



Tightbeam #288

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This is issue **#288, September 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—

fabficbks@aol.com or

thru regular mail at 29 Whiting Rd. Oxford, MA 01540-2035

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EDITORIAL RAMBLINGS

OUR COVER THIS ISSUE

is a photograph of a Space X Falcon 9 launching from Cape Canaveral Air Force Base on July 22, carrying a Telstar Vantage satellite into orbit.

HARLAN ELLISON DIED ON JUNE 28TH

Prominent science fiction author, long time fan, social activist, writer of scripts for television and movies, reviewer of everything from political philosophy to new comic books, he was an energetic, sometimes bombastic personality know for the extremes of his personality and the tremendous variety of his writing.

Since his passing the internet has been ablaze with comments and anecdotes about him and his legacy to the genre he loved. Here is an anecdote you may not have seen before. Written by Mark Evanier, it appeared on his excellent internet blog News From Me. Mark Evanier is a professional writer of animation cartoons, comic books, television and movie scripts, non-fiction books, and is a long time fan of comics, animation, and musical theater. His on-line blog is always interesting and fact filled. It is also often amusing and can be read at this URL--- <https://www.newsfromme.com/>

By actual count, there are 8,448,329 anecdotes about Harlan Ellison, 7,609,224 of which are actually true. This is one that fits into both categories and it involves a man named Julius Schwartz who was an important editor for DC Comics and a semi-important figure in the science-fiction community. Julie and Harlan had an extremely close relationship that some would describe as "father-son." Some would also tell you that at times, Julie — though he was nineteen years older than Harlan — was in the "son" role.

Most of the time though, Julie was the obstreperous adult and Harlan, the even-more-obstreperous child. Every Wednesday morning for a very long time, Julie (in the DC offices in New York) would phone Harlan (in his home in Southern California) and they'd talk about anything and everything. One day around 1971, the topic somehow ventured to the notion of Harlan, who had done very little writing for comic books, writing a Batman story. Julie Schwartz was the editor of *Batman* and *Detective Comics* at the time. Harlan did not want to do it with any sort of deadline but he said he would come up with something in the near future.

This was in 1971.

Now with Harlan's passing, the Internet is filled with remembrances and honors and cyber-mourning and tributes, and in lot of them you'll see some version of the phrase, "He inspired me to become a writer." Harlan did a lot of that. He inspired people in other ways, as well. He occasionally inspired someone to hate Harlan Ellison but we won't go into that here. Here, I'm celebrating him for inspiring so many people in a good way. Like I said, he was a writer who made other writers proud to be writers.

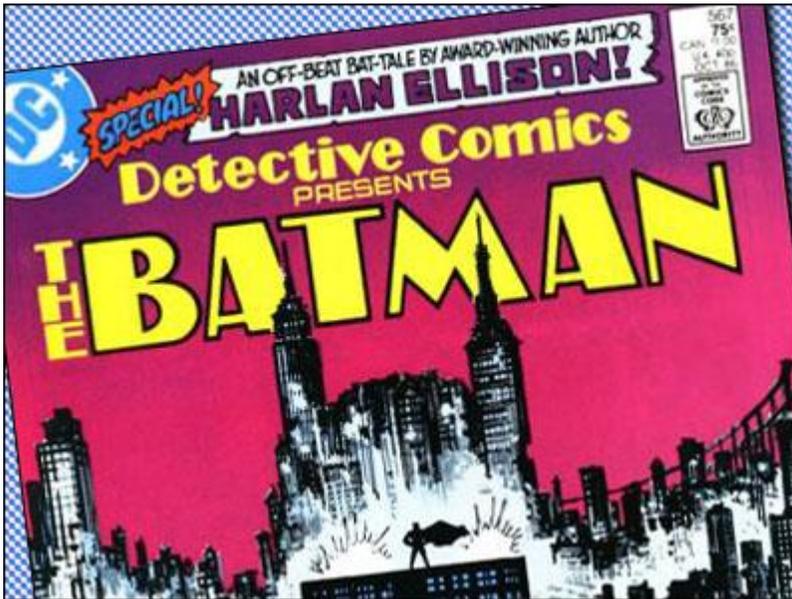
So many of us learned good, valuable things from him but a few writers I can think of learned to yell and scream about every rewrite, every note, every alteration. I can't guarantee the following but supposedly, someone once asked Ray Bradbury if it was a wise idea for a writer to fight about each bit of interference the way Harlan did. Bradbury reportedly replied — and this sure sounds like an answer he'd give — "I don't know if that's okay but if you try it, check first and make sure you have the talents of a Harlan Ellison."

(In truth, Harlan did not turn every single bit of producer or editor or network input into a battle. It's just that when he did, we who admired his work all heard about it. And heard about it. And heard about it.)

So there might have been a few wrong lessons to learn from the man. More serious was his occasional inability to meet deadlines. He turned his chronic tardiness in everyday life into one of his better stories, "Repent,

Harlequin!' Said the Ticktockman." It's a fascinating work because he seems to have tried to take every rule of Good Writing he could think of, violate it and still wind up with Good Writing. I know some disagree but I kind of think he made it.

But he was late with so much of what he wrote, and I suspect...well, I know there are writers who think, "If Harlan Ellison can be weeks/months/years late, so can I." To quote Ray Bradbury again, assuming he even said it, "I don't know if that's okay but if you try it, check first and make sure you have the talents of a Harlan Ellison."



One might argue that he was not late with the Batman story he promised in 1971 to write for Julie Schwartz since he never had a firm deadline. But it finally saw print in the October, 1986 issue of *Detective Comics*, fifteen years later...and eight years after Julie had stepped down as the editor of *Detective Comics*. Deadline or no deadline, that's late.

But let us step back to the ten-year anniversary of the promise to write this story. Imagine yourself back at the Comic-Con International in San Diego in 1981. It was at the El Cortez Hotel in that city and it wasn't even the Comic-Con International yet. It was the San Diego Comic Con and attendance was a whopping — brace yourself — 5000 people. Now, there's 5000 people in the hall dressed as Harley Quinn, many of them even women.

We're at the awards ceremony where they're presenting not the Eisner Awards like they do nowadays but the Inkpot Awards. They still give out Inkpot Awards but at panels and other programming, not at the big awards ceremony. One of them is to be presented to Julius Schwartz and there to watch him receive it is his friend (and former client back when Julie was an agent), Ray Bradbury.

I am seated at a table in the hall awaiting that impending moment when someone comes up to me and whispers that there's a man outside who needs to talk to me. "He says it's urgent," says the whisperer so I get up and go out to the hall and there is Harlan, who had not otherwise made an appearance at the con. He is clutching a manila which he informs me contains his Batman script. He drove down to the con to surprise Julie with it and he wants me to help him sneak into the ballroom so he can make an effective entrance. At the proper moment — which may only be seconds away — he will spring up onto the stage and turn in the script in front of what seems like the entire professional comic book community.

Just then, we hear from inside the hall that the next Inkpot recipient is Julius Schwartz. There's a burst of applause and Harlan urges, "Quick! Get me in there while he's still on the stage!"

I say, "Relax! If Julie's making an acceptance speech, we have plenty of time." I tell Harlan to follow me and I will be his shield. I am 6'3" and somewhat wide. You could have hidden Lawrence Welk and his entire orchestra behind me. Harlan is 5'5" and somewhat narrow so as I make my way through the ballroom, few people notice that he is shadowing me. When I get to a pillar near the stage, I motion that he should hide behind it and he does as I continue on back to my seat.

Julie Schwartz is on the stage and so are Ray Bradbury and few other folks. Julie is thanking everyone and talking about how in his career, he was worked with so many talented writers and artists. Utterly unaware Harlan is even in the same area code let alone twelve feet away, he says something like, "Everyone helped me by getting their work in on time. Well, except for one person but I probably shouldn't mention his name."

Someone yells out, "Mention his name!" Once when Harlan told this story, he said it was me but I'm pretty sure it wasn't. I sorta recalled it was him but he would have remembered if it had been him. Whoever yells it out causes Julie to say, "It was Harlan Ellison!" There is a big laugh from the audience...and I don't think any of them had spotted Harlan behind that pillar. Julie adds, "He promised me a script ten years ago and I'll probably never see it. If I do, I'll probably reject it!"

Suddenly, Harlan leaps from behind the pillar and, making his way to the stage, he proudly waves the envelope. The audience is hysterical and Julie is gasping in amazement and laughing and having some sort of editorial seizure all at the same time. I doubt anyone who was there will forget that moment.

Once on stage, Harlan whispers something to Julie who laughs, then Harlan grabs the microphone and makes a wonderful speech about the honor of writing a Batman script for the great Julius Schwartz. Jackie Estrada, who now runs the big awards event at Comic-Con International, was there at that moment with her camera. Here with her permission is a photo she took. If you click it on it, it will fill your screen...but then come back and I will describe a few things to you.



Photo by Jackie Estrada

The gent at the left is Ray Bradbury. In the back is Sergio Aragonés who was onstage during the ceremony to draw cartoons of the winners. You may notice that Sergio never gets older although his mustache does. You

can only see a little of the man next to him but it's almost certainly Shel Dorf, one of the founders of Comic-Con. And then you have Harlan and Julie.

There is more talk and thanks and hugging and then Ray, Harlan and Julie depart the stage and the next award is presented. I am curious as to what it was that Harlan whispered to Julie when he got up there so as soon as the festivities end, I scoot over to Julie's table and I ask.

He leans in confidentially to me and says, "He said, 'It's just the first page but I promise I'll finish it in the next week.'" Julie then opens the envelope to show me and, sure enough, it's a title page and about fourteen sheets of blank paper.

THIS WILL BE MY LAST ISSUE AS EDITOR OF TIGHTBEAM

People who have read my comments made in the July issue of TNFF, the club's monthly newszine, will understand my reasons for passing the editorial torch. In the future a new editor will probably have a different vision and viewpoint about *Tightbeam* and how the fanzine should be run.

I have enjoyed my run as editor, and I want to extend my deepest thanks for all the writers and artists who have so generously contributed their time and talents to this publication. I hope you who are reading this have enjoyed *Tightbeam* as well.



BOOKS

The Eye Of The World by Robert Jordan

This is the first book of the ponderous Wheel of Time series. After attending Jordoncon and seeing just how many people live and breathe these books I decided to give the series another try.

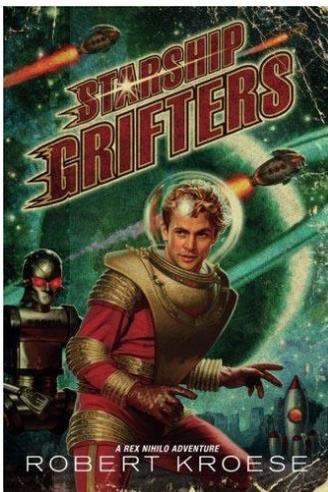
I tried reading “The Eye of the World” years ago when Robert Jordon was gaining popularity, and I just couldn’t get into it. The first quarter of the book moves so slowly that it was difficult to get past it, but once the action starts, the pace does pick up. I did make it through “The Eye of the World” this time, but I don’t really see any reason to continue.

