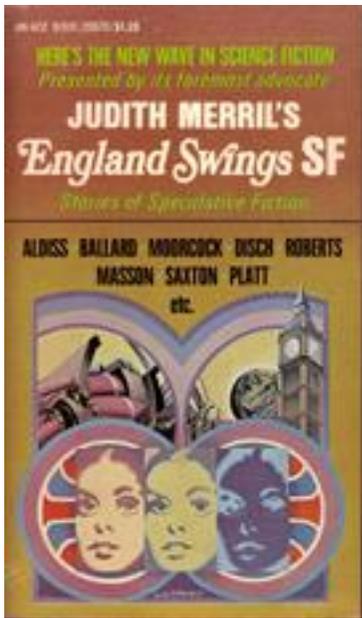


Naturally, I went. Looking back 42 years, I'm not sure if I even knew who Judith Merrill was at the time. But, whoever she was, the flyer said that she was a science fiction writer. What else mattered?

I arrived a little late and found a squat old lady with long grey hair seated in a plain chair, with a dozen or so listeners forming a modest audience around her. I was brimming over with questions to ask ... though the nature of those questions now escapes me completely. Not one was ever answered, unfortunately. Judy had apparently just seen *2001: A Space Odyssey*, and *that* was all she would talk about. I went home a somewhat disillusioned young fan.

I didn't know then, of course, that I would be hearing a lot more about Judith Merrill in the coming years.

Judy was not native to Toronto. She was from The Bronx and had been a member of the Hydra club, before the war. She married or slept with about half the Futurians, and had a brief but furious career as a writer, frequently collaborating with her lovers. For reasons sufficient unto Judy, she abandoned writing fiction herself, and turned to editing New Wave anthologies. *England Swings* launched a fashion for often unintelligible, pretentious "Speculative Fiction." Having lost interest in traditional



pulp adventures, Judy had become a passionate advocate for any sort of remotely surreal, symbolist, or absurdist *avante gard* literature. Dismissing the parochial name “science fiction,” Judy rebranded it the much groovier-sounding “Spec Fic.” The new fad resulted in a spate of New Wave anthologies such as *Dangerous Visions*. While they made waves at the time, unfortunately most of the New Wave looks rather quaint, today – it was so obviously desperate to borrow the luster from more “respectable” brands of literature.

Judy went one better than that, in fact. She adopted her favourite authors into the Science Fiction genre the way Mormons adopt dead relatives into the faith – whether or not they ever wanted to belong to the Church of the Later Day Saints, or had even heard of them. Similarly, it didn’t matter to Judy whether Borges or Kafka had ever read or even known about Science Fiction.

Judy’s interests had clearly become quite cosmopolitan, compared to her Hydra days. I remember that Madge, the first custodian of the Spaced Out Library, sometimes complained that Judy insisted that the collection waste a certain amount of shelf space on books that were about as relevant as the *Bhagavad-Gita*, *Grey’s Anatomy*, *Mein Kampf* or Tim LaHaye’s claptrap *Left Behind* novels.

Judy had heavy-duty influence on the Spaced Out, however, and could not be denied. She gained this influence through having somehow talked the Toronto Public Library board into founding a special collection for “speculative fiction” in the first place. As the core of the new collection, Judy donated her own books and magazines. It was perhaps not as generous a gesture as it seemed. I overheard other remarks by Madge, at the SOL, that Judy had made a pretty sweet deal for herself ... in exchange for a van full of ratty paperbacks, she had received a free office, a modest stipend from the TPL and other perks. The pages with Judy’s own stories had all been cut or torn out, and, even when not defaced, the material was not in especially desirable condition. Many, if not most, of the books and magazines in the collection eventually had to be replaced.

That was one of the things you learned about Judy if you knew her at all well. Even while rendering valuable public service, she was expert at looking out for Number One.

She probably had to be. Judy seems to have been one independent lady, and, after a certain point in life, she never bowed to orthodoxy to get married again, or to find a regular job. She lived a Bohemian lifestyle that I can only admire, and have, in my own small way, done what I could to emulate. She lived by her wits, by her ability to charm, by her connections and by her *chutzpah*.

Judy was not too proud, for instance, to sell her soul to the CBC. Despite her own rarified tastes in SF literature, for a year or two she played host to Saturday-nights reruns of *Dr. Who*.

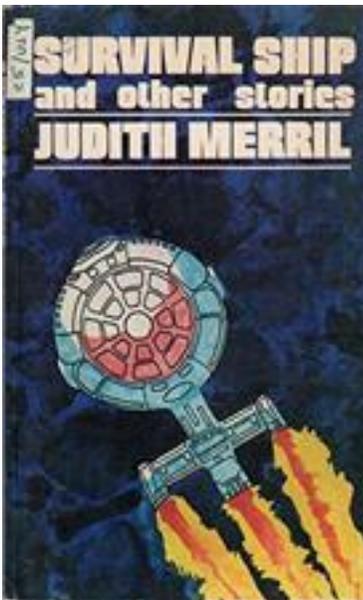
I had a personal experience of Judith Merrill’s survival instincts. The occasion was sometime in the later 1970s, when I was one of a number of precocious and rather aggressive fans. We weren’t part of Judy’s charmed circle, but she was a familiar figure. And Judy was always careful to remain on good terms with the local fandom, both from natural friendliness and the good sense to not alienate readers. One day we were having an early dinner at a place on Spadina Avenue called the Sun Wa. Spadina had turned into Toronto’s “new” Chinatown, and abounded in excellent Chinese restaurants of every

description, that even *we* could afford. The Sun Wa specialized in savory noodle dishes: big heaping plates of flat noodles, round noodles, rice noodles, every kind of noodle, served with delicious black bean sauce, peanut sauce, oyster sauce or chili sauce. Any dish for a price that wouldn't buy an entree anywhere else. We had no idea, however, that the Sun Wa was also one of Judy's favourite Chinese restaurants. The place was packed, that day, when in through the door came Judy. She looked for an empty table, then, finding none, Judy recognized *us*. She didn't hesitate a moment before pulling up a chair and joining us, just as though we were old friends. I think we were a little flattered and made room, as though *we* thought we were old friends, too.

It was one of those moments that make fandom a little special, actually.

Judy's true friends were not really the local fans, though. I knew one or two of the older OSFiC members were closer to Judith Merrill than the current generation, but they had drifted out of the club by that time. Judy's private life was not unduly visible from outside. It was generally known among the fans that she had shadowy connections to media personalities in the CBC, connections in the Toronto Public Library board, and connections to literary doyen. She had had her career honoured by the International Authors' Festival at the Toronto Harbourfront Center, an unheard-of honour for a mere ghetto writer. Judy was a founding member of Rochdale College, a student-run college and co-operative living experiment., that – as a Marxist – must have seemed to her like a mission to raise consciousness.

Consciousness-raising maybe. But I remember the few club meetings in the Rochdale building, downtown. The place was a dump. Dark, concrete tunnels with tiny rooms that looked like kindergarten classes. There were likely more drug dealers than instructors or professors. I never saw the dorms, but the smell in the halls was fecund, and you had to take care not to step in undesirable organic residues left by the half-wild canine population. After a few years, the college was closed, and the building itself gutted for redevelopment. It appears, in fact, that the establishment of the college had originally been a tax dodge, regardless of the idealism of some of the founders. It was neither the first nor last noble ideal to founder on human nature.



In an act of Establishment Revenge, the building was reopened as the Senator David A. Croll Apartments.

Cast adrift from Rochdale, Judy occupied a number of humble addresses over the next few years. Now and then I'd see her, frumpy and rumpled as ever, at conventions, but she didn't seem to be in her natural environment there. What her natural environment might be was something of a mystery, though. She had an apartment, somewhere. When she couldn't come up with the rent, she lived in her office at the Spaced Out Library – by then renamed The Merrill Collection. When I was mailing her complementary copies of OSFiC's monthly newsletter, I addressed them to an apartment on Jarvis Street. Jarvis had once been a boulevard of millionaires. The families of the actor Raymond Massey and his brother, Lt. Governor Vincent Massey, had mansions on Jarvis Street, and had once paid workers to dump tons of snow on the street for the delight of an elderly family member on her deathbed. By the 1970s, though, it was a low-rent district, lined with non-descript low-rise

apartments, and the mansions had become boarding houses or outright flophouses. Independence and the Bohemian lifestyle came at a cost.

Judith Merrill was also one of the founders of the Toronto Hydra meetings, created in imitation of the original New York writers' club to which she had belonged 30 years before. With John Robert Colombo, she invited potential young writers to discuss the business of writing, the writers and writing itself. At least in theory. I can only name a few of the members, and never witnessed them in actual discussion. Phyllis Gotlieb was a member, though, and also a good friend of mine. She kept putting my name forward ... but her efforts were ignored, and I was never invited to attend. On the other hand, I wasn't greatly exerting myself to write professionally, so I didn't feel as slighted as I might have.

But since the group gradually grew to include other friends of Judy's and John's, who had no more ambition to become a professional writer than I did, the sense of being slighted was never entirely absent, either. It was one of many frustrations in life that I've learned to live with, and with little regret in retrospect. So much of fandom is about who you know ... but, for better or worse, also who you *don't* know. If you don't learn to be philosophical about it, you can spend a lot of time in a slow burn.