The Wheel Of Time series is an exploration of the Eternal Struggle between Good and Evil, and finding a balance between the two. That’s a theme that’s launched its share of stories, from Lord of the Rings to Star Wars. My problem with TWOT is that it really doesn’t go anywhere new or surprising. In the early parts of the book we are introduced to a group of charming country folk obviously destined for Great Things as a band of Faithful Companions. From the first chapters I could see that Our Hero Rand al’Thor is destined to wield great power and survive numerous tests and battles before confronting the Evil Overlord.

Most of the action in the book is a Hero’s Journey from the rustic mountain farmlands to the big cities and capitals of magic. There was absolutely nothing surprising in the progress of this trip. The intrepid Band escapes danger in their peaceful village and comes into contact with a series of adventures, monsters, and magic. All four of the farm kids develop special powers, with Rand getting the lion’s share. Jordan takes great pains to explain to us that all of this has happened before and will happen again as The Wheel of Time turns. There’s very little left up to free will or chance.

Jordan’s writing is straightforward and indistinctive. There aren’t a lot of great passages to highlight nor are there many difficult to follow sentences that might require careful reading to parse the meaning. Jordan is at his worst when he tries to write in dialect, especially the faux Elizabethan dialog that many of the characters voice. The characters’ ‘accents’ seem to come and go as the book progresses. There are enough fights, chases, and tight spots to keep the pages turning, but not much more. This was an OK read to pass the time on air travel, but not a lot more.

---review by Gary Robe

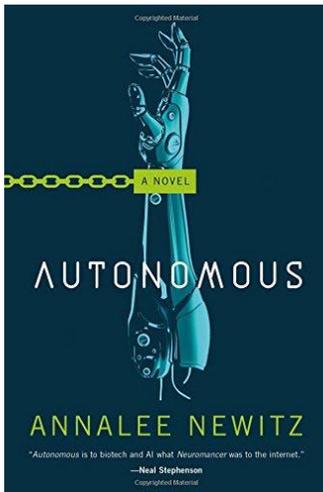


Starship Grifters by Robert Kroese; available in Trade Paperback and ebook versions

Shortly after the first Star Wars came out in 1977, I remember seeing a spoof of the film called Hardware Wars. This novel is in the tradition of the latter, and some reviewers have compared the author to Douglas Adams, some favorably and other unfavorably, and to Harry Harrison’s Stainless Steel Rat series. (The author dedicated this novel to Harrison.) The narrator is an android named Sasha (Self-Arresting near-Sentient Heuristic Android), who is somewhat feminine. Her programming forces her to re-boot every time she has an original thought thereby losing that thought. Sasha is owned by the equivalent of Han Solo, Rex Nihilo, who is not as smart as Solo, nor does he have Solo’s conscience, but he is luckier. Nihilo doesn’t just win a spaceship, named Flagrante Delicto, in a card game but a whole planet in addition. However, it turns out to be a scam. Nihilo also manages to break two people out of a prison

planet called Gulagatraz and gets mixed up in the rebellion by members of the Revolting Front against the Malarchian Empire. The main antagonist is an agent of the empire named Heinous Vlaak. There is no romance, although Rex and all the male characters are attracted to a sexy female bounty hunter named Pepper Melange. The scientific justification for faster-than-light travel, while unusual, is at least as plausible as some other space operas I have read. Overall, I found this novel quite readable and occasionally funny. The ending reminded me of Dick's "We Can Remember It for You Wholesale", aka the film Total Recall.

---review by Tom Feller



Autonomous by Annalee Newitz; available in hardback, Trade Paperback, paperback, and e-book versions (prices of the e-book and the paperback are almost the same)

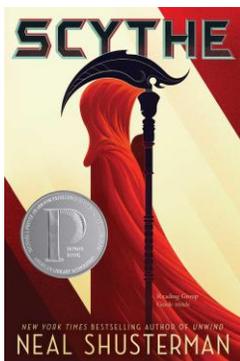
In the year 2144, according to this novel, there is no United States, Canada, or quite possibly any nation state at all. Instead, those two countries are part of something called the Free Trade Zone. Global warming has proceeded to the point where the Arctic Ocean is navigable, and there are major cities in what we currently call the Northwest Territories, where much of the action is set. Las Vegas is no longer a resort, but is instead a major center for the slave trade, which has been revived. There are brief references to an event called The Collapse, which occurred sometime in the late 21st Century. The good news is that we will have colonies on the Moon and on Mars, although no scenes are set on them.

There are four point of view characters in this novel. Judith "Jack" Chen, who has her own submarine, is a drug pirate in the sense that she reverse engineers pharmaceuticals and either sells them on the black market or gives them away to people without insurance or otherwise can't afford them. Unfortunately, she does too good a job with one of the medications, which has fatal side effects that were unknown to her at the time. Much of the action is driven by her efforts to fix the problem and by the agents of the International Property Coalition (IPC) on behalf of Zaxy, the pharmaceutical company that owns the drug, who seek to silence her permanently. There are also numerous flashback scenes which provide Jack's back story.

The other three POV characters are Elias Wojcik, a Polish-born agent working for the IPC with a license to kill, his associate, a three-month-old military-grade robot named Paladin, and Med, also a robot. Robots like Paladin have human brains and, in theory, can earn their freedom in ten years. In other words, they can become "autonomous", which is where the title comes from. Paladin starts out as genderless, but eventually learns that its brain came from a woman and begins to think of itself as one. This leads to romance between Wojcik and Paladin, although there is an issue as to whether Paladin can truly consent. Med, short for Medea, has been an autonomous robot since her creation in Anchorage. She is a medical researcher who assists Jack in trying to find a solution to the effects of the drug.

This is Newitz' first novel, and it was nominated for the Nebula. I was very impressed with the world building. Furthermore, although there is conflict, there are no villains and even the mostly good characters have major flaws.

---review by Tom Feller



Scythe by Neal Shusterman; available in hardback, paperback, and e-book formats

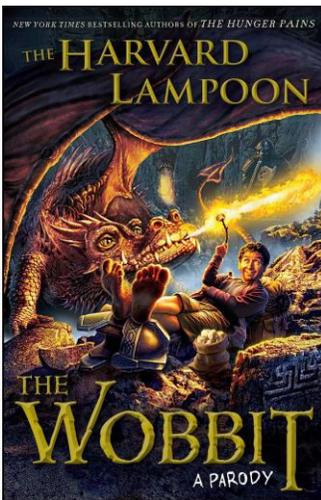
By the year 2042, according to this young adult novel, nanotechnology will advance to the point where there are no natural deaths and very few accidental ones. Every few years, people reset their apparent age as far back as twenty-one. Since people did not stop having children, a form of euthanasia is enforced by an elite group known as Scythes. They have a license to kill and, for the most part, have the autonomy to choose those they "glean". They each have a quota and are required to keep detailed records. Occasionally, they are censured for not adhering to the "Ten Commandments" for Scythes. Scythes may not single out particular ethnic groups or social classes, for instance.

One of the main characters, Scythe Curie, has been reprimanded, but never punished, for refusing to glean children under the age of eighteen. Scythe Faraday, on the other hand, uses pre-2042 death statistics to select his gleanings. During a visit to a high school, he gleanes a high school student who drives his own car, because those statistics showed that a large number of teenagers used to die in automobile accidents. This visit brings him into contact with 16 year old Rowan Damisch, whom he selects to become his apprentice. While gleaning the next door neighbor of Citra Terranova, also sixteen, and her family, he is so impressed by her conduct that he selects her to be his apprentice as well. Although both Rowan and Citra are both reluctant to become scythes, which Faraday considers an important qualification, they agree because their families will both receive immunity from gleaning for the one year of the apprenticeships and lifetime immunities if they qualify to become Scythes. One Scythe having two apprentices is unheard of, although not prohibited, and this becomes an important plot point later on. Rowan and Citra discover that there are factions within Scythedom, and these conflicts drive much of the plot. The novel ends when the two of them complete their year of apprenticeship and have to face the consequences.

It is an interesting future, although I found it implausible that people would continue to have children. The “Cloud” has evolved into a sentient version of the web called the “Thunderhead” and become the world government. Scythe Curie became famous when she gleaned the last President of the United States and his cabinet. No one travels in space, unfortunately, because it is deemed too dangerous, and the worst social problem appears to be boredom. It is not clear whether it is a utopia or a dystopia, but I did find this novel to be a very entertaining and interesting read.

---review by Tom Feller

Second Breakfast



You know, I love a good parody. I always have. I am a big fan of “Weird Al” Yankovic (at least his early material when he was doing parodies of songs I actually knew). I also loved the source of “Weird Al’s” inspiration, namely, the works of Allan Sherman. I enjoy my Dr. Demento albums. I even enjoy the Scary Movie franchise and its numerous spinoffs, the Austin Powers and Airplane series and Mel Brooks’ masterpieces, including my favorites, Blazing Saddles and Young Frankenstein. And, back in the day, I really relished the magazine parodies that were produced by the Harvard Lampoon, and, of course, the flow of talent there from that ultimately created the National Lampoon (I’m talking about the now-defunct magazine here, not the run of silly movies). In fact, I have a DVD-ROM set of the full run of NatLamp magazines.

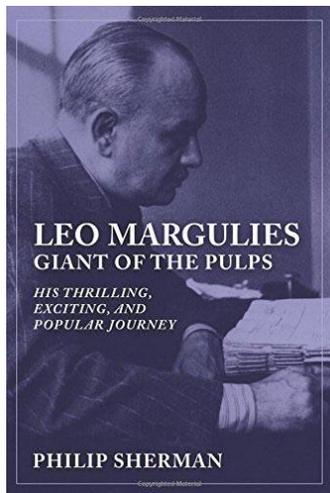
Now, at about the age of 16, which, frighteningly, I just realized was a full half century ago. I became entranced by J.R.R. Tolkien’s The Lord of the Rings. For decades, I considered it one of the best (set of) books I had ever read – still do. Imagine my delight a few years later, then, when I discovered a novel-length parody of that monumental work by the Harvard Lampoon, entitled Bored of the Rings. To this day, I consider Bored to be one of the funniest books I’ve ever read, being the adventures of Frito Bugger, Spam Gangree and the wizard Goodgulf as they defied the hordes of Sorhed to defeat the forces of evil in Lower Middle Earth. It was a brilliant parody, featuring a writing style that mimicked Tolkien’s in many places and that followed the storyline of The Lord of the Rings closely. If you’ve read LOTR (or even seen the movies) and haven’t read Bored of the Rings, you’re missing out on a treat.

Well, Bored of the Rings was published in 1969. Flash forward to 2013, and a newer generation of Harvard Lampoon writers has tried to recapture the same lightning in a slightly different jar. The new book is a parody of Tolkien’s The Hobbit (which was, of course, the precursor to LOTR), and is titled The Wobbit. The title immediately brings to mind Elmer Fudd singing “kill the wabbit,” but the newer parody isn’t bad. That said, it isn’t up there with Bored, either.

My age, which I mentioned above, might be part of the problem. Back in 1969, I was interested in all of the then-current manifestations of pop culture, so references to them in Bored were understandable and enjoyable. In my later years, I’m not as interested in a lot of youth culture, so such references may be whooshing right over my head.

The parody follows the narrative of *The Hobbit* pretty well, and there are some genuinely hilarious parts to the story. Because most of the names were different, the book didn't feel as much like a prequel to *Bored of the Rings* (the name of the wabbit in this book is Billy Bagboy, though the same character in *Bored* was Dildo Bugger, for example), though there is a quick effort at the very end of the book to tie the two together and explain the name changes. What I did find a bit off-putting was the overuse (in my opinion) of Harry Potter references, which cropped up in almost every chapter. Indeed, the wizard in the story was named Dumbledalf. But it is a decent parody, well worth a read, especially if you enjoyed *Bored of the Rings*. I note in passing that there is another parody of *The Hobbit*, also titled *The Wabbit*, by author Paul A. Erickson, with a sequel entitled *The Superfriends of the Ring*. Neither of these is the subject of this review, I'm talking about the Harvard Lampoon version. I may have to pick up the other two and check them out in the future, though.

---review by Tom McGovern



Leo Margulies: Giant of the Pulps by Philip Sherman; available as a Trade Paperback only, priced \$19.95

I enjoy reading about the pulp magazines of the past and the people associated with them. Over the last few years, I've read *Pulpwood Editor*, *Pulpwood Days*, *The Fantastic Pulps*, etc., and recently came across a book about pulp legend Leo Margulies (1900 - 1975), a 342-page illustrated biography written by his nephew, Philip Sherman.

Pulps were cheap magazines written for everyone, but the original target audiences were adolescent boys and girls, primarily boys. In the first half of the 20th Century pulp magazines covered newsstand racks with stories about cowboys and Indians, science fiction/fantasy yarns, and tales of exotic adventures of all sorts. The stories were written by such famous genre authors as A. Merritt, Ray Cummings, Ray Bradbury, Edgar Rice Burroughs, Isaac Asimov, and Sam Merwin, Jr. -- with a readership of tens of millions -- and for only 10 or 15 or 25 cents a copy (with a few selling for more, and even fewer selling for less).

The best-known editor of this era was Margulies, editor-in-chief of Standard Magazines -- The Thrilling Group. During one period, it is said he bought two million words a month for his pulps. He edited scores of magazines and was, for a time, the highest-paid pulp magazine editor in the country.

Leo Margulies: Giant of the Pulps - His Thrilling, Exciting, and Popular Journey (Altus, 2017) includes accounts by writers of his generosity and the encouragement he gave to so many would-be authors, including Harlan Ellison. He and his wife Sylvia once rejected some stories by Stephen King, which Sherman justly characterized as "a big mistake."

Sherman, an electrical engineer, did extensive research about his mother's brother, drawing largely upon records from university archives, including The University of Oregon, Boston University, The Ransom Center at The University of Texas at Austin, Texas A&M University, other colleges/universities, and from journals such as *Writers' Digest* and *Author & Journalist*. He also drew upon his own family's personal experiences with their remarkable relative. Sherman has written many professional articles and three books in his field, but his biography of Margulies is described as his first book "on a lighter" subject.

I was especially interested in Margulies' involvement with science fiction magazines such as *Thrilling Wonder Stories*, *Startling Stories*, and *Captain Future*; science fiction anthologies such as *From Off This World* (1949), *My Best Science Fiction Story* (1949), *Giant Anthology of Science Fiction* (1954), *Three Times Infinity* (1958), etc.; and with superhero comic books published by Standard; but I also found the other material in the book to be entertaining and informative.

After he left Standard, Margulies formed his own publishing companies and produced the genre magazines *Fantastic Universe* and *Satellite Science Fiction*, along with various mystery and western titles. Sherman devotes considerable space to the science fiction magazines his uncle created, and presents many interesting facts about them. Margulies apparently had a lifetime interest in science fiction, and was present at the very first science fiction convention held in New York in 1939.

Sherman didn't spare his relative in writing about the intimate (and sometimes negative) details of his legendary uncle's life. To Sherman, the biggest mistake Margulies ever made was fathering a child with a

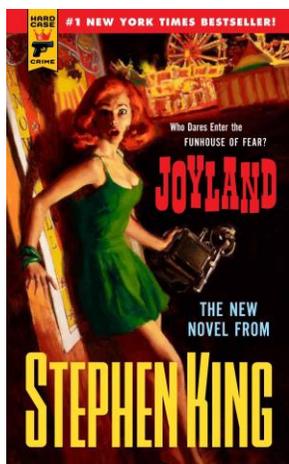
woman not his wife. To his credit, however, Margulies supported the child (and her mother) for more than sixteen years – even though he apparently played no other part in their lives.

Of special usefulness to me were the several appendices, listing all the publications in which Margulies was involved during his long career. I wish Sherman had provided as much information on comic books as he did on other publications. During the 1940s Margulies worked in an editorial capacity when such popular comic books as Exciting Comics, Thrilling Comics, Startling Comics, America's Best Comics, The Fighting Yank, and The Black Terror were being published by his employer, but almost nothing is said about them by Sherman -- even though, when he was 10, his uncle bought him 40 comic books at a soda fountain in Brooklyn where they had stopped only because his uncle needed cigarettes!

In addition, his book could have benefited from better editing; Sherman was allowed to repeat himself far too often as he described his uncle's life and work. Still, I recommend this book highly to lovers of the days when pulp magazines were a large part of life in the United States.

---Review by Jon D. Swartz, N3F Historian

A Soft-Boiled Crime Story



I wasn't expecting a lot when I picked up Joyland by Stephen King. I had seen the book in stores, and it looked to me to be an attempt by King to replicate the "hard-boiled" detective stories of the 1930s, 40s and 50s. I was genuinely expecting something akin to King's take on Sam Spade, Mike Hammer and the like. Stephen King is, of course, a master of storytelling, so I'd have expected such an effort to be good within its genre, but then, "hard-boiled" crime stories aren't really my favorite genre. Because of that, I waited a long time to buy this book.

Ultimately, I bought it because one of Amazon's affiliated sellers was offering a "Like New" copy at a bargain price. Even after buying it, I let it sit for a while before reading it – I just didn't think I would enjoy it very much. I mean, the book cover is designed to look like one of those old paperback detective novels. It's part of a series called "Hard Case Crime" published by Titan Books, and the back cover says, "Hard Case Crime brings you the best in hard-boiled crime fiction, from lost pulp classics to new work by today's most powerful writers, all in handsome and affordable editions." It sounds like a great concept, but, again, not really my genre.

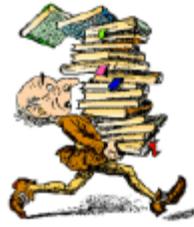
Then again, I needn't have worried. This story is a treasure. I've used the term "hard-boiled" several times now. Let me be explicit here: there's nothing "hard-boiled" about this story! This is a gentle, fascinating and very moving story about a young man discovering life and love. Yes, there's a murder; yes, there are a few tense moments and yes, in true Stephen King fashion, there's even a bit of a ghost story. But it is all woven together into a rich coming-of-age story that plucks the heartstrings. I'm not ashamed to say that my eyes were a bit watery as I read the powerful ending.

The book runs under 300 pages; in Stephen King terms, that's practically a short story. But the narrative carries you along and keeps you turning the pages. It's the story of Devin Jones, a 21 year old male virgin who, in the wake of a painful breakup, comes to work at Joyland, a small amusement park in the Carolinas, over the summer following his freshman year of college. The park is suffering under competition from the big attractions like Disney and Six Flags, and is run mostly by former carnival workers with a culture and language all their own. As King is prone to do, many of these characters are developed in rich detail.

Joyland features its own fun house of horrors, in which a gruesome, unsolved murder occurred several years back. The ghost of the victim apparently lingers in the attraction, but can only be seen by those with the proper sensitivity – "the sight." Along the way, Devin encounters a mysterious woman with a very ill child. With much effort, he befriends them and, as a result of their relationship, the lives of all three are enriched and endangered. The end of the novel packs a powerful punch, both in its action sequences and its moving conclusion.

Over the years, I've either read or listened to audio versions of quite a few of Stephen King's novels, but few were as evocative as this one. Only two of his works have left me sniffing at the end: one was 11/22/63 and Joyland is the other. It's an excellent read; I recommend it highly.

---review by Tom McGovern

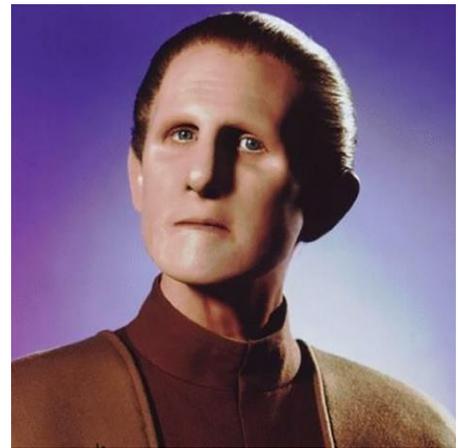


RENE AUBERJONIS: ODO AND THE EMPEROR

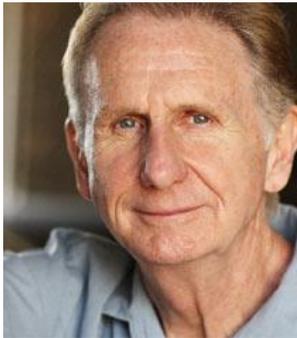
by Jeffrey Redmond

The American actor Rene Auberjonois (age 78) is well known for playing Odo in the Star Trek Deep Space 9 television series. He was born in New York in 1940, and is also a prominent stage and film actor, as well as writer and director. He attended schools in England and the U.S., and has a wide variety of interests in art, music, and philanthropy.

Rene is also a direct descendant of Napoleon's younger sister Caroline Bonaparte. When the Emperor conquered most of Europe (in the early 1800's), he made his brothers and sisters rulers of the various lands. Caroline married the French general Joachim Murat, and they became a king and queen in Italy. **They had four children, and were basically happy together.** Joachim seems to have had no mistresses or other women, and was a flamboyant character with his manner and stylish clothes.



Murat was frequently gone fighting (and winning) battles for his powerful brother-in-law, and Caroline would govern in his absence. The Bonapartes were from the island of Corsica in the Mediterranean, and of Italian ancestry. The French Revolution in the 1790's guillotined many of the royalty and nobility of France. Napoleon led the army and took over the country. He made himself an emperor in 1804, defeating all other European armies opposing him. Ambitious French generals married his sisters, while others had their sisters or daughters marry Napoleon's brothers.



Napoleon was one of the greatest military commanders in history, winning many battles (but also losing many men). After he was finally beaten and removed from power in 1815, Murat was arrested and shot as a traitor. But Caroline lived on in Florence until 1839, dying at age 57. Rene's mother was Eugenie Murat, who was a princess among European notables. His father Fernand Auberjonois (the son of a famous artist) was an important Swiss journalist and espionage agent for the OSS during World War II.

Unusual to imagine that Constable Odo is such a part of European nobility, and having so interesting a personal background. But Rene Auberjonois has appeared in numerous television productions, and is especially famous among science fiction fans for STDS-9 (1993-99). He was in 173 episodes, displaying a significant range of talent and role enhancement. He's married with two children, and lives in California. Hopefully there will be quite a number of his performances to come.

The Expanse—Riding the Roller-Coaster Thru Three Seasons

by

Gary Robe

A thousand curses on you SyFy Channel, and whatever passes for your leadership! A pox on myself for getting sucked in again by a promising SyFy series only to be dashed again. I was hesitant to watch the first season of *The Expanse* because I'd been turned so many times before by the shifting sand of SyFy programming, but *The Expanse* seemed to be so successful and popular that even the SyFy management wouldn't muck it up. Well, joke's on me because SyFy announced halfway through Season 3 that they would not be continuing the series.