To tell the truth, I was never an enthusiastic reader of Judith Merrill's fiction. I have a battered paperback edition of *Survival Ship and Other Stories*, published by Kakabeka Books. With a publisher named after a waterfall in Northwestern Ontario, who could resist? I also have an old Pyramid paperback with a neat Schoenherr cover, called *Out of Bounds*, that I recently read ... and that partly inspired this piece. My collection is completed by two absurdly mispackaged paperbacks – *A Shot in the Dark* has a lovely cover ... for a mystery novel. *Sin in Space* was originally *Mars Child*, before it was given a ridiculous cover painting of a stripping space blonde and leering astronaut. Actually, *Mars Child* was only half Judy's. The name on the cover is "Cyril Judd," a pseudonym for the team of Judith Merrill and Cyril Kornbluth. You have to wonder who thinks up these inappropriate marketing schemes.

When the biography, *Better to Love, the Life of Judith Merrill* was published in 2002, I manfully resisted the temptation to spend \$29.95 for a copy.

Clearly I don't regard Judith Merrill as one of the giants of the science fiction genre. Her main accomplishments seem to have been as an editor and guiding light of the New Wave, and as one of the founders of the famous Milford writers' workshop. In Canada, all that was pretty much behind her, as she shifted toward using her influence on her circle of friends and connections to act behind the scenes. The establishment of the Spaced Out Library was one of her accomplishments, as it was to gain a foot in the door for science fiction's recognition at the Harborfront festival. One of her last ventures into editing, and the only one in Canada, was the first volume of the anthology of Canadian SF, *Tesseract*. She was named to the Hall of Fame by the SFWA. But to look at a list of her published fiction, I find it all a little puzzling.

It doesn't seem to be what Judy accomplished as a writer that has left the biggest impression in people's minds. Possibly not her role as editor, either. Frankly, I think she is overrated as a science fiction writer, and her reputation as an editor seems to have faded somewhat over time. What she accomplished out of sight may prove to be more durable, as the Spaced Out Library, *aka* The Merrill Collection, is today housed in a state-of-the-art facility, occupying an entire floor of a gorgeous faux

Art Deco building near the University of Toronto, and is considered one of the major collections of science fiction in the world. The Milford writer's workshops may have furthered the careers of many valuable writers who might possibly have slipped through the cracks, otherwise. Even Hydra North may have made a difference to someone's career.

What I think admire most about Judith Merrill isn't her career, but that she appears to have lived life *entirely on her terms*. Regardless of a relatively small body of writing, now mostly obscure, she possesses a significant reputation in the field. She made a place for herself in influential circles, and found ways to earn her living in Canada *despite* an obvious inclination to avoid regular, salaried employment. I doubt Judy ever tolerated a "boss" in her life, or ever did much that she didn't want to do. She lived a free, if probably not easy life. Judy did it for Judy, of course ... not for anyone else. But, honestly, in what other way can a person get anything important done?



This article was reprinted from Taral Wayne's fanzine *Broken Toys* #24, December, 2013. Long time fan and fanzine editor Taral Wayne is also an award winning professional artist and one of the founding members of the furry fandom art genre. He currently produces *Rat Sass* on an irregular basis, with issues posted on the efanzines.com website. Much of his professional and fan artwork can be seen at the following websites,

■ <http://www.furaffinity.net/user/saara/>

-- <http://taralwayne.deviantart.com/>

and he is available for paid art commissions. He may be reached at taral@bell.net.

WHAT ABOUT ROSWELL, ANYWAYS?

by Jeffrey Redmond



Without a doubt one of the most significant places for UFO, extra-terrestrial, and alien abduction sites on this planet is at Roswell, New Mexico. Located in the southeastern region of the state, and 80 miles east of the U.S. Government's top-secret White Sands Missile Range and Test Center, it has become an endless source of interest and speculation. But why Roswell?

On July 14, 1945, as World War II was coming to an end, the military exploded the very first atomic bomb at their White Sands facility. (The second and third bombs were soon after dropped on Japan, but that is another story). Did this very first nuclear detonation attract the attention of superior beings from other planets? Perhaps

In the summer of 1947 there were a number of UFO sightings in the United States. Sometime during the first week of July 1947, something crashed near Roswell. W.W. "Mack" Brazel, a New Mexico rancher, saddled up his horse and rode out with the son of neighbors Floyd and Loretta Proctor, to check on his sheep after a fierce thunderstorm the night before. As they rode along, Brazel began to notice unusual pieces of what seemed to be metal debris, scattered over a large area.

Making a further inspection, Brazel saw that a shallow trench, several hundred feet long, had been gouged into the land. Brazel was struck by the unusual properties of the debris, and after dragging a large piece of it to a shed, he took some of it over to show his neighbors, the Proctors. Mrs. Proctor moved from the ranch into a home nearer to town, but she remembers Mack showing up with strange material.

The Proctors told Brazel that he might be holding wreckage from a UFO or a government project, and that he should report the incident to the sheriff. A day or two later, Mack drove into Roswell where he reported the incident to Sheriff George Wilcox, who reported it to U.S. Air Force

Intelligence Officer, Major Jesse Marcel of the 509 Bomb Group, and for days afterwards, the debris site was closed while the wreckage was cleared.

On July 8, 1947, a press release stating that the wreckage of a crashed disk had been recovered was issued by Lt. Walter G. Haut, Public Information Officer at RAAB under orders from the Commander of the 509th Bomb Group at Roswell, USAF Col. William Blanchard. Hours later the first press release was rescinded, and a second press release stated that the 509th Bomb Group had mistakenly identified a weather balloon as wreckage of a flying saucer. This was issued on July 9, 1947.

At a funeral home in Roswell, a young mortician named Glenn Dennis received some curious calls one afternoon from the morgue at the air field. The Mortuary Officer needed to get hold of some small hermetically sealed coffins, and wanted information about how to preserve bodies that had been exposed to the elements for a few days, without contaminating the tissue.

Dennis drove out to the base hospital later that evening where he saw large pieces of wreckage with strange engravings on one of the pieces sticking out of the back of a military ambulance. When he entered the hospital he started to visit with a nurse he knew, and he was immediately threatened by military police and forced to leave. The next day, Dennis met with the nurse. She told him about the bodies and drew pictures of them on a prescription pad. But within a few days she was suddenly and mysteriously transferred to England, and her situation and whereabouts remains unknown.

FURTHER ANALYSIS

From the research of Don Schmitt and Kevin Randle in their book, "A History of UFO Crashes", much information about the Roswell Incident has been accurately documented and compiled. The military had been watching an unidentified flying object on radar for four days in southern New Mexico. On the night of July 4, 1947, radar indicated that the object was down around thirty to forty miles northwest of Roswell.

Eye witness William Woody, who lived east of Roswell, remembered being outside with his father the night of July 4, 1947, when he saw a brilliant object plunge to the ground. A couple of days later when Woody and his father tried to locate the area of the crash, they were stopped by U.S. military personnel, who had cordoned off the area.

Sheriff Wilcox telephoned Intelligence Officer Major Jesse Marcel, and he was sent by Col. William Blanchard to investigate Mack Brazel's story. Marcel and Senior Counter Intelligence Corps (CIC) agent, Captain Sheridan Cavitt, followed the rancher off-road to his place. They spent the night there, and Marcel inspected a large piece of debris that Brazel had dragged from the pasture.

On Monday morning, July 7, 1947, Major Jesse Marcel took his first step onto the debris field. Marcel would later remark that "something... must have exploded above the ground and fell." As Brazel, Cavitt and Marcel inspected the field, Marcel was able to determine which direction it came from, and which direction it was heading. "It was in the pattern... you could tell where it started out and where it ended by how it was thinned out..." he later stated.

Marcel could see the debris was "strewn over a wide area. I guess maybe three-quarters of a mile long and a few hundred feet wide." Scattered in the debris were small bits of metal that Marcel held a cigarette lighter to, to see if it would burn. "I lit the cigarette lighter to some of this stuff and it didn't burn", he said.

Along with the metal, Marcel described weightless I-beam-like structures that were 3/8" x 1/4", none of them very long, that would neither bend nor break. Some of these I-beams had indecipherable characters along the length, in two colors. Marcel also described metal debris the thickness of tin foil that was indestructible.

After gathering enough debris to fill his staff car, Maj. Marcel decided to stop by his home on the way back to the base so that he could show the unusual debris to his family. He'd never seen anything quite like it. "I didn't know what we were picking up. I still don't know what it was...it could not have been part of an aircraft, not part of any kind of weather balloon or experimental balloon...I've

seen rockets... sent up at the White Sands Testing Grounds. It definitely was not part of an aircraft or missile or rocket", he exclaimed.

Examinations were conducted under hypnosis conducted by Dr. John Watkins in May of 1990. Jesse Marcel Jr. remembered being awakened by his father that night. He following his father outside to help carry in a large box filled with debris. Once inside, they emptied the contents of the debris onto the kitchen floor.

Jesse Jr. described the lead foil and I-beams. Under hypnosis, he recalled the writing on the I-beams as "Purple. Strange. Never saw anything like it...Different geometric shapes, leaves and circles." Under questioning, Jesse Jr. said the symbols were shiny purple and they were small. There were many separate figures. And, under hypnosis: Marcel Sr. said that it was a flying saucer "I asked him what a flying saucer was. I don't know what a flying saucer is...It's a ship. He was excited!" he remembered.