There's a possibility that another company like Amazon or Netflix might continue the series, but I'm not holding my breath because of SyFy's own incompetence. They sold US streaming rights to Amazon and the International streaming rights to Netflix, thereby hopelessly tangling the production rights of the series and making it highly unlikely that a white knight like Amazon would take it up if they have to share international rights with Netflix.

That said, we're now halfway through Season 3, and it is spectacular. The first season took us through enough of *Leviathan Wakes* to introduce us to the protomolecule, and the launch of *Starship Eros*. The second season finished off the last third of that story and launched into the weaponizing of the protomolecule, the political crossfire between Christen Avasarala and Errenwright, and the greed of Jules-Pierre Mao. Our heroes on *The Rocinante* manage to fight off a protomolecule-human hybrid golem, and Avasaraa and Bobbie get trapped on Mai's ship as they expose the evil plot to exploit the protomolecule by setting the entire solar system into war despite whatever the protomolecule-infested remains of *Eros* are going on Venus.



Season three gets Bobbie and Avasarala on board The Rocinante as the crew is at the breaking point over Naomi's betrayal. Holden convinces everyone to just get out of the fight and head for Io, where the search for Prax's daughter seems to lead. All concerned expect Io to be a nearly deserted outpost, far away from the shooting war between Earth and Mars. Of course, this is The Rocinante, Holden, Naomi, Alxes, and Amos, so Io is really the tipping point for the survival of the Solar System. Episodes 6 and 7 of Season 3 finish up Caliban's War in two of the most spectacular hours of TV that I've seen in decades. The rescue of Prax's daughter Mei is one of the most satisfying scenes ever and I still tear up after three viewings. I want a T-shirt or coffee mug with the line "I am that guy". It's right up there with Delinn's "if you value your lives, be somewhere else!" line in Babylon 5.

Episode 8 takes the story up several months after the end of The Caliban War and right away reminds us that the protomolecule is alien technology that was sent to the solar system billions of years in the past to do something that has nothing to do with humanity. The protomolecule has its own agenda which is to take a big chunk of Venus and build a giant ring way out past the orbit of Neptune. I can see where Season 3 is likely to end up. The characters and hardware are in place for the drama to play out. I'd like to hope that there is a chance the series will continue somehow, but if not, we have 36 episodes of The Expanse that show just how good SF can be on TV. Rot in the coldest, loneliest corner of Hell, SyFy Channel!

And then, with the bitter pill festering in my consciousness, came the Late Breaking News!!! Jeff Bezos announced that Amazon would take over production and continue the series into Season 3! Great news indeed. It would be interesting to see if they continued the episode-a-week release or dropped the whole series at once for binge watching.

And the answer came. The third season ended with a surprise double episode, so it expanded to 13 episodes. That extra time was needed to complete the adaptation of Book 3 of the series: "Abaddon's Gate". As with previous seasons, this one ends with a vast expansion of both the scope and stakes in place within The Expanse Universe.

The protomolecule builds a giant ring in space, and humans from all three factions of the Solar System race to the outer fringe to make sure they get a piece of whatever is happening. At first the ring is inert and enigmatic, until a stunt pilot flies through the gap at high speed and *Something Happens*; a shimmering energy field fills the ring and anything passing through doesn't come out the other side. Objects can pass through the membrane, but there's a speed limit, as the poor stunt pilot demonstrates that a human body has a lot in common with a blood-filled water balloon if you decelerate fast enough.

Of course The Rocinante is right there with the Earth, Mars, and Belter ships headed for The Ring. The Roci has been hired to take a documentarian out as well as becoming documentary subjects themselves. Naomi is conflicted as she is torn between her family on The Rocinante and her desire to help The Belt evolve into respectability. She leaves The Roci and joins the crew of The Behemoth, a salvaged generation ship that The Belt converted into the System's biggest warship.

It all goes terribly wrong when a mysterious woman working as an electrical technician for the Earth fleet blows up a ship and fabricates a video broadcast from The Rocinante with James Holden taking responsibility for the attack. In the confusion The Behemoth launches a missile at The Rocinante. As the missile closes in, a vision of Joe Miller appears to Holden and directs The Roci to relative safety inside The Ring.

On the other side of The Ring there must have been an alien Chief Engineer who told his captain in his Galactic Scottish accent, "Sure, I ken change the laws of physics!" The other side of the gate is a strange space. It's not infinite, but the walls of the sphere are a definite no-no zone. Inside gate space the speed limit for matter seems to be 12,000 kph, although light still travels at, well, the speed of light. In the center of the space there is a moon-sized object with no identifiable purpose.

There are funny scenes where Holden discovers he can only interact with the vision of Miller when he's alone. Of course, Joe Miller died when the protomolecule took over Eros, and this vision admits that's right. It's The Protomolecule call the shots, and Vision Miller is its clumsy way to interact with Holden because it seems something with a physical presence to complete a task for it.

The attention to detail of the show's production continues to thrill me with its authentic depiction of space travel. For example, as ships approach a destination they turn and make deceleration burns. When people move in ships in zero-gee you hear the click of the magnetic boots as they walk down a corridor. In one episode there is a fire onboard a ship, and it spreads out like a flaming beachball. When I showed this bit to Pay Moloy,

his eyes got big and he said, “Yep, that’s what a fire in zero-gee looks like!” There a critical point where many of the people on the ships inside the gate space are critically injured, and the doctors explain that the human body just can’t handle internal bleeding in zero-gee. The list goes on.

The TV adaptation of the books continues to be excellent, There are several characters in “Abaddon’s Gate” that get compressed into two people in the show. This serves to simplify the plot for the screen, intensify the interaction between those two, and add real suspense to the climax because book readers really won’t know if a certain character lives or dies in the fight.

At the end of the season, the events in gate space have fundamentally changed the dynamics of the entire Solar System. The human races that the universe is bigger and scarier than they ever imagined, but the opportunities out there can’t be ignored. Space is big. Really big.



This story is taken from the March, 1934 issue of *Wonder Stories*. Written by Dr. David H. Keller, the magazine's editor Charles Hornig noted its unusual theme and unique plot elements. Keller as a writer was a personal favorite of Hugo Gernsback, publisher and owner of *Wonder Stories*, and he was also a favorite with the fans of that era.

Seven years later the story was reprinted in the May, 1941 issue of *Startling Stories* as part of their Scientifiction Hall of Fame series. The story was specifically nominated to be reprinted by Julius Schwartz, who at the time was running the only literary agency specializing in science fiction/fantasy stories. In his short comments he said that this was a special type of story; something that long time fans of science fiction could appreciate, yet a story so interesting that it could be shown to someone not familiar with the genre and make a favorable impression on even the most hardened critic.

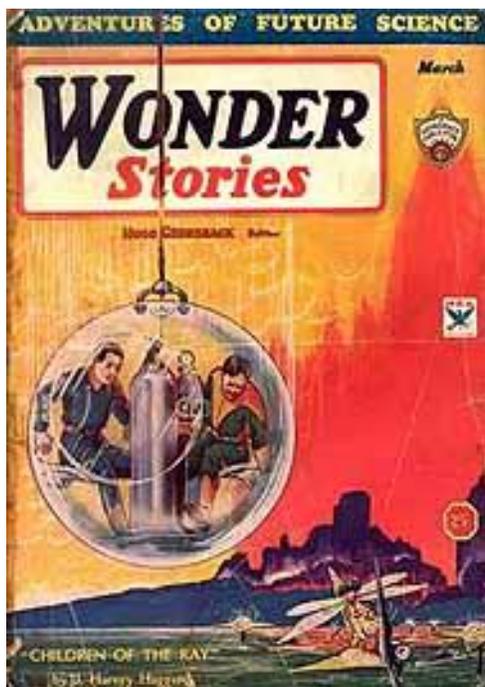
Julius Schwartz later became an editor at DC Comics, and famously ushered in the Silver Age of comics with his reintroduction of the new Flash character in 1956. He went on co-create many comic book best selling characters, and revitalized Batman when it was about to be cancelled in the early 1960s. As one of the company's top editors he was assigned a similar task with Superman in the late 1970s.

Asked about this particular story in the mid 1990s he said he still stood by his original opinion. This is exactly the kind of story that will impress and entertain both the dedicated hard core fan and a person who knows nothing about science fiction. We think you will agree.

THE LITERARY CORKSCREW

By

DAVID H. KELLER, M.D.



The last patient to enter the Doctor's office that afternoon was a rather indefinite type. She had made a previous appointment for that late hour with the request that the specialist give her at least an hour of his time. This was so unusual coming from a person who was absolutely unknown and who had no letters of introduction, that Dr. Newberry had looked forward to the consultation with a certain amount of curiosity mingled with a peculiar dread. The last lady who had asked for an hour of his time had tried to blackmail him, and since then the doctor had always been rather shy of unknown females who asked any favor out of the ordinary.

This particular lady did not seem one to cause him fear or his wife jealousy. She was rather pathetic looking in many ways, but at the same time her plain face, when illuminated by emotion, softened till the lines of middle age faded into a glorified sunset. Her clothes were neat, dignified and yet somewhat old-fashioned. Compared with the average woman of middle age, she seemed to lack something. The Doctor felt that in some way life had been unkind to her. Even before she had said a word, he decided that he should pity rather than suspect her.

Without a word, she handed him the letter which had confirmed the appointment, evidently wishing to use this as an introduction. The doctor took it and looked at it casually and then handed it back with a slight bow, as he said: "So you are Mr. Henry Cecil's wife? That is rather an odd way to say it in this feminine age. Please sit down, Mrs. Cecil, and tell me what I can do for you. It seems that you asked for an hour of my time. Is that correct?"

"Yes, I wanted to consult you. But first I want to pay you for the hour. How much is it?"

“That depends on what has to be done. I have no fixed charge for my service. Tell me your trouble.”

“I would rather pay you in advance.”

“All right, if you insist. Say twenty-five dollars.”

“Here it is. Mr. Cecil and I are so afraid of debt that he made me promise not to confer with you till you were paid. The case is a very odd one. I presume that you are governed by the laws of medical secrecy in regard to your patients’ histories?”

“Absolutely. It is particularly necessary in my specialty of neuro-psychiatry.”

“Then I can start in and tell you all about it?”

“Yes. Start from the beginning, and give any detail that you wish. How long ago were you in perfect health?”

“I am not the one who needs your advice. It is my husband.”

“Then why did you come?”

“We thought it best. We have been married a number of years and I understand his condition so well that it did not seem necessary for him to come as he is rather sensitive about it.”

The doctor sighed as he looked at his desk clock. The minutes were passing, and it seemed hard for the woman to even start with her story. He remained silent, however, as he had learned from experience that a hasty interruption often spoiled the entire story told by the patient. So he simply arranged the stationery on his desk and waited. Soon the woman started.

“You see, my husband’s name is not really Henry Cecil. That is just a name that we used when I wrote asking for the appointment. The details of his illness are so peculiar that we felt it best to conceal his real name. It is one that is widely known in certain phases of our national life, and I am sure that you would be rather astonished if you heard it. But it will make no difference in your analysis of the case whether you know his real name or not. At least, I cannot see that it will make any difference. So, in any case records you are forced to make, simply write his name as Henry Cecil, age fifty, married, and an author by occupation.

My husband has always written. In our collection of his manuscripts we have an uninterrupted collection of his literary efforts starting with his fourteenth year. Of course, there were years when he did not produce very much, but in some of those early periods he seemed to love nothing so much as writing. After we were married, I made a special study of all those efforts, and was surprised at two things that were prominent. The first was his desire to write, and the second was his inability to do so. I do not mean that he was unable to write, but he was not able to write well. He wrote manuscript like a man would play the piano, self-taught and without notes. I told him once, ‘You want to paint but you have no preliminary knowledge of either line or color.’

He would make the worst mistakes in grammar, and not only be unable to see them but actually said they were correct because they sounded all right to him.

For many years, he spent all of his spare time writing. Of course, he had an occupation that required a large part of his time and brought in a sufficient income to enable him to support the two of us. He was a clerk in a book store. The work was congenial, and he loved to live with books, but I always felt that it was not as dignified a calling as though he were a lawyer or even owned the store himself. He worked in the store, rather long hours, and would write most of the rest of the time. While he was working on a story or novel, he was a hopeless companion till he finished it. And then came the sad part. He would be so proud of what he had done, he would insist upon reading it to me, and always ended by asking me if I thought it was good enough to publish. At times he thought I was hysterical as I tried to cover my anxiety and grief at the hopelessness of his effort.

At first, he tried in a rather halfhearted way to sell his material, but it always came back. He pretended that he was glad; that he really did not want the children of his brain to be paraded before the curious average reader, but I knew that all the time his one ambition was to be able to write commercially. He wanted to get out of the book store and write at his leisure. He would say to me: ‘I am tired of trying to sell good books to people who want to read trash.’

At times I felt that if he was out of the book store, if he had plenty of leisure, that he might be able to do better than he had done in the past, when he had to write at night, exhausted from selling his books. But on the other hand, it was very satisfactory for him to bring home a check each month. Up to this time, his literary effort had cost us quite a bit and had not brought in one cent, so I felt that he had better stay where he was. Otherwise I was sure that we would starve.

Ten years ago he was taken suddenly ill with appendicitis. He was affected for several days before we realized how seriously ill he was. It was during his vacation. The organ ruptured before the physician realized the condition. But he was saved, and in a short while, he returned to work again. The day he left for the book store he handed me a manuscript.

'Mary, he said, 'before that operation, I had a good deal of pain. It lasted for some days. I never said anything about it, because I did not want to worry you, but while I was in that condition, I wrote a story. I wish you would look it over and tell me what you think of it. Seems to be different from the rest of my trash.' I read it that morning and there was no doubt that it was different. It was really worthwhile. To make a long story short, I sold that story for sixty dollars and the publishers said they would buy any number of similar stories at the same price.

That was good news for my husband. He wanted to give up his position at the book store at once. I had all I could do to keep him from doing it. Finally I promised him that if he could write eleven more stories like this first one, I would take a chance, and let him write for a living. I actually cried that night when he took out his little Corona and started to write.

During the next month he worked hard, but he could not do it again. What he wrote was just the same poor stuff that he had been writing all his life. Against my will, I offered the stories for sale and found that they were absolutely unsalable. My husband and I discussed the situation rather seriously. He felt that if he could do it once, he could do it again. I felt that his one effort had been a white blackbird. I did not understand it, but I was sure it was an isolated literary freak.

Meantime, the publishers of that story clamored for more like it. Their readers had approved of it. It had caused countless letters of discussion and controversy to be written to the editor of the magazine. We were in a peculiar position; like that of a prospector who finds a solitary nugget of gold and cannot locate the lode it came from.

Six months of discouraging effort passed, and then my husband became ill again. This time he had several infected teeth. There was some pus, a good deal of pain, and in every instance, after several days of useless effort to save the tooth; it had to be extracted, with more pain. There was one week that my husband suffered so that he was unable to sleep. He sat up in bed with an electric pad tied to his face. During these two weeks of almost constant suffering, he tried to forget his ailment by working with his Corona. I forgot to say that he had fever. That was the combination; pus, pain, and fever. I can see now that he was a sick man. He wrote six short stories. After he went back to the bookstore, I read them, and I saw that they were good. They were even better than the one he had sold. I took all six of them to the editor who had bought the first. He read them and was really angry at me.

'You may think this is a joke. Madam,' he said, 'but it would have meant money to both of us if you had sent these in one at a time. I am going to give you a hundred dollars each for these if you will promise me not to hold them back.'

I did not argue the matter with him, nor try to explain it. I did not really understand it myself.

When I told my husband, we had another argument. He again wanted to quit his job. I wanted him to keep on a payroll. I told him that I was not sure that his writing could support us, and he pointed to the six hundred dollars earned in two weeks time. However, we decided to put the matter to the test, and it worked out the same way it had before. Perfectly well, back at work in the book store, he wrote terrible drivel.

The publisher made a hit with those six stories. The circulation of his magazine increased one hundred per cent. Naturally, he wanted more, and there were no more to be had. He absolutely refused to consider the other stories my husband wrote, and said they were not by the same author.

The next five years were just a continuation of this sequence. Now and then, my husband would have a bad tooth, violent pain, fever, and finally a painful extraction. During these periods of suffering, he would write and we had no trouble selling his efforts. They sold themselves. Editors bid against each other, but the production was limited, and all the time I forced my husband to remain in the book store. At the end of the five years, he had sold over ten thousand dollars' worth of manuscript, but his teeth were all gone !

We realized by that time, that there was a definite connection between his periods of illness and his ability to write material that could be sold. I tried to figure it out. Was it the infection, the pus, or was it the fever, or just the pain? It certainly must have been one of them, or some combination. The fact was, that in

health, under ordinary circumstances, he just could not write salable stuff, but given certain conditions of disease, he wrote like an inspired Muse. Only, of course, all the Muses were feminine, and my husband is very much of a man.

I studied the matter from the standpoint of other authors, and I was surprised to find that something similar had happened to all of them. Robert Louis Stevenson could not write unless he had fever. If his temperature was normal, he loafed around, and did not even attempt to write; but when the fever came, he was another man, a man who could, and did write brilliantly. deMaupassant and several other French writers did their best when they were dying from paresis. DeQuincy and Coleridge took opium; Bums and many others could only write when intoxicated; Mary Lamb was at her best when she was passing into an attack of insanity. Swift was insane. Burton a case of melancholia. So my husband was by no means an isolated case.”

At this point Dr. Newberry held up his hand to stop her.

“These men you mention were all great men, madam,” he said.

The woman flushed as she softly replied. “So is my husband. You will agree with me when you learn his real name. But allow me to go on with the story. The book store he clerked for went out of business, and he was without a job. I asked him to try to secure a new position in another store, and they told him he was too old. He came home after several such rebuffs and said, ‘Mary, this looks like the proper time to retire, and just spend my time writing and enjoying life with you.’

It was horrible of me to say it, but I just had to, so I replied, ‘My Dear, your teeth are all gone, your appendix has been removed, and your sinus trouble is cured. You know as well as I do that you have to be taken ill in order to write.’

He agreed with me, but felt that it was not the actual sickness, but the pain that helped him write. As far as I could see, it did not make any difference what the trouble was. The fact remained that it was either the pain or the fever or the pus. He had been in good health for over four months, and during that time, his efforts were those of a high school boy. He even got so he could not think of a plot. Well, we had a little money, and our home was paid for, so I told him to take it easy and make it a real vacation. He was ambitious, never liked idleness, and so he started to do some of the floors over. He was at that one day when I heard him cry, ‘Mary! Mary!’ I ran to see what the matter was, and found he had run a pine splinter under his fingernail. Perhaps you know how it hurts. It used to be one of the old forms of torture. He just sat there holding his hand and making no effort to take it out. I asked him to let me see it, but he just smiled and shook his head, and told me to get a pencil and paper. So there he sat on the floor, holding his hand and trying to keep from crying as he dictated the best plot for a story that you ever heard of. I wrote for over half an hour, and then he said, ‘Now, that is something like it. I can write that story and sell it. Will you see if you can remove this splinter?’

He typed that story on his portable with the injured finger suspended in the air. I took it to one of the publishers and said, ‘You know what my husband writes. Well, here is something that is better than he has ever done before.’ The man took my word for it, and gave me exactly one thousand dollars. He was afraid that I would take it somewhere else.

My husband and I talked the matter over a few weeks after that. He told me that the instant that splinter drove under his finger nail, something broke in his brain and the story was formed. That is why he left the splinter there, even if it did hurt. He wanted to be sure to get the story on paper before the worst of the pain stopped. He said to me, ‘Mary. That is what made me write. It is not the pus or the temperature but it is physical pain.’

I told him it was horrible to feel that way, but he said that he had to make a living somehow. He enjoyed writing, and he just had to sell it. I was a little suspicious, and asked him if he had run that splinter in on purpose. But he denied it. Three weeks after that, he developed a bone felon on that same finger. We had it treated but for three weeks he suffered from it, and during that time he dictated a novel to me, and that novel has sold over one million copies. No, I am not going to tell you the name just yet, but you have no doubt read it. The point is this. He wrote that novel while he was in pain. The publishers asked him to write another and he did after he had recovered and it was a bust; a genuine BUST.

So we knew definitely what it was that permitted him to compose material that he could sell. We lived comfortably for a year, and then we invested our fortune in bonds and lost every cent. It started to look as though we soon might have to sell our house before the tide turned. My husband was in the best of health, so you can imagine what he was writing. He worked hard, three thousand words and better every day, but the publishers wouldn’t even look at the stuff he produced, though they all were anxiously waiting for him to go up

in the air, as they called it. He was desperate, and so was I, for I knew what was in his mind. I was willing to take in washing, anything, to keep him from it, but at last he said it. He asked me to hurt him.

Honestly, Doctor Newberry, I love that man better than I do my own life. I would die for him. The very thought of deliberately hurting him made me heartsick and sick every other way. I offered to see if I could get work, asked him to let me sell my jewels, and always he was stubborn. He stopped eating and sleeping, and at last in desperation, when he threatened to throw himself in front of an automobile, I told him I would help him. So we started to experiment, and I saw that he was in some way used to pain, like a drunkard used to alcohol. The little pains, like a needle prick did not do any good. It had to be something grinding, continuous, something that would cause the average man to faint. The little things I did to him were just useless.

So we evolved a technique. I do not blame you, doctor, if you think us insane, but he would have died if he had failed to support me, and if he died, I would die, too. We had to do something. So we got a corkscrew and sterilized it, and sterilized his back as well as we could, and then he sat down at the typewriter and prepared to write while I screwed that thing into his backbone!"

"I cannot believe it!" said the Doctor. "I never heard of it ! Why the thing is impossible! How could you do it?"

"I don't know. I know that I cried all the time, but I never let him hear me. The corkscrew penetrated till it touched the bone, and he started to write slowly. Then I gave it another half turn, and he made his fingers race over the keyboard. He wrote for three hours and then came to the end of the story. I removed the corkscrew gently, painted the wound with iodine, placed a piece of adhesive over it and fainted."

"I should think so."