At 11:00 A.M Walter Haut, a public relations officer, finished the press release he'd been ordered to write. He gave copies of the release to the two radio stations and both of the newspapers. By 2:26 P.M., the story was out on the AP Wire: "The Army and Air forces here today announced that a flying disk has been found."

Phone calls began to pour into the base from all over the world, and Lt. Robert Shirkey watched as MPs carried loaded wreckage onto a C-54 aircraft from the First Transport Unit. To get a better look, Shirkey stepped around Col. Blanchard, who was irritated with all of the calls coming into the base. Blanchard decided to travel out to the debris field and left instructions that he'd gone on leave.



On the morning of July 8th, Marcel reported what he'd found to Col. Blanchard, showing him pieces of the wreckage, none of which looked like anything Blanchard had ever seen. Blanchard then sent Marcel to the Fort Worth Air Field, to see General Ramey, Commanding Officer of the U.S. Eighth Air Force. Marcel stated years later to Walter Haut that he'd taken some of the debris into Ramey's office to show him what had been found. The material was displayed on Ramey's desk for the general when he returned.

General Ramey wanted to see the exact location of the debris field, so he and Marcel went to the map room down the hall. But when they returned, the wreckage that had been placed on the desk was gone and a weather balloon was spread out on the floor.

Major Charles A. Cashon took the now-famous photo of Marcel with the weather balloon, in General Ramey's office.

It was then reported that General Ramey recognized the remains as part of a weather balloon. Brigadier General Thomas DuBose, the chief of staff of the Eighth Air Force said, "[It] was a cover story. The whole balloon part of it. That was the part of the story we were told to give to the public and news and that was it."

The U.S. military tried to convince the news media from that day forward that the object found near Roswell was nothing more than a weather balloon. July 9th, as reports went out that the crashed object was actually a weather balloon. That clean-up crews were busily clearing the debris.

Bud Payne, a rancher at Corona, was trying to round up a stray when he was spotted by military and carried off the Foster ranch, and Jud Roberts along with Walt Whitmore were turned away

as they approached the debris field. As the wreckage was brought to the base, it was crated and stored in a hangar.

Back in town, Walt Whitmore and Lyman Strickland saw their friend, Mack Brazel, who was being escorted to the Roswell Daily Record by three military officers. He ignored Whitmore and Strickland, which was not at all like Mack, and once he got to the Roswell Daily Record offices, he changed his story. He now claimed to have found the debris on June 14th. Brazel also mentioned that he'd found weather observation devices on two other occasions, but what he found this time was no weather balloon.

Later that afternoon, an officer from the base retrieved all of the copies of Haut's press release from the radio stations and newspaper offices. The Las Vegas Review Journal, along with dozens of other newspapers, carried the AP story: "Reports of flying saucers whizzing through the sky fell off sharply today as the army and the navy began a concentrated campaign to stop the rumors." The story also reported that the Air Force Headquarters in Washington DC had "delivered a blistering rebuke to officers at Roswell."

Ever since then the U.S. Government and military have suppressed, stalled, and blocked every attempt for independent investigators to examine and find out what exactly did happen back in 1947. All military personnel concerned with the original Roswell Incident have been disciplined and forced to remain silent. So will the real story ever be known?

Fortunately there are many eager researchers, from all over the planet, who are always interested in getting at the truth. One of the main focal points for them has been the public museum and civic center in Roswell, with continued investigative events planned.

THE ROSWELL MUSEUM AND CIVIC CENTER

If you decide to go to Roswell, and explore these events for yourself, a vast itinerary awaits you for the upcoming July festival season. UFOs, alien abductions, and flying saucers are just some of the topics to be further explored. With such gatherings of those interested, perhaps participants can get closer to the truth than ever before.

Much more information is available at the Roswell Museum website: www.iufomrc.com

Good luck to all of you in your efforts to get at the real story. Since 1947 something has indeed been going on at Roswell, New Mexico. But just exactly what is still a source of speculation and debate. And, with the continuing Government cover ups, this may remain the norm for quite some time to come. But, thanks to so many knowledgeable researchers, the real truth may just yet be discovered.



THE MAN WITH A DOUBLE SHADOW

by

Robert Jennings

“Hello, Ken’s Quickie Wash, how...”

“Ken, it’s Wilson. You still got that kid Willis working for you?”

“Oh, Hi Will, let me turn this stupid machine off.” I bent over and shut off the coin sorter. It was an old machine, but it was still fast and reliable, dropping hundreds of loose quarters into ten dollar coin sleeves and spitting out the finished folded rolls like clockwork, but it did make an awful racket. I shut it completely off. Conversations with my friend Wilson Quimby sometimes ran long.

“Will?” a grunt came from the other end of the line, “Sure, Willis still works for me. Couldn’t do without him. He’s out at the number three location doing a full machine repair on a dryer unit. You need him for some work around the house?”

“No. But I might need to borrow him later on. Could you come on over here this afternoon, say 1:00? I need you to break trail for me.”

I chuckled. Quimby was not the friendliest or most likable human being around, not by a long shot. He could be downright rude and antisocial. So I was sometimes his ‘front man’ to handle the social amenities and keep the conversation going.

“I suppose so. Got a client lined up?”

“Yeah, a man I know..of. A guy I know about. He claims he is beset with a mystic curse and wants my help.

“A mystic curse? Really? What kind?”

“Tell you about it when you get here. I’m not sure if his trouble is a mystic curse or anything supernatural at all, but he has a real problem, and he wants my help, urgent, as in really urgent. See you around 1:00?”

“I’m on my way.”

As I drove the store van over to Quimby’s place I had to wonder again how in the world the two of us had ever gotten together. I’m an easy going guy with a curiosity about ancient legend lore, but my business is running coin-op laundries. With all the new environmental regs on water and detergent use and the rest of it, this was a lot tougher than it used to be. Quimby was a man in his thirties who, by vent of having been born with good relatives, had managed to inherit some money by way of a trust fund, enuf to keep him from having to seriously look for work, not that he would have ever seriously been concerned about the working world even if he was stone broke. But the inheritance money allowed him to pursue his inquiries into the world of the occult and the supernatural. “My little oddities” as he liked to phrase it.

His investigations had resulted in his being able to write a sort of regular newspaper column for the local paper. Occasionally they even put some of his articles on the wire. The column examined and mostly debunked various old legends or superstitions, but sometimes it talked up something that might really be supernatural. Those kinds went over best, especially around the Halloween season. He’d been able to convince a small regional publisher to collect his columns into a couple of hardback books. I don’t think they sold very well. The publisher’s New York agent kept trying to get them out in paperback, which would have meant bigger sales, but so far nothing had come of that.

Inbetween research that included scouring old newspaper files and the like, he also occasionally took on clients who claimed they had problems. Usually these were harmless crackpots, hysterical women or lying

teenagers from dysfunctional families seeking attention, along with a few scattered genuine nut cases thrown in for good measure. But every now and then something interesting turned up. I was wondering if this might be one of them when I turned into the narrow creek-pebble and cement driveway that let up to his house.

Quimby's house had once been some kind of rest home. It was on a rise, well built with brick-O-block walls and a wood-shingle roof slapped over the top to take the edge off the antiseptic look of the place. Quimby had bought it when the business went belly-up ten years ago. He claimed he needed all that room for his collections, which might well be true. He had a tremendous assortment of junk. At least I considered most of it as junk. He has souvenirs, books, research material, charms, idols, newspaper clippings, ritual totems, voodoo fetishes, Indian arrowheads by the hundreds along with other Native American crafts, and lots more in the same line.

I've told him a dozen times at least that if he would just organize the stuff he could make a good living giving talks with the displays at libraries and clubs. Those kinds of organizations were always looking for interesting lecturers. Altho, considering how gruff Quimby could be with people I don't suppose that would ever work out. Not that he was ever going to get all that mess classified anyway.

I looked around for any other vehicles. Except for Quimby's ancient VW mini-van, I was the only visitor, so far.

Quimby met me at the door.

"Heard you coming up the driveway." He ushered me into the long hallway and into the room off the immediate left. This was his so-called study. Actually it was the room he used to meet people. His real study was farther down the hall near the back.

This room had been the office of the manager for the rest home or sanitarium or whatever this place had originally been. It came equipped with a big antique style desk along the window side, and a couple of book shelves. There were some books there, but mostly there were knick-knacks and a few small vases with wild flowers in them.

Quimby liked flowers. He wouldn't grow his own garden, claimed it was too much work, but he picked wild flowers from the area behind the house, and his neighbors on either side sometimes gave him flowers too. At least they did now, after they had finally gotten to know him better. As I said, Quimby was not the easiest person in the world to be friendly with, but once you got to actually know him he's a pretty decent guy.

I plopped down in the side chair by the desk. The two big leather chairs in front of the desk were for potential clients, and whatever friends they might want to bring along. Quimby opened the min-fridge built into the right side of the desk and passed over a can of Diet Mello Yello. The fridge was also a leftover from the rest home manager.