"Well, we sold that story. It had the touch of genius, they said. Then they demanded another novel. They pleaded with us, offered us anything we wanted if only we would do it. And we did it. We went through three weeks of Hell, but we turned another best seller over and collected for it. That was a year ago. In that year we have not tried it again. My nerves were shattered. It was harder on me than my husband, because I had to stand behind him and determine just how far I had to put that damned thing into him to keep him at his best. That is our story. That is my story. The book that he wrote last you know, everybody knows.

Oh! There is really no use in concealing it from you further. My husband wrote "Deepening Shadows"

Dr. Newberry jumped from the chair.

"You do not mean to say that "Deepening Shadows," the book that has enchanted us all with its weird beauty, the book that has the Dunsany touch in a way that is greater than anything has ever been; you don't mean to tell me that Henry Le Kler is your husband, and that this book, in all its beauty, was written under such circumstances?"

"That is exactly what I mean. Dr. Newberry. I know my husband. He can write a dozen novels as fine and better than "The Deepening Shadows". He has the latent ability, the potential mentality. The public needs his work, they need him. He has been the one clear clarion call in American literature during the last five years. But I cannot keep on with the corkscrew. Here it is. I am through with it. There must be some other way. Something must be possible to help him write without sending us down to the bottomless pit so that America can breathe the clear, pure air of Eternity in his writings. I want you to take this. When we are both dead you can tell the story. No one will believe you, but while we three are living, I want you to help us."

And here the woman tossed the corkscrew upon the Doctor's desk and sobbingly covered her face with her hands.

Dr. Newberry picked up the shining instrument. He held it almost reverently. Then he spoke softly.

"Mrs. Le Kler, this little corkscrew should be carefully preserved. In spite of its usual disreputable associations with alcoholics, this story of yours invests it with a greatness and a dignity that no similar corkscrew has ever had. Yet all your mental suffering and your husband's physical anguish were unnecessary. I will not say that. Perhaps had you come to me five years ago I would have smiled at your story and dismissed you without even trying to help you as I am going to try to help you today. Perhaps I needed the sharp stimulation of your tale, the realization that one of the most beautiful books in all literature were bom in travail, not only of the soul, but also of the body.

I am about to leap across the chasm and see something that no other physician has ever seen before; at least, not clearly. I feel that your husband will write again. He will continue to delight the American public with his fancy and the pathos of his beautiful prose, but never again will it be necessary for him to suffer as he has in

the past. No More Pain!"

You mean that you can help us?" asked the anxious woman, stretching out her arms in a gesture of relief.

"I believe so. You see, it was not really the pain that made him write..."

"But we know that it was!"

"No. The pain was simply a stimulating cause. What really produced the clearness of plot, the beauty of diction, the Dunsany touch, was not the pain but the influence of the pain on the glands of internal secretion. Their hyperactivity was just sufficient to turn a writer who had mechanical technique, into an author who wrote as a bird sings in the blue of a summer morning."

"But it was the pain after all."

"Have it your own way. The pain is not necessary. Every day your husband's internal glands secrete just so much fluid. This passes into the blood stream and is carried to the brain. We are not sure, but perhaps the brain secretes a fluid of its own. We know that small portions of it, like the pituitary and the pineal, perform very important functions as far as the intelligence is concerned. I feel that the trouble with your husband is that he is secreting just a trifle less than he needs to be a great author. The pain stimulated these glands to greater activity, but as soon as the stimulation ceased, they returned to their normal. Perhaps something like that occurs in all great authors, poets, and artists. Who knows? But I shall give your husband a medicine that is really the secretion of several glands."

"From human beings? Certainly that cannot be!"

"Of course not. These are from the glands of cows, sheep, and pigs, obtained in the slaughter houses of Chicago."

The woman shook her head. Hope faded out of her eyes.

"It will not do any good," she said. "You cannot make me believe that by swallowing parts of pigs and cows, my husband will write anything worthwhile."

"I am not asking you to. Simply try it. Tell your husband that you saw me, and I ordered a tonic. Don't tell him of my conclusions. Get an automobile and roam over the country. Forget everything except that you love each other. Don't urge him to write, but before you leave, hide the Corona and some paper in the car. See what happens and then write me. I want to make you a present of this visit. Leave the corkscrew and the secret with me. I will guard them both carefully. Here is the prescription and your \$25. Good luck and good-bye."

A few days later, Henry Le Kler and his wife started off on a vagabond tour in a little Ford car. They had no particular place to go and were going there in the most roundabout way. They had but one idea, namely, to keep off the concrete and see the real country unspoiled by filling stations, billboards, and hot dog stands. For ten days they had a wonderful time, and three times a day the faithful wife gave the tonic and watched, rather hopelessly. On the tenth night they slept at a farmhouse, the paying guests of a friendly old couple who lived amid hayfields and apple trees. The night was warm and the moon full. At one in the morning the sleeping woman was roused by her husband's movements. Henry Le Kler was sitting up in bed.

"I feel funny, Mary," he said. "I cannot sleep. Things are happening in my head. If I had my typewriter with me, I believe I could write something worthwhile."

The wife went to the chair, put on her kimono, and lit a candle.

"You stay in bed, dear, and tell me about it. I'll write it in pencil. I have the old Corona and just loads of beautiful white paper in the little old Ford. When morning comes, you can write all you want to."

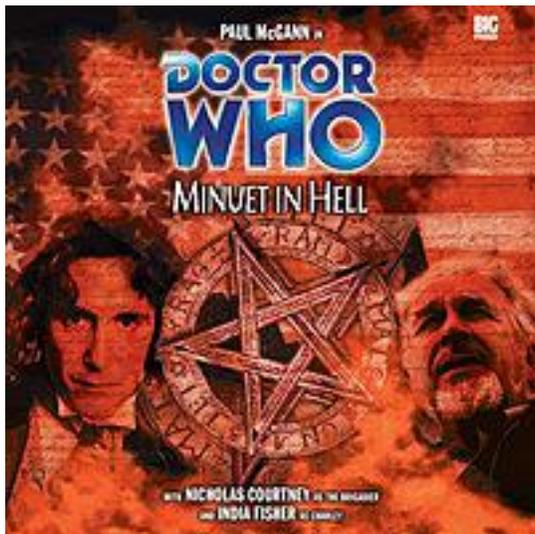
So, there in the candlelight and moonlight, he talked to her, hour after hour, till morning came, and as he talked, she wrote. At the breakfast table, they asked the old folks to let them stay a few days longer. They really stayed six weeks, and at the end of that time three hundred pages of manuscript were completed.

During this time, the man wrote and ate and slept. The wife corrected, prayed, and did her best to feed him. Finally he wrote FINIS, dated it, and wrote his own peculiar colophon on the last page. Closing his typewriter, he looked at his wife as though awakening from a dream.

"I did it!" he exclaimed. "I did it and it was not necessary to hurt me. Something happened to me and it was not caused by pain!"

"Perhaps you do not need the pain any more," she replied happily, but she did not tell him the story. She wanted him to have the pleasure of thinking that it was his ego, his soul, his peculiar persona, that had made this novel possible. Over the country roads they traveled back to ultracivilization. The manuscript was handed,

year old Lucie Miller from Blackpool when she is abducted by Time Lords and dumped into the Doctor's TARDIS for mysterious reasons. There's something about Lucie that threatened the fabric of Space and Time, but in typical Time Lord fashion, they don't explain what the threat is or what The Doctor is supposed to do about it.



The shows are bundled into eight episode seasons with each episode taking about fifty minutes of play time. While the mystery of Lucie provides some continuity through the first season, the episodes themselves are nearly independent. Since the relationship between Lucie and The Doctor evolves as it goes along, and their shared experiences do add up, it is best to listen to the episodes in order.

The stories bring back classic Doctor Who foes like The Daleks, and the Cybermen, as well as obscure ones like The Nesters, Crinoids, Wrym, and the eight leg giant spiders that were the downfall of the Third Doctor. The series is also not afraid to take off with new threats in places where you might expect old ones. For example, in one episode set on Demos, you might expect to run into Ice Warriors, but it turns out to be something else.

The stories are best when they rely more on dialogue than sound effects. There's limited mental imagery to get from the sound of a blaster battle, monster roars, and explosions. Sure, these sounds are necessary to tell the story, but they can get tiresome when over-used.

The verbal sparring between Paul McGann as The Doctor and Sheridan Smith as Lucie is fun as their relationship evolves over several story series. Some of the best episodes happen when the two are split up for most of the story and may only be reunited at the very end or in the following episode.

So far we have gone thru the first three series of eight episode sets. There are another eight, and then the plot shifts into The Time War. I'm looking forward to that.

But wait---There's More! Big Finish has just released the first four-episode series with Georgia Tennant playing The Doctor's Daughter, Jenny. There is one episode during which David Tennant's third season where The Doctor gets cloned and the result is Jenny: The Doctor's Daughter. The character appears in only the one episode of the TV series, but has been a matter of great fannish speculation, since, at the end of the episode we learn that Jenny can regenerate like a Time Lord.

Georgia Tennant is Peter Davidson's daughter, and Mrs. David Tennant, putting her in a unique position in the Whoniverse. Big Finish has now given her a story arc of her own. The stories are a lot of fun, as Jenny discovers what it's like to be a Time Lord with all the baggage, as well as no TARDIS. She spends a lot of time stealing spaceships, so it apparently runs in the family.



She also picks up a mysterious companion, Noah, who she finds hiding in a closet in a gigantic abandoned spaceship. Noah has fragmented memories, and apparently doesn't understand a lot about being humanoid, but has a surprising understanding of space-time physics. I have an idea of what Noah is going to turn out to be, but I'll wait for new episodes to come out and see if I'm right.

These audio sets can be ordered directly from Big Finish at – <https://www.bigfinish.com/hubs/v/doctor-who> They are well worth the price if you are any kind of a Doctor Who fan.

cinema



I recently had an opportunity to view “X The Unknown”, a Hammer film from 1956. This was originally scheduled to be the second Quartermass feature, but Nigel Kneale, creator of the Quartermass character, refused to authorize the production. Undeterred, Hammer made the film anyway, starring American actor Dean Jaeger as a scientist star named Dr. Adam Royston.

This is an excellent example of how film makers can produce a high tension, suspenseful movie without using much in the way of special effects, and especially by not showing the menace until the very end. The plot concerns a mysterious, unexplained highly radioactive spot in a rural area where military training is taking place. The radiation becomes extreme, an explosion results that opens a jagged crack in the earth that appears to go down for an extreme distance. Investigation by a scientist at a nearby Atomic Energy Laboratory turns up evidence of radioactive elements locally and in hospitals being drained of their atomic energy, while random people in the region suffer horrible heat and radiation burns after seeing something that is so terrifying that many go catatonic from shock.

Investigating the crack in the earth almost results in the death of one of the investigating team. Something is down there, but what? Further events transpire as a monster from the depths of the earth is apparently roaming the countryside at night, attracted to radioactive material, leaving a path of death and destruction in its wake. Efforts to contain the monster and seal up the crack with concrete are not effective.

The monster crashes across the region seeking a cache of highly radioactive cobalt and its path will lead thru a populated village. Mayhem and heroism follow, until finally

the scientist hero of the film manages to perfect his machine that will magically drain radiation from any object. Unfortunately, this usually effect causes said object to explode, but he thinks be has that little glitch finally fixed. (Hey---no snickering out there! This is serious mid 1950s pseudo super-science malarkey here!)