"So, who is this potential client," I asked, after a deep swig. Mello Yello should be investigated by the government. The stuff is almost addictive. I'd never tried it before I met Quimby four or five years ago, now I can't live without it.

"Man named Randall Curtis. A dabbler. Claims he got in too deep. Got a curse on him now. Probably killing him."

I sighed. "You know Will, I still can't read your mind. If you want me to help you've got to..."

I hadn't heard a car come up the driveway, but the door bell sounded loud and clear. Quimby stood up and motioned me to proceed him to the front door. I left the can of soda on the coaster always kept there for me.

The short man at the front door might have been in his late thirties, but he sure looked older than that. He looked haggard and worn, and tired, and bedraggled, all at once. But mostly he looked frightened. He looked like a man in the grip of perpetual fear. He also looked like a man who had lost a lot of weight recently. His clothing hung off him in loose folds. I briefly wondered what could cause a man to react like that. We were about to find out as we all walked back to the study.

"Would you care for a can of soda?" Quimby held up a Mello Yello can and leaned over the desk a bit. Curtis looked over at him as tho he was viewing a crazy man.

"No, no, thank you," he managed to stammer out.

"I'll take that, Will," The conversation was not off to a good start. Time for me to add some grease to the wheels. "I'm Ken Jackson, I usually help Mr. Quimby in his investigations. Will hasn't explained anything at all about your problem. Why don't you relax and fill us in on all the details. Maybe I should take a few notes here, Will? Just in case there are a lot of details?"

Curtis shook himself, like a small dog, as he watched Will underhand flip the can over to me where it joined the open one on the coaster, after which Will took a long sip from his own can. "I don't think that will be necessary."

There was a silence. Will was about to open his mouth and say something pointed, but I stepped in, "So, Mr. Curtis, please, some background information here. What exactly is the nature of your problem?"

Curtis looked at me with a hopeless expression. His thinning hair had long gray streams all thru it, which added nothing to his current appearance. "I have two shadows now, Mr. Jackson. One is the regular shadow any human being casts in light, and the other one...is some sort of supernatural creature that is attached to me and is slowly draining the life force out of me."

"Indeed," I said, keeping a straight face. "And when did you first notice this situation?"

"Three weeks ago last Friday. I was working in my home workshop. I was..I was alone, and pursuing a sort of electric experiment..." There was a short pause, "When I closed the relay-----"

"You noticed this immediately?" queried Will. His elbows were propped up in front of him on the desktop, his finger tips spread out and touching. This tended to give him a rather sinister appearance, what with his thick horn rimmed glasses and the flat-top haircut. He looked like some kind of stereotyped gangster thug out of the movies. I've told him more than once not to adopt that pose when he was talking to people. He never pays any attention.

Curtis glanced over and sort of shrunk back into the chair. "Yes, I did. I felt as tho some presence, some creature was with me, almost clinging to the back of my mind, if you can understand what I mean. Then I looked down and there were two of them, two shadows."

"Perhaps we could see this double shadow," I suggested.

"Certainly." Curtis stood up. I stood up too and Will came around from behind the desk. In the middle of the room under the modern multi-bulb chandelier there was a soft shadow off to the right bunched up behind him a bit, and there was a similar shadow, but sharper, very dark, off at about a thirty degree angle to the left of that.

Will gazed down at it. "The one on the left, the sharp dark one, that's the invading shadow, I take it?"

Curtis shuttered. "Yes, that's it."

Will stepped onto the shadow, with both feet. "Walk off a bit, toward Ken there, please."

Curtis did. The shadow moved with him just like a normal shadow, except there were two distinct shadows, one lightly dark and the other one very sharply defined and ebony black.

"Oh well," said Will with a little smile. "So much for the easy solution. So, Mr. Curtis, I understand you dabble in the supernatural. Tell us a bit about that, please, and why you think this shadow had something to do with the paranormal."

"I don't think, I know!" He blurted out, and looked from Will to me, then back again. Whatever the situation, he obviously believed that the problem was supernatural in nature.

Will got that belligerent look on his face and snapped a comment before I could step in. "Look, Curtis, you want my help, that means I have to know what was going on when this thing attached itself to you. Either give me some details, or get out!"

The look of shock on Curtis' face was one I had unfortunately seen on other potential clients before. I rushed to inject a few words.

"Mr. Curtis, anything you care to say here is completely confidential. But at the same time, anything, as in anything at all you can add to the background here would be useful in solving this problem. Surely you understand the necessity of a full disclosure, don't you?"

There was a short silence, fairly brief actually. Curtis started to speak: "All right. I'm interested in the spirit world. My wife and daughter died in a car accident a dozen years ago. It...devastated my life. I've been trying to find some way to communicate...reach them somehow, on the other side, for at least eleven years.

I tried all the mediums and spiritualists, all the fakes, the charlatans, and some that might not have been fakes, but none of them could get me in touch with the...with that other side..."

Will sat up and opened his mouth to say something that I'm sure was going to be insulting, so I said something instead.

"There's a lot of exploitation by frauds trying to capitalize on people like yourself. How long did it take you run thru the list of crooks?"

Curtis smiled a bit. “Only a couple of years, and the learning experience only cost me about eight thousand dollars. I think I got off pretty light, considering. But anyway, I’ve been looking into other avenues since then. I read some of the work of Omonsky, and the Thespian group, I’m sure you gentlemen know of these books. Luckily a lot of the more obscure material came back into print in the 1970s and early 1980s as part of that occult book club, New Age I guess they called it, back then. So I didn’t have to drop a fortune getting a lot of rare books in their original editions. And in recent years, a lot of the older and really obscure material has been posted on the Internet, for free. That helped too.

Anyway, I read Audry’s book on the legend lore connection with spirits and totems. You’re familiar with that?”

Both Will and I nodded. Claude Audry was a conscientious expert who tracked down old information and tried to shift it out scientifically.

“I was especially interested in his discussion of American Indian spirit stones, Star Stones he called them. They were supposed to help the shaman see into a different world, a world beyond our own where spirits lived and could communicate with us. The thing that struck my attention was the information that so far as Audry could tell, the incidents where they seemed most likely to produce results were during the beginning or end of summer storms or violent weather in the late autumn. What struck me was not the weather part, which is what Audry and most everybody else seems to zero in on, but the fact that these kinds of weather patterns are usually associated with a lot of lightning and potential electrical discharge building up in the atmosphere.

My thought was, what if the stones were reacting to the heightened electrical potential in the atmosphere. What if the electrical discharge was what was really causing the medicine men to be able to see across into that other spirit world? The more I thought about it, the more I thought I might be able to test this out.”

“But you would need a spirit stone,” I injected

“Indeed, yes. But, believe it or not, that was not as hard as it sounded. It turns out that local antique dealers and those New Age stores in the west sell these things all the time. Undoubtedly a lot of them are fake, but, here’s where the Internet came in handy again. I could check pictures of each item before I bought it. I bought five of them before I found one that...”

“That really worked?” I asked.

“Yes. I wish now that I had never found it!”

“Please, continue Mr. Curtis,” Will’s voice was almost cordial, quite unusual for him. “What did your Star Stone look like?”

“Well, most of them are quartz, rose quartz being the most favored type, altho Audry and a few other reports mentioned clear quartz and even yellow-tinged quartz. The stones are supposed to be a little smaller than a man’s fist, mostly worn down to an oblong or somewhat oval shape. Obviously any stone that looked too regular, or looked as though it might have been machine shaped or chipped was probably going to be a fake. The fifth one I tried was smaller than the rest, but longer, and had some irregularities in the stone pattern. They may have been impurities or fractures, I’m not sure.

Anyway, I tested it the same way I had the others, which was to put the stone into a clamp, and run an escalating electrical current thru the stone with an electrode at either end. Stone is not normally a conductor of electric current, but the impurities in most quartz allow for some electrical passage, usually at pretty high voltage levels.

Except this last one. As soon as the electrical level had been raised only slightly I noticed a change in the color of the quartz, it became milky white, then the white began to clear, and it was as though I were looking thru a window into another universe. There were orange colored mountains off in the distance, and a pool, or an oasis or small pond of some kind in the immediate foreground, and some strange trees, with bizarre triangle shaped leaves, bright scarlet in color. Then a serpent with moth-like wings of some kind flew across the scene. It was bizarre, and it was beautiful at the same time. I turned the whole apparatus, and the stone acted like a mobile viewer. I was able to shift the scene, and by turning around I could see a path leading up to the pond or lake or whatever it was, and the foliage and flowers, they were so beautiful and so brilliant, so fantastic they took my breath away!

I watched as some sort of animal, perhaps a cross between an animal and an insect, since I recall that it had six legs, yet it may have been as large as a dog, was coming across toward the pool, directly into my line of vision.

Then there was a flash of darkness, a sort of bright darkness. I can't explain it, shiny darkness perhaps. Anyway, the next thing I knew I felt something, some presence leap into my body, and attach itself to me, along my left side, but mostly I felt it in my mind. It was as tho something else was in there along with me. I sat down, and shut off the current, but the...thing, the presence, it didn't go away. It's been with me every since!

I felt tired. I went to bed. I woke up twelve hours later, but I was still tired. I was hungry, but food didn't taste very good and it didn't seem to renew me. I have been losing weight, and feeling lethargic and run down ever since. And always this, thing, this being, this monster, is dwelling with me inside, at the edge of my mind, gnawing away at my soul, sucking energy from me. I feel it constantly, this hideous presence! It's awful! This force, this curse from the other side, whatever it is, it's killing me!"

"You've seen your family doctor?"

"Yes, but what could he do? He thinks I'm losing my mind, overcome by depression. He thinks I'm going crazy, and sometimes I think he's right! I've thot about suicide, just to get this...thing, this monstrous evil force out of my mind and out of my body. If I'm dead at least I'll be free of it. At least I think I'll be free of it, but maybe this monster will follow me even beyond the grave! It's killing me anyway, slowly but surely." Curtis stopped talking, and looked over at Will.

"Hmm. Most interesting." Will stirred a bit and toyed with a ball-point pen on the desk top. "I doubt you're beset with any curse. It sounds like you have some sort of parasite attached to your mind and soul, probably a non-intelligent being who feeds on mobile creatures. When you activated the Star Stone you opened a gate into another world, another dimension perhaps, maybe even a glance back into time for all we know. But whatever you did, it was not a step into that world beyond normal human death, it was a trip somewhere more dangerous by far."

"I scarcely know, or care any more. Can you help me?"

Will tapped his fingertips together and made a grimace that looked horrible.

"I believe I can remove this creature from your body. However, it will cost you, a lot. My fee in this matter will be very large, since there is considerable danger involved."

"Danger? Like what?" I asked.

"The danger is that once we remove this shadow being from Mr. Curtis, that it may decide to glom onto somebody else, me or you, for instance. We certainly don't want that to happen. So Mr. Curtis, how much money can you raise in a hurry?"

"How fast?"

"Let us say, day after tomorrow, at Noon. I'm sure you want this problem solved as rapidly as possible."

"Yes, I do, why not here and now?"

"Because I want you to go home, and get that Spirit Stone that caused all this problem, and then I want you to go to your bank and get a certified cashier's check made out to Wilson Quimby in the amount of ninety thousand dollars."

"Ninety thousand? I haven't got ninety thousand dollars!"

"Come, come Mr. Curtis, is your life not worth ninety thousand dollars? A life free of this monster that is sucking your very soul to oblivion?"

"I can't give you what I don't have!"

"Then what do you have Mr. Curtis?"

"I have perhaps twenty thousand in my bank account, plus some stocks and bonds and other securities. It all might be worth fifty thousand dollars. Beyond that I have only my house and my collection..."

"Your collection you say?" Will's smile was predatory, to say the least. "Why, perhaps we can arrange something after all Mr. Curtis. You see what your meddling around in these occult matters has caused you, why not turn over your collection, books, gadgets, all of it to me, and I'll cut the bill down to, say, forty thousand. That's forty thousand by certified check, and the rest of your collection to me, by day after tomorrow."

"I couldn't possible convert it all to cash that soon!"

"Tut tut, no problem. We'll sign a contract. What can you raise in cash by day after tomorrow Mr. Curtis? Do the best you can, and return at Noon Wednesday. I'll draw up a contract. You can bring a witness if you want, bring your own lawyer if you like. Ken and one of his friends can act as my witnesses. But I feel we need to get this problem dealt with as soon as possible, before this mystic leech has sucked the very soul out of your body. Time may be very short here Mr. Curtis. We need to act rapidly. Do we have a bargain or not?"

Curtis was ashen faced. “Yes, yes, we have a bargain. The material I have...my collection, how will...”

“No problem at all. When you have satisfied yourself that I have solved the problem and freed you from this monster, Ken and his friend and I will take his van down to your house and pick up the collection. We’ll load it ourselves. I think you will agree after this unfortunate incident that you will not longer have any need for it.”

“Yes, I guess so. Yes. I agree. And you can really get this...thing out of me?”

“I am almost certain of it. So,” Will stood up. “That’s settled. Go and make your preparations and return here with that cashier’s check at Noon Wednesday.”

Curtis shook Will’s hand, turned and stumbled out of the house. I glared over at Will. “Forty thousand plus the man’s collection? That’s pretty sharp trading isn’t it?”

Will glared right back at me. “No, it is not. This bungling amateur has unleashed a genuine horror into the world. Luckily he came to see me before things got out of hand. If left alone until it killed Curtis, the monster would have jumped into another human host, perhaps even reproduced itself and spread like some sort of invasive disease. Who knows what havoc these monstrous shadow creatures would wreck on our world? The whole human species might be at risk here.

Mr. Curtis is a driven man. He has wasted twelve years of his life mourning a family that is dead and gone, and it’s time he got on with his life. Only a sharp lesson where it hurts him the most, in this case, his pocketbook and his accumulation of mystic clap-trap will suffice. Sting him hard while removing the source of his meddling and he may yet learn to live a full life without dwelling on a morbid tragedy from the past. His departed wife and child would have wanted it, and after he has had a chance to think it over, he will agree that this is for the best as well. But as long as that hodge-podge accumulation of occult junk is sitting around his house it will always be a temptation in the future, so we are going to remove that temptation, once and for all.”

“Ah,” was all I could say. I hadn’t thot it thru the way Will had.

“In addition there buddy, you and Willis have to be paid for your help in this deal.”

I gave a visible start. “Willis? What’s he got to do with this?”

“We will need him. Did you say he was over at that strip mall on the edge of town, your number three location? Isn’t that the same shopping center that has the tanning parlor and the makeup place and that dumpy dollar store there too?”

“Yes it is. Why?”

Will stood up. “Why don’t you call him and make sure he stays right there. Then you and I can drive over and discuss a bit of mechanical tinkering I want Willis to do. I’ll pay him, and you, of course, for your time and effort. I think you’ll both find this interesting.”

“Twenty-eight thousand for the check, and your signature on this contract, all the copies please, which is your promise for the rest, Mr. Curtis, and then we can get going on this business.”

Will gazed at the cashier’s bank check with an expression of hearty appreciation while Curtis signed the rest of the contract copies. Jack Willis and I witnessed the copies. Curtis hadn’t bothered to bring along any of his own friends to act as witnesses.

“Now what?” asked Curtis. Will stood up, slid his copies of the contract into the top center desk drawer, folded two copies for Curtis, shoved them into an envelope which he handed over to him and started toward the door.

“We’re going to take a little ride over to the edge of town Mr. Curtis. We’re going to face the problem head-on. But first, we’re going to deal with this. Catch, John,” said Will as he flipped the Spirit Stone over to Willis.

We walked outside and over to the edge of the covered front porch. There was some kind of short cement pillar there, some remnant from when the building was originally built. Willis put one of those little portable iron bar anvils carpenters used to use to straighten out bent nails on top of the pillar, and then pulled out a long handled hammer from behind it. He was just lifting it to get a good swing when Curtis gave a shout.

“Hey! No! You can’t destroy that?”

“Really? Why not?” Will turned to look at him.

“It’s an ancient relie! It’s a mystic doorway! It’s a priceless icon!”

Will smiled serenely. "And it's also mine. Remember, that was part of the deal. Cash, and your collection, including this Sun Stone."

Curtis took a half step forward. "But, it's the mystic doorway to another universe, the world where those shadow...things live. You can't destroy it!"

"Well now," said Will, "I believe your real concern here is that when I counteract the magic spell or the supernatural curse that had tied this monster to you, that you believe the creature will be naturally expelled back to its own realm. Rest assured that my handling of the problem does not require this stone, which, if you may recall, is only activated when some sort of electrical current affects it.

This so-called ancient relic acted as a doorway to let this shadow being attach itself to you. If somebody else fiddles around with it, who knows what other horrors might be unleashed on the world? But if we smash it to smithereens right now, that will never happen again, is that not correct?"

He turned back and gave Willis a sharp nod.

John took a full swing. The quartz shattered nicely under the very first blow. John gathered up the pieces and hammered them a few more times. In less than three minutes the entire stone had been reduced to gravel and powder. The expression on Curtis' face was quite distressing. He looked gaunt and horrified.

"Nicely done there Mr. Willis," said Will. "Now, what say we all pile into Ken's van and proceed to our destination."

The strip mall had cracked pavement along the edges, and a couple of empty store fronts at the far end of the complex. There were cars out in front of my coin-op laundry, but not many cars in the rest of the lot. Usually there were people at the Chinese buffet, but not so many today.

We headed toward the Sophisticated Lady tanning parlor. Curtis started to ask some questions, but Will motioned him to silence. The sign on the front of the tanning parlor said closed for the afternoon. Willis knocked on the front window, and the door opened almost immediately. The woman there with a cigarette dangling out of her fat lips looked pretty formidable.

"Well, you're on time, I'll say that for you." she said.

"Told you we would be," said John.

"Yeah, where's the money?" She had a hard-eyed look to her. The flannel nurse's top she was wearing with the little yellow teddy bears all over it was a note in irony so far as I was concerned.

"You'll get your money," said Will. "But first, let's see the tanning bed."

The woman turned and made her way toward the back of the building. We followed.

Curtis looking perturbed. "What's this all about? Tanning bed, I don't need any tan."

"No, you need your problem solved, and this tanning bed is part of the solution. Ah, here we go, this is the male sized bed?"