The monster attacks soldiers, more heroism ensues, and finally the monster is lured between two vehicles armed with the new huge radiation draining machine scanners, where, with appropriate low budget 1956 effects, it blows up. But...then a second explosion occurs near the crack, and as the team approaches to see what's going on, the movie ends. It's almost like a sequel was planned, except there was no sequel.

The success of Hammer Film's first science fiction thriller “The Quartermass Xperiment” in 1955 not only provided a big financial and critical boost to the studio, it also made a significant impact in the US when the film was released there under the title “The Creeping Unknown”.

Sol Lesser at RKO provided half the money for the new production, \$30,000, all of which went to pay the salary of American actor Dean Jaeger, who RKO also arranged to star in the production. Jaeger was a veteran character actor who was easy to work with, someone who was not upset with minimal rehearsals or the

very rapid filming schedule Hammer needed to bring the feature in close to budget. This also meant that “X The Unknown” had an even smaller operating budget than the previous Quartermass movie.

Hammer managed to produce a picture that appeared far grander than it was by concentrating a lot of the action in and around a rural set using actors dressed in military uniforms that could be swapped in and out of different scenes.

The original director of the movie was Joseph Losey, a blacklisted Hollywood director who had moved to the UK and changed his name to Joseph Walton in order to stay in the movie biz. Unfortunately he fell seriously ill early in the shooting schedule and had to be replaced by Leslie Norman, a competent director who hated working for Hammer because of their ultra-tight budget, and the break-neck shooting speed that studio head Anthony Hinds insisted on. This was his only work with Hammer. Later Norman did extensive work with British TV shows, particularly featuring series characters such as The Saint and The Baron that were syndicated in the US and Canada.

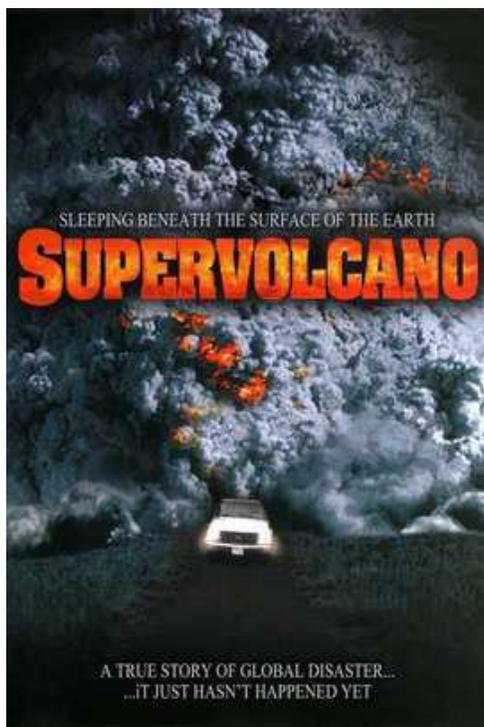
The result was a gripping movie that keeps the tension and thrills moving right thru till the very end, which is good, because the monster in the movie, the entity that is creating all the death and destruction, was finally depicted as being a flowing blob of jelly, hardly something that would strike terror in the hearts of any filmgoer if the story plot hadn't ramped up the suspense before the evil entity made its appearance.

The film was another financial and critical success for Hammer, altho ironically RKO did not benefit from their investment. RKO's severe business and financial problems came to a head late in 1956, and the studio stopped making or distributing films in 1957. The wreckage would be sorted out in later years, but this means that RKO was not involved with the marketing of this picture in the United States. Warner Brothers handled the successful US distribution and publicity campaign.

More importantly, the success of “X The Unknown,” following on the heels of the public's fascination with the Quartermass movie, solidified Hammer's decision to make high tension horror their mainstay from this point onward. A second Quartermass film followed in 1957, and the floodgates were opened to a whole stream of interesting, well developed thrillers from the studio that followed.

“X the Unknown” holds up well thru the years. It still provides chills and suspense sixty-three years after it was made. Anyone who has not seen this film really ought to make time on his schedule to view it. Excellent DVD copies are on sale many places at very affordable prices, and somewhat less pristine copies may be viewed for free at some sites on the internet.

---review by Bob Jennings



When It All Blows Up

As if you didn't have enough to worry about, Netflix is now carrying a BBC “series” called Supervolcano that depicts in horrifying detail what would happen in a worst-case scenario if the magma deposits under Yellowstone National Park should trigger a super-eruption. I put the word “series” in quotation marks because the entire series consists of two 50-minute episodes. It's really more of a stand-alone movie and can be easily watched in its entirety in an evening.

Now, when I think of BBC programming, I generally picture stodgy programming featuring characters with thick accents, dry senses of humor and generally stuffy dispositions. That is not the case with Supervolcano at all. The tagline for the story is “A true story of global disaster...it just hasn't happened yet.” This is a well-made, exciting film in the disaster movie genre, all based on actual science. The effects of a full eruption of the Yellowstone volcano would be terrifying; every place on earth would be affected and millions would likely die.

This film follows a group of scientists who are resident in Yellowstone for the exact purpose of monitoring the seismic

conditions there. We get to see them as the volcano builds up to eruption, during the disaster itself and (in the case of those who survive) in the aftermath.

The scientific effects are pointed out in great detail, to a point where, though the story is technically fiction, it is referred to in some reviews as a “docudrama.” And they are horrifying. Volcanic ash may look like snow when it’s falling (at least on TV), but it is much more dangerous. First, it’s much heavier; only a few inches on a roof can collapse the roof, and even less is required if it gets rained on. The ash in the air, if breathed in, combines with water in the lungs and essentially turns to cement, so that one can easily die of suffocation. In one scene, a commercial airliner flies through the ash cloud, and is pelted such that the windows and shell of the plane are severely damaged. Both engines are taken out by the ash, and the plane glides to a forced landing at the nearest airport.

The special effects are amazing and completely believable. The eruptions themselves along with pictures of the aftermath, the pyroclastic surge leveling everything in its path, people being blown into the sky by a sudden geyser burst – this is one scary movie. The effects looked so genuine, in fact, that I suspect that some of them may have been taken from actual eruptions, possibly the one at Mount St. Helens – which would seem like a firecracker if the Yellowstone caldera should let go.

When I started watching this, I was expecting something along the lines of a Nova program, with British professors explaining in excruciating detail how volcanos work. What I got was a riveting, edge-of-the-seat thriller from which I learned a lot along the way. I recommend it highly.

---review by Tom McGovern

Blaxploitation Returns (SPOILERS)

Just last night as I write this, I finished watching the first season of Black Lightning on Netflix. It is, of course, based on the adventures of the DC Comics character of the same name. It came to Netflix from the CW network, which also carries a number of other programs based on DC characters. Unfortunately, Black Lightning isn’t the best of the bunch; not even close.



As I watched through this series, there were times when I felt as if I was watching one of the old “Blaxploitation” movies of the 1970s. Those times were, of course, when the character of Black Lightning was created, presumably as a way of bring the current trend in movies into the comic book world. Racial issues were a major public concern back then, and, of course, they have not gone away today. However, the near-constant racial – and particularly the retro and stereotypical nature of the way they are presented – proved distracting from the storyline. Naturally the storyline centered on drug dealers and street punks, even though the central

character, Jefferson Pierce aka Black Lightning, is the principal of a high school and presumably middle class at the very least.

If you allow for all that, the storyline itself isn't bad. It centers on a secret government conspiracy to use street drugs to recreate an accidental exposure from 30 years ago that turned a bunch of kids into metahumans. The black ops agency is working with local drug kingpins and street gangs. Black Lightning has been out of action for nine years because his superhero duties brought his marriage to an end, but now he is forced out of retirement to deal with the situation. In the course of the season, Pierce's daughters discover their own innate super-abilities, his marriage gets patched up, there's lots of intrigue between the government, the drug dealers, and Black Lightning himself, and, of course, our hero (mostly) beats the bad guys. Of course, there's a setup for season 2 at the end.

I wouldn't call this series bad, as such. The story itself was pretty interesting. There were just elements that I found either absurd or distracting, such as the 70s feeling that I described above, and the appearance of Black Lightning's costume. The dude looks like he is wearing a neon sign from a diner in the 1950s. There are lights everywhere. I'm telling you, nobody would go out in public in that getup, especially Jefferson Pierce, who is shown to be a pretty sharp, though conservative, dresser when in his role as principal. But that superhero suit – I swear I kept expecting to see the words "Eat at Joe's" flashing in the lights.

So, maybe, if this sort of thing appeals to you, or you're just a fan of anything DC Comics produces, give the show a try. I'll probably watch season 2 when it comes out, though I'm less than enthusiastic about it. Honestly, as shows about black superheroes go, Luke Cage is the much better choice.

---review by Tom McGovern



Hotel Artemis

In Los Angeles in 2028, according to this movie, there exists an unlicensed medical facility catering to professional criminals wounded in the commission of crimes, so long as they buy a membership in advance. Converted from an old hotel, it is operated by The Nurse (Jodie Foster), who had lost her license because of alcoholism. She is also agoraphobic. She is assisted by an orderly (Dave Bautista) who regularly announces that he is a "medical professional" and has a badge to prove it.

At the beginning of the movie, which is set on what is usually a quiet Wednesday night, it has two occupants, a professional assassin (Sofia Boutella) and an arms dealer (Charlie Day), but its existence is threatened by riots over the city water supply. A bank robbery led by brothers Sherman (Sterling K. Brown) and Lev (Brian Tyree Henry) goes wrong, and they have to seek medical treatment for Lev's wounds. Further complications include treating a police officer (Jenny Slate), who has a history with The Nurse, and the arrival of the crime Boss (Jeff Goldblum), who originally bankrolled the facility, and his son (Zachary Quinto), who is desperately seeking his approval.

This film marks Foster's first acting appearance in five years, which by itself is quite welcome and elevates the material, although she is made-up to look older than she is. The film is also helped by what I think is Bautista's best work to date. Brown, Goldblum, and Quinto contribute their usual fine performances. Basically, this is a B-movie with an A-list cast, also helped by writer-director Drew Pearce's sharp dialogue.

---review by Tom Feller



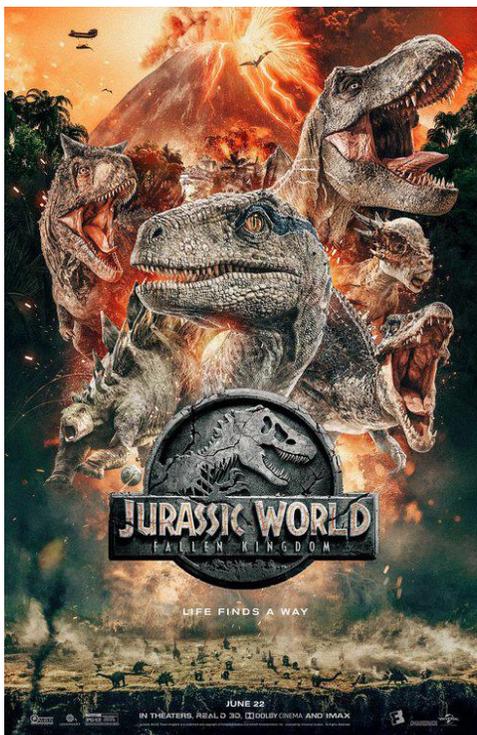
Incredibles 2

Many film critics consider the best superhero movie not to be one based on DC or Marvel characters but rather *The Incredibles* in 2004. It has been fourteen years, but we finally have a sequel after writer/director Brad Bird finally wrote a script with which he was satisfied. It begins immediately after the ending of the first movie, which takes place during a track meet in 1964. As they are exiting, a super-villain by the name of “Underminer”, because he tunnels underneath the ground, appears on his way to rob a bank.