"Yeah. Its set up just the way the kid there wanted it. You gonna fix it back afterwards?"

"Indeed we will. And now, Ms Jacobs, here is your money." Will handed the lady a thick envelope. "Please go on over and enjoy a Chinese dinner. A leisurely Chinese dinner. About an hour and half worth. Do I make myself clear?"

The woman flipped the envelope open. I could see it was stuffed with ten dollar bills. "You got it honey. You gonna send the kid over when you finish?"

"That we will. Now, have a good meal."

We waited until she was gone. John locked the front door after her.

"She may come back sooner than that, you know," said John. "She's curious as a cat."

Will smirked. "Who cares? This shouldn't take very long at all. All right Mr. Curtis, what you are going to do is disrobe, and get inside this tanning bed here. And after you lay down, I'm going to ask you to hold this thermos bottle, this one right here."

Will passed held up a small thermos bottle. It was short and squat, the kind used for soup or stew, with a very large mouth, only the mouth was covered over with some wide mesh nylon screening, and there was movement inside the bottle behind that screen.

"What's in the bottle?"

"Crickets Mr. Curtis, crickets. Three of them. Three of the largest and hopefully liveliest crickets the local bait shop could find for us. These are prime crickets Mr. Curtis, they cost two dollars each, true royalty among the live bait hierarchy, if you will."

"I don't understand."

“Please start undressing and I’ll explain.”

Curtis hesitated

“Mr. Curtis, do you want my help or not? We are all males here, we’ve all seen what a naked human being looks like, and your body isn’t going to be much different than ours, so please, get undressed and lay down inside that tanning bed while I explain the situation.”

Curtis sighted, and began taking off his clothes, shoes first.

“What we want to do is make life uncomfortable for your shadow parasite. I believe the best way to do that is to make it very bright for him. Your description of this other world where it originally lived indicated relatively moist, or at least humid conditions. I think that if we apply some heat that it will be uncomfortable, and more than that, if it has no place to cast its own shadow that it will abandon you as a host and find some other host to move into.

“Other host? You mean...”

“Absolutely correct. These crickets, or at least one of them, will be the next host, if all goes well. Your mention of seeing a six-legged creature in this other world that resembled a large insect gave me the idea. Perhaps insects are the monster’s normal prey.

You will hold the bottle in your left hand, like this, so that the lip of the bottle casts a shadow, and of course, inside the bottle, the crickets will cast their own shadows. It is my belief that this creature must see a shadow in order to attach itself to a new host. With this all-over tanning booth, all the lights turned on high, plus a few extra bits of fluorescent tubing our friend Mr. Willis has added yesterday, you are going to be bathed in solid light that allows absolutely no shadows of any kind. You will have to close your eyes, because the brightness is going to be pretty intense, and probably the heat will be intense too.

That means, as soon as you feel the thing leaving you and going, hopefully, into the body of one of these crickets, you will need to immediately take the cap you will hold in your right hand, bring it over and cover the bottle and screw it on, as smoothly as possible. Understand? Good.

Why don’t we just practice the maneuver a few times to make sure you can do it right? We don’t want any slip-ups here. When and only when you have completed the maneuver and screwed the cap on this thermos bottle completely tight, only then Mr. Curtis, are you to shout out to us and we will open this tanning table lid and let you out. Not a second before. Do you understand me? This is your only chance to get rid of this loathsome parasite, so please don’t muff it.”

Meanwhile, John was in the wash room filling up another large container with water. When it was a bit over half full he and I each grabbed a side handle and moved it into the tanning room.

“Don’t concern yourself with the water bucket Mr. Curtis. It’s just an extra precaution. Ah, all ready? Good. Use the steps there and lay down inside. Please be careful, that plastic shield is supposed to be able to bear your weight, but it may not be all that sturdy. There are extra fluorescent light tubes underneath it. Ken, can you help...”

Curtis stepped up and sort of half rolled into the tanning cabinet. “I’ve got it. I’m fine,” he said.

“Very good. Now. Mr. Curtis, here is your thermos. The crickets are quite curious about you. I hope they will continue to be. Hold it in your left hand, no a bit closer to your side. Remember the lid of the tanning table is going to be shut down on you. Ready now, move your hand over a bit. Good. Now, a practice swing across your body when you feel that the parasite is gone, and clap the lid over the bottle. Very good. Let’s run thru it again. Remember, your eyes will be closed inside the cabinet.”

Curtis ran thru it seven times before Will was satisfied that he had the movement down pat enough to be comfortable with it.

“John, why don’t you and Ken get the other things out of the back of the truck, please, while I close the lid on Mr. Curtis. No, no, we will not be turning the lights on just yet. I want you to run thru the thermos movement at least a few more times and get the feel of the tanning bed with the top down.”

John and I walked out to the van and started taking out the photo studio arc lights we had loaded in early this morning. These were the kind of tripod lights professional photo studios use for portrait sittings, only we had replaced their bulbs with ultra-bright halogens.

Back inside we set the lights up all around the tanning booth. John and I donned sun glasses, while Will fished a pair out of his shirt pocket. Will kept up a patter of conversation with Curtis, asking him to go thru the lid procedure just once more, refusing to answer any questions about what we were doing out here. Finally we were ready.

“All right Mr. Curtis, we are going to turn on the tanning table lights. Please shut your eyes now. Just hold the lids shut normally, don’t squinch them up. All right, ready, lights, now!”

John threw two switches. The arc lights went on first, then the tanning bed lights. The light was so intense it looked like the whole room was in the middle of some kind of white fireball.

“How we doing in there Mr. Curtis? Please do not speak. Remember, if you open your mouth it may form a shadow in your throat, and we don’t want any shadows in that tanning bed at all.”

“Now,” whispered Will, and motioned with his hand. John reached inside the small box and pulled out a little white mouse, a mouse in a harness with two long strings attached to it. I grabbed one end, and moved over to the right side, John held the other end. We made sure we were on the backside of the arc lamps. The mouse was in the middle area, wiggling and clawing round in the air, but the harness was tight around his body, he couldn’t get loose. We lowered the mouse to the floor in front of the tanning booth in the full glare of all those arc lights, and knelt down so we were holding the string tight against the floor, and thus the mouse was held right down onto the floor as well. We needed him to be more or less stationary. I noticed that even in all that light, that the mouse was casting a shadow off to one side.

The time seemed to drag past. It couldn’t have been more than five or six minutes, but it seemed a lot longer. It was hot as hell out here, and I wondered how bad it must be for Curtis inside that tanning booth. Suddenly there was a movement inside the cabinet. We all heard it, a creak, then the ‘cluck’ sound of the cap on top of the thermos and the sound of the lid screwing down tight.

“Now!” Curtis shouted. “In bottle. Now! Open up!”

“One moment Curtis. I’ve just got to unlatch this thing.” Will stepped over behind the booth. His hand was in a heavy winter glove. He reached across, and pulled the tanning cabinet lid up so that the lid concealed him as it rose.

“*Aaahh! My eyes!*” screamed Curtis as he tried to sit up. He reeled backward, hit the edge of the lid with his head and dropped like a rock, completely unconscious.

There was a flash of darkness. That’s the only way I can describe it, a flash of darkness that went from Curtis right over and into the mouse. It was lightning fast, but we all saw it. I almost let go my end of the string, but luckily I didn’t.

“Now, gentlemen, right now!” shouted Will.

John and I pulled on the string, the mouse was suspended in mid air, squirming like crazy. As fast as we could while maneuvering from behind those blazing arc lamps, we moved the mouse so it was directly over the container of cold water. Carefully we dropped the mouse into the water. It swam to the sides, but the plastic bucket sides were so steep above the water level that it couldn’t get out. It started to try and climb up my side of the string but I tossed my end over toward the water filled container and so did John. With no tension the mouse couldn’t climb up the limp string.

Will ran around behind the circle of arc lamps and grabbed the can cover. In a flash he stepped from behind a lamp tripod and snapped the cover down on top of the container, tight. It was a waterproof seal, or so it said. We all heard it click into place. But just to be sure, John was already plugging in a glue gun, and with six glue sticks there, he was going to seal up the edges of the container so the mouse, and the shadow parasite trapped inside the mouse, would never be able to escape.

Will shut the arc lights off, and then turned the tanning table lights off, just as Curtis was starting to sit up a little. He had a bit of sunburn on his body, but it wasn’t as bad as I had thought it would be.

“I’m...I’m... That thing is gone!” A look of such joy spread across his face as I don’t believe I’ve ever seen on a human being before. “How did you know?”

“Why don’t you get dressed Mr. Curtis. Oh, wait, here’s a towel, you might want to wipe all that sweat off first. You get fixed up, while we get this gear out and John puts this tanning table back the way it originally was, then we can talk. I wouldn’t mind some Chinese chow, myself. How about you boys?”

“Yeah, right by me,” I said. The arc lamps were heavy, but you know, it didn’t seem like much of a job getting them back into the van. I felt pretty good about the whole escapade.

“I thought the trick with the crickets was really going to work,” said Will, spearing a small egg roll with his fork. “But then I started to think about it. What if the creature was actually intelligent, or even semi-intelligent? Even if it was as smart as the typical family dog it would be pretty suspicious when the light forced it out of

your body and it saw some handy insects right close. If it had any kind of intelligence, it would suspect a trap. It would then, if I was right, try to force you to get the tanning booth open and then it would leap into another human body nearby, and probably do a better job of concealing itself this time than it had with you, Curtis.”

“That’s exactly what it did. It forced me to put the cap on the thermos and shout out to you. I knew it was going to leave me, it was just holding on by a thread, but it was really clawing and thrashing around, altho those are the wrong words, chewing up my mind. The pain was so awful I was willing to do anything it wanted me to. When you opened the tanning table and all that outside light hit me I felt the thing panic. The pain when it ripped itself out of my skull...” Curtis shuddered. He reached for another sip of tea.

“Well,” said Will, “With all that light, and the only live object it could see being that mouse, and certainly the only live object it could see that was casting any kind of shadow, it had to move, and it did move, right into the mouse. And then John and Ken dropped the mouse into the water bucket.”

John leaned forward, “But how did you know the creature couldn’t leave the mouse Mr. Quimby?”

“I didn’t. I had to gamble on that, same as I gambled on the crickets. But it seemed unlikely that the creature would willingly abandon a host body unless that body was dead or near death, and of course, unless a suitable second host was nearby, and casting a shadow. If it had gone for the crickets, the thermos lid would have sealed it in. With all that light on the mouse, and no place for it to go, that it could see to go anyway, getting the mouse into the bucket, and the lid on the bucket was a risk, but we made it work.”

“Why a water bucket? I don’t get that part,” I asked.

“With all the Sun Stones, spirit stones, whatever you want to call them out there, a few of which apparently really worked, why had no shadow creatures crossed over before? Because the common factor here was water, rain water. My thot was that the water was some sort of inhibiting factor. Maybe the creatures can’t move thru water which is why none of those old shamen got caught by shadow demons, that we know of anyway. I figured that putting the new host into a water bucket, and sealing him in there would make certain he couldn’t jump to another host.

So, we have our tub of water, with our drowned mouse, and we are going to take that tub of water, sealed up, and move it out into the ocean this very afternoon in Ken’s motor launch, and toss it into the deepest part of the Atlantic we can reach.”

“Why not just take it out to Dughan’s lake? That’s closer, and it’s pretty deep, from what I hear,” said John, between mouthfuls.

“Because lakes sometimes get drained, by human hands or by acts of nature, but I don’t think the ocean is ever going to get drained, at least not for the next billion years or so. I don’t care to take any chances with something as malevolent as that shadow parasite.

And then, tomorrow around Noon, we three will drive over to pick up your collection of paranormal stuff, Mr. Curtis.”

Curtis smiled a little, a genuine smile of relief. “You can have it. Good riddance to the whole pile.”

“And that, I think, should be the end of that,” said Will, and chomped down on the end of the egg roll. “Altho I could use another glass of Mello Yello. How about you gentlemen?”



cinema



Ready Player One

I was especially interested in seeing this movie, because I had read the novel by Ernest Cline. It is set in dystopian 2045, which is beset by climate change, energy shortages, famine, poverty, disease, and war. Its main character, Wade Watts (Tye Sheridan), lives with his aunt in a Columbus, Ohio slum called “The Stacks”, because it consists of doublewide trailers arranged vertically. Every day he and many other people escape into a virtual world called the OASIS. The plot is essentially a treasure hunt like Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory, because the late founder of OASIS, James Halliday (Mark Rylance), has left an “Easter Egg”, a hidden object, somewhere in the virtual world. Whosoever finds the Easter Egg inherits Halliday’s vast wealth, including ownership of OASIS. (Halliday was the richest person in the world at the time of his death.) It is full of references to pop culture, especially the 1980s. Watts, in his avatar of Perzival, for instance, drives a DeLorean. Other references include the films Excalibur, Spaceballs, Aliens, the 1953 version of The War of the Worlds, Bill and Ted’s Excellent Adventure, Child’s Play, Family Ties, John Hughes movies, The Iron Giant, Jurassic Park, King Kong, Star Trek, and the Stanley Kubrick adaptation of The Shining. Perzival’s main rival is Art3mis (Olivia Cooke), a flirtatious punk rock female avatar

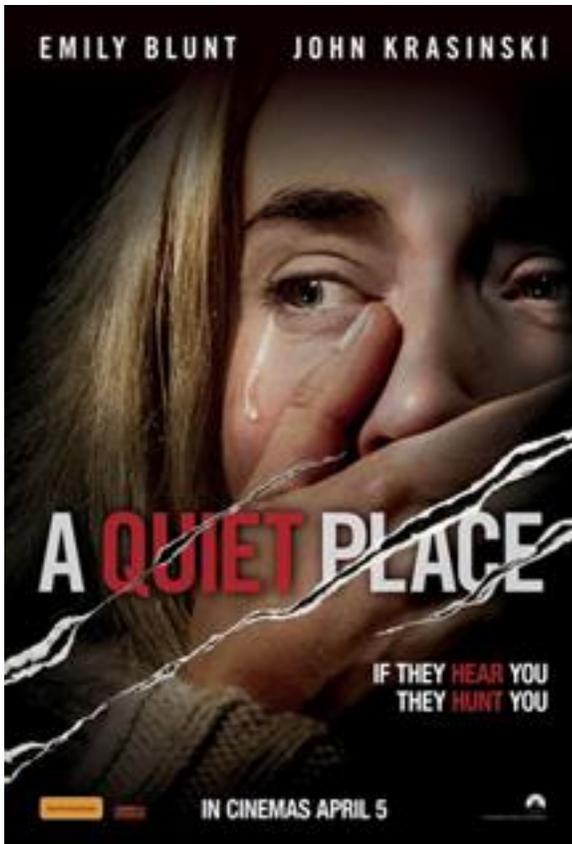
that Watts hopes is a girl in real life, and his best friends in the OASIS are Aich (Lena Waithe), Sho (Philip Zhao), and Daito (Win Morisaki). The principal villain is Nolan Sorrento (Ben Mendelsohn), the CEO of a large tech corporation, and he employs mercenaries to help him find the Easter Egg, both in OASIS and the real world.

Usually I don’t like it when a film deviates so much from the book. For instance, Wade doesn’t meet the real person behind Art3mis until late in the book, but in the movie he meets her about halfway through. However, this non-stop action movie, directed by Steven Spielberg, is so well done that I can overlook the deviations.

---review by Tom Feller

A Quiet Place

The premise of this horror film, one of the scariest and most suspenseful I’ve seen in a long time, is that the Earth has become overrun with monsters that are blind so they use their hearing to find their prey. The viewer does not seem them in their entirety until well into the story, but they are eventually revealed to resemble the ones in movies such as Alien and Predator. The movie never says whether the monsters are supernatural, extra-terrestrial, or the product of an experiment gone very, very wrong. There is very little spoken dialogue, and the characters communicate via sign language so that the monsters can’t find them. The story is told about



one farm family in upstate New York: father (John Krasinski, who also directed and co-wrote the original screenplay), mother (Emily Blunt), and children (Millicent Simmonds, Noah Jupe, and Cade Woodward), and there is only one other character, billed as “Man in the woods” (Leon Russom). Simmonds is deaf, by the way. They are all excellent, and the film assumes that viewers have some intelligence. Another complication is that the mother is pregnant, and she has the challenge of giving birth silently without anesthetic and then how to deal with a crying baby. My only quibbles were that I did not believe that they could plant straight rows of corn without farm animals or tractors and that the background music was unnecessary.

---review by Tom Feller

Avengers: Infinity War

This is the 19th and longest movie in the “Marvel Cinematic Universe”. Although it is not necessary to see all 18 of the previous ones, it would be useful, because there are no character introductions. As soon as they appear on the screen, the viewer is expected to know their names, their origins and powers, and their personalities. In the opening, Thanos (Josh Brolin), the principal villain, beats up both Thor (Liam Hemsworth) and Hulk (Mark Ruffalo) and

outwits Loki (Tom Hiddleston). Thanos is searching for the Infinity Stones. There are six of them, and two just happen to be on Earth. One is inside a medallion worn by Doctor Strange (Benedict Cumberbatch), and the other is inside the head of Vision (Paul Bettany).