The Incredibles try to stop him, but they are only partially successful. Since superhero activity is illegal, they find themselves living incognito in a motel when a brother/sister business team offer to sponsor them. However, at first they only want Elastigirl (voice of Holly Hunter) so Mr. Incredible (Craig T. Nelson) gets to become a stay-at-home dad. Elastigirl fights a new villain by the name of Screenslaver, but Mr. Incredible has to help Dash (Huck Milner) with his math homework and Violet (Sarah Vowell) with her social life while trying to figure out Jack-Jack’s newly discovered

superpowers. It is a toss-up as to which one has the more difficult task. Their story lines merge by the end, of course. This movie is a lot of fun and a worthy sequel.

---review by Tom Feller



Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom

I read *Jurassic Park* by Michael Crichton in the original hardcover shortly after its release and before the first movie. I have seen all five movies and enjoyed all of them, even if they have gotten sillier and sillier over the years. Between the third and fourth movies, the investors went ahead and built the theme park on an island in the Pacific west of Costa Rica. In the fourth movie, the park was destroyed. The surviving dinosaurs, including the Tyrannosaurus Rex, still live in the island three years later, although the opening scene of the new film shows poachers venturing there to obtain DNA samples. The island’s volcano has become active, threatening the remaining dinosaurs. Under the auspices of a rescue mission financed by Benjamin Lockwood (James Cromwell) and led by Ted Wheatley (Ted Levine), the two main characters of the fourth movie, Claire (Bryce Dallas Howard) and Owen (Chris Pratt), return to bring Blue, the only known surviving Velociraptor, to a sanctuary island. They discover that the expedition has a secret agenda, which drives most of the plot.

Jeff Goldblum, who starred in the first two films as Ian Malcolm, and B.D. Wong, who appeared in the first and fourth as scientist Henry Wu, have cameo roles. The special effects are

excellent, as you would expect, and the film actually features more dinosaurs than any of the previous four. By the way, one of the most controversial aspects of the fourth movie was Claire wearing stiletto heels through the film. In her opening scene in the new movie, Claire is wearing high heels, but when she returns to the island, she is wearing hiking boots.

---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.



DAGON #700

8-1/2x11", 10 pages, published monthly by John Boardman; Room 108, 2250 S. Semoran Blvd.; Orlando, FL 32822-2704; \$10 for ten issues or The Usual.

Please note John's new address. He is settled into new digs with his daughter in Florida, away from the roller coaster weather in Maryland.

This is technically John's APA-Q zine, but he usually doesn't bother with mailing comments and when he does they are extremely brief. This is a mostly monthly fanzine devoted to whatever John happens to find interesting or worth commenting on at the moment.

This issue carries a long, multi-linked article about national anthems; how effective they are, where they came from, as well as satires on the words of some national anthems (particularly in time of war). He notes the humble, or sometimes obtuse sources for many national anthems. The official national anthem of the United States is "The Star Spangled Banner," basically a bawdy tavern drinking

tune to which a poem composed during the War of 1812 by Francis Scott Keys happened to fit more or less compactly.

John noted that the US national anthem wasn't officially adopted until 1931, more than a hundred forty years after the country was formed. It was made official during the waning days of the Hoover administration and in the middle of the Great Depression. The choice of that particular tune was not universally accepted either. He notes that lots of schools kept on using "America the Beautiful" or "America" (sung to the tune of "God Save the King!") instead. Irvin Berlin's "God Bless America", introduced by Kate Smith in 1939 on her national radio program, is immensely more popular, far more singable, and certainly more accessible than the official anthem, which seems to be keeping itself alive mostly because it is played at the beginning of baseball and basketball games (altho, as he notes, "God Bless America" is usually played during the seventh inning at all the baseball parks he has personally experienced).

He notes that European nations tend to select national anthems directly from old religious hymns or with a hymn-like composition, but England's "God Save the Queen" was taken from an old German drinking song: "Heil Dir in Siegekranz", which loosely translates as 'Hail to Thee in Triumph Crowned'. Almost everyone agrees that France has the very best national anthem. "Les Marseillaise" was apparently spontaneously composed by French troops during the French Revolution on their way to defend the Revolution against its enemies.

John also discusses the efforts of the nation's founding fathers to create a totally secular nation, despite efforts by many individual states, particularly in New England, to create officially sanctioned religions and punish both atheism and non-Christians. He notes that Revolutionary War hero Ethan Allen was fined \$200 by special legislative act in Vermont for daring to write a book promoting atheism. In Massachusetts the Puritan church was the official religion of the Commonwealth until the early 1840s, and taxes were used to support it officially. Unfortunately, the idea that national, state, and local governments should be in the business of officially sanctioning and supporting a particular popular religion, or opposing other non-popular religious creeds has not gone away and seems to be actually gaining support in today's fractured political environment.

There are also some comments about how "conservative political thought" seems to have almost always been linked to prejudice and support for racial inequality, while supporting special privileges for a wealthy elite. He mentioned the determined, but futile efforts of Maryland to oppose school integration and the equal rights voting act. There are also some very brief mailing comments to round out the issue.

Most issues of *Dagon* make for lively reading. Most issues carry a mixture of John Boardman's views on the world and they are almost always interesting. *Dagon* is fanzine that is well worth sending for.



DITKOMANIA #96

5-1/2x8-1/2" fold over saddle stitched, 40 pages, published irregularly by Rob Imes; 13510 Cambridge #307; Southgate, MI 48195; \$3.00 for sample issue, after that The Usual.

This is a fanzine devoted entirely to the comic book work and career of Steve Ditko, the legendary comic artist most famous for his work in the creation and development on early issues of The Amazing Spider-Man and Doctor Strange for Marvel Comics. He did a lot of other comic book work before he landed at Marvel, and he did lots more afterwards. Ditko recently died a few months ago, and he was working at comic book art right up till the end, active after more than sixty years in the business of producing comics.

While it might seem that everything in the world that could possibly have been said about the man and his work has already been covered, issue after issue editor Imes comes up with even more information to spotlight and discuss in these *Ditkomania* issues.

This time round the focus is on Ditko's science fiction characters, specifically, the short-lived DC hero Starman. Several writers take a look at this character, his creation, his adventures, the artwork on the series, his placement, and there are also multiple theories on why the character did not succeed. Starman only ran twelve issues as a half-magazine feature in *Adventure Comics* in 1980. In my opinion Starman was poorly placed in *Adventure* at a time when the stands were literally flooded with new science fiction and super hero creations. The stories and the art were certainly good, but it was a case of a good, but not spectacular character getting lost in the crowd. Sharing half a comic with the zany Plastic Man character probably didn't help matters either.

There are also articles about Questar Warriors, an assembly of Ditko creation that appeared in the pages of Questar Magazine beginning in 1977. Chief among the characters was Cosage. This article takes an in-depth examination of the oddities that appeared, and how they sometimes linked together. Questar only

lasted thirteen issues, but as the author of this article points out, they are relatively easy and inexpensive to purchase, and despite this series having been reprinted (altho not recently), the superior reproduction on glossy paper of the originals is worth the investment for the true Ditko collector.

Other articles deal with Ditko short weird comic stories that were reprinted in the British Dr. Who weekly magazine. Billed as "Dr. Who's Time Tales" all the eight different five-page long stories were black and white art reprints from Marvel comic books published in the months immediately preceding the introduction of Spider-Man. Once the Dr. Who magazine changed to a monthly schedule, all those Marvel reprints were dropped.

Larry Johnson has a long article on the horror hosts who introduced Ditko stories in the assorted Charlton comics where his art appeared over the years, beginning with the Mysterious Traveler. He notes that these were almost all unique, specifically created by Ditko himself to "host" and introduce his supernatural stories, somewhat similar to the hosts of the old EC horror comics.

The letter column this time round is short, but offers some interesting comments and discussions of the material in the last issue, particularly dealing with the philosophy of Objectivism, and Ditko's involvement with the concept. There is plenty of artwork thruout the fanzine to illustrate the versatility of Steve Ditko thru the years.

If you are a comic fan, especially a Ditko fan, this all makes fascinating reading. This is a fine issue of *Ditkomania*, well written, carefully researched with a wide range of different artwork thrown into the mix for good measure, and well worth checking out.



ARCHIVE #1: DOWN BY THE OLD SLIPSTREAM

8-

1/2x11"; 8 pages; Arthur D. Hiavaty; 206 Valentine St.; Yonkers, NY 10704-1814; irregular (so far), free for The Usual; one free copy by email to anyone who specifically asks for the e-version. This first issue is currently posted on the efanzines.com website.

Arthur Hiavaty is one of the finest writers and thinkers in fandom when he sets his mind to it. He consistently produces some of the most quotable writing in the hobby, but for more than a few years he has confined himself to a twice-yearly perzine that circulates primarily thru FAPA.

This is a new effort, or perhaps, a rebirth of an old effort, since the first issue of this new fanzine reprints comments he made in the past about various writers and various books he had read. Most of these commentaries deal with science fiction writers and one or another specific volume by that author, but on occasion he covers a range of titles and subjects. Most of these comments are

relatively short, maybe half a page to three quarters of a full page of tight, small type, but Arthur packs a lot of opinion and observations into his comments, and on some subjects he goes on for several pages.

He even has an insightful, long, detailed examination of the works of a science fiction author (a Hugo winner at that) that I never heard of. I was wondering if I had finally hit my doldrums because I couldn't recall a single one of the stories or novels he cited, then I caught his note at the end of the zine revealing that the writer and all his assorted works were a hoax created by Author. It sure sucked me in.

Some of his comments are certain to spark new discussions and objections, just as they did when they originally published, such as his comment that he considers Philip K. Dick the inventor of philosophical science fiction, or his opinion that most of Kurt Vonnegut's later writing was devoted to the concept of denying his creativity so he deliberately tried to dumb down his writing to the most simplistic level possible so as not to burden readers with too much unreality or ideas that were beyond their level of acceptance.

His reviews and comments on some of the authors and volumes discussed are uniquely original. I don't think his observations about the works of Barrington J. Bailey are necessarily correct, but he raises interesting ideas about an exceptional writer who has been sadly overlooked by most science fiction readers, ideas that make me want to go back and reread my collection of Bailey novels.

Arthur says he dislikes fantasy, and rarely reads it. He specifically says he dislikes world creations that run on for multiple volumes, then he specifically discusses a number of exceptions, including the fantasy-detective stories of Randal Garrett.

Some of his other comments are also spot-on, as when he describes Keith Laumer as "an author of a large number of books in which the good guy punches the crap out of the bad guy until he gets what he wants." And his thots on all of these subjects are delivered with terse, pithy, insightful nuances masterfully well crafted. Really, his command of the English language is a joy to behold.

I'll say it again; Arthur Hiavaty is one of the best writers in fandom. All of his comments are sharp, precise, and well worth reading, whether you happen to agree with his viewpoint or not. I can only hope that this new fanzine will come out more often than those twice-a-year Nice Distinctions issues.