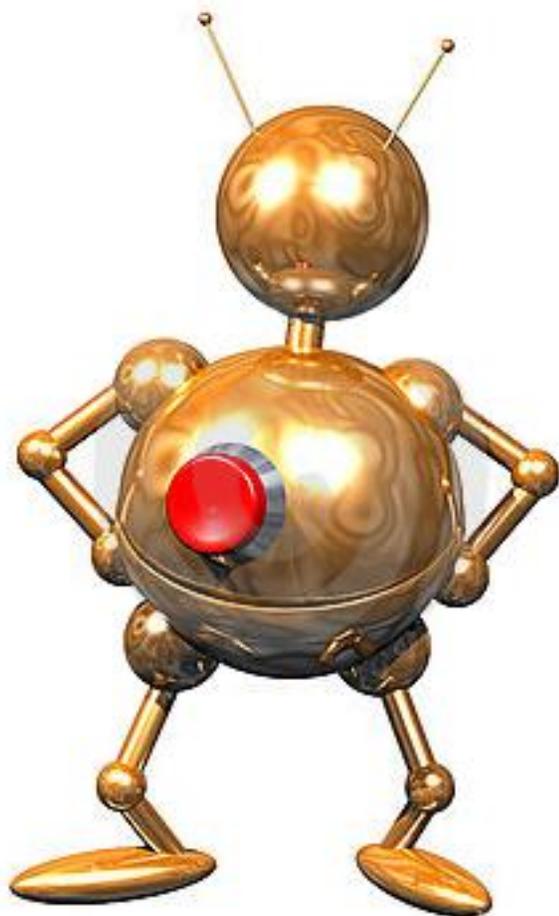
If Thanos obtains all six stones, he plans to wipe out half the life in the universe, because he is a Malthusian who believes that so much life will exhaust the universe’s resources. Obviously, the Avengers, including Iron Man (Robert Downey, jr.), Black Widow (Scarlett Johansson), War Machine (Don Cheadle), Scarlett Witch (Elizabeth Olsen), Falcon (Anthony Mackie), and Captain America (Chris Evans) oppose him, and they are assisted by other heroes such as Black Panther (Chadwick Boseman), Winter Soldier (Sebastian Stan), Spiderman (Tom Holland), and the Guardians of the Galaxy (Chris Pratt, Dave Bautista, Bradley Cooper, Vin Diesel, Zoe Saldana, Karen Gillan, and Pom Klementieff).

Actually, this film is just as much a Guardians of the Galaxy movie as it is an Avengers one, because Thanos is the step father of Gamora (Saldana) and Nebula (Gillan). I was amazed at how well the filmmakers juggle all those characters, and the movie overall is better than I expected.

Warning: This movie is the first of two parts. The second part will come out next year.

---review by Tom Feller





FANZINE REVIEWS

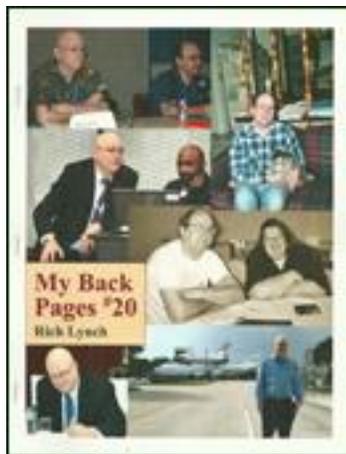
A regular feature of
TIGHTBEAM

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 as well as the e-zines that I have received since the last issue of *The Insider* was mailed out. Copies of fanzines both print and pixel types intended for review

should be sent to---**Robert Jennings; 29 Whiting Rd.; Oxford, MA 01540-2035 or fabficbks@aol.com**

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 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.



MY BACK PAGES #20

8-1/2X11"; 30 pages; irregular, from Rich Lynch; P.O. Box 3129; Gaithersburg, MD 20885---The Usual

This is one of the most attractive, well produced fanzines being produced these days. The layout is quite professional, and the issue abounds with full color photographs on almost every page. The appearance is visually stunning.

Each issue of this zine is composed mostly of articles Rich wrote in the past that were primarily presented to a limited audience, as thru a science fiction apa, for example. Some of them are relatively recent write-ups, others are drawn from his long history as an active science fiction fan. This issue most of the material is resurrected from the somewhat distant past, altho there are reprints of several articles he wrote last year.

This concept of pulling articles from low circulation or limited edition fanzines that very few people have had a chance to read, and presenting them in a new anthology format so they can be read by a much wider audience is a

good idea that other fans might want to pursue. Rich goes the format one better, by writing connecting mini-articles after each longer piece, explaining some additional details and bridging the articles together. He also

usually provides additional new original articles in each issue so it's not a total reprint collection, but, not this time round.

It's almost summer time, and in spring a trufan's thots naturally turn to---conventions! It's science fiction convention time around the world, and this issue Rich devotes most of the issue to write-ups of past WorldCon conventions attended, and the travels/adventures/sights experienced along the way to and from/after each convention. He notes that he and his wife Nicki attended their first WorldCon in 1978, forty years ago, and he has managed to attend quite a few since then.

He presents write-ups of the trip to and attendance of the 1996 L.A. WorldCon, and the 2017 MidAmericaCon. In truth there is some convention reporting here, with some photos, but mostly these articles discuss his travels to assorted sights around the cities where the conventions were held.

The report on the 2017 convention is the longest article in the issue. He devotes time and space to discussing some of the panels he was on, and some of the problems with the Hugo voting procedure that the convention business meeting tried to correct. There are lots of remarks and observations about places around St. Louis and the surrounding area that he and Nicki managed to visit. He notes that there is a lot of local color and interesting places that even the local residents may not be aware of (or, perhaps, not even care about). Full color photos abound.

Rich has a government job dealing with environmental issues that requires him to travel frequently, and frequently he is directed to go to far distant exotic locations to deal with conferences and scientific forums he helps to organize. Sometimes he gets a day or two or even three off before or after the event, and he makes full use of the time to explore the local area and examine the history and sights. He often discusses these junkets around the country and around the world, accompanied by color photos of scenes, people, relics, buildings, oddities--all kinds of fascinating things.

This time round he relates his experiences in Abu Dhabi, a Persian Gulf nation that is part of the United Arab Emirates. The region, he notes, has been settled for many thousands of years, but the discovery of oil transformed a backwater rural nation into a modern powerhouse. One thing that did not change with the advent of modern civilization was the heat. The average springtime temperatures while he was there was 105+ degrees every day! He has many interesting things to report about his visit, and lots of interesting color photos to go with the narrative.

And he writes well about his adventures. I have to admit that travel reports by most people tend to be pretty dull stuff. They tend to be mainly lists of people seen, foods eaten, travel problems and the big event of the excursion. For whatever reason fans seemed obsessed with the foods they gobbled down at conventions or on travel jaunts, and they report it avidly, as tho anybody else actually cared about what they had for lunch that particular day. Rich doesn't do any of that. He concentrates on things that a general reader would find intriguing or amusing and writes about them in a casual yet detailed manner that makes even the most obscure and unique thing interesting.

There is a short article on Flying Saucer related movies from the fifties that he remembers fondly, stepping stones in the development of his life-long interest in science fiction literature. There is also an article on attending a dinner meeting at the Cato institute (a libertarian think-tank in Washington, D.C.), where the author of a newly published book was speaking on the futility of campaign finance reform. For the record, Rich disagreed with him, but when he tried to raise some counter points the speaker was able to side-step his concerns and return to the subject of hyping his new book.

A couple of additional one pagers relate his meeting with longtime fan Harry Warner in the company of two Australian fans, and their almost-meeting with movie star Roy Rogers. Then there is a one pager about how he handled photographing last year's solar eclipse.

It's all good fun stuff, and there's more here as well, packed between two full color covers that show, by my count, twelve different photographs of Rich himself at various different ages in various different locations. There may be some kind of deep personal or sociological reason why the covers to all of these fanzines always feature a collection of shots of the editor, but thus far no one has figured out what it might be. I tried to raise the question with editor Lynch last year, but never got an answer. Maybe it's part of some kind of occult Mystic rite that ensures his color photos each issue come out sharp and clear. Running a dozen biographic photos on each cover is probably easier than sacrificing a virgin on an Aztec stone alter anyway.

In years past Rich and Nicki won multiple Hugo Awards for their fanzine *Mimosa*. *Mimosa* is no longer being published, but folks who appreciated that publication would do well to check out this issue of *My Back Pages*.



DASFAX June 2018 8-1/2x11", 10 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.

There are short columns by the club President discussing recent and upcoming club events, and even shorter notes by the Secretary, plus essential club info.

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. The subject range is 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.

In keeping with the spring theme reverberating thru fandom, this issue focuses on science fiction conventions Jackson has attended, cons that made memorable impressions on him, specifically the 1976 Westercon which was held in Los Angeles that year. He reprints his entire con report from that year, even going so far as to reproduce the typewriter font he used in his original report, and printing the report in blue ink (since he can't duplicate the original twiltone paper or mimeo printing).

Is this carrying nostalgia too far? Maybe. In order to make the con report more understandable to modern readers (1976 was a loooonnnng time ago), he even has footnotes and explanations of terms, personalities, events that he assumes most people either never heard of before, or maybe have just forgotten after all this time. It was an interesting experience reading a few sentences, then having to flip to the last sheet of the zine to read the foot notes and addendums. (Not necessarily always an enlightening experience, but definitely interesting.)

The con report dwells on the problems with the convention hotel, and the author's gosh-wow feelings when he actually got to meet several real life honest to Ghu professional science fiction writers, and discovered that they were actually human beings, usually friendly human beings happy to sign books and happy to discuss their works and the field of science fiction in general with him. The honest enthusiasm of attending this first major convention of Jackson's experience shines thru this con report even after more than forty years.

More than that, it is a capsule-glimpse into the past thru the eyes of a young SF reader relatively new to the world of fandom; a time many old fans might have forgotten, when the world of science fiction was bright and new and exciting, where attending a convention where you could actually meet other fans in person, face to face, and discuss their hobby with fans and pros alike was a monumental event. That sense of wonder often fades with the passage of time, so it was refreshing to read this report that actually rekindled that feeling of enthusiasm and joy. Nicely done, and well worth the effort, blue ink and all.

Dasfax carries another long 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.

**THE DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE
IS august 20, 2018**