

# TIGHTBEAM

A detailed illustration of a post-apocalyptic city. In the foreground, a small child in a red jacket and dark shorts stands on a dirt path, looking towards a large, dark, reflective pool of water. A red ball lies on the ground near the child. The background features several tall, heavily damaged skyscrapers with exposed steel frameworks and crumbling facades. The sky is a mix of orange, yellow, and grey, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The overall atmosphere is one of desolation and hope.

#264

February 2013

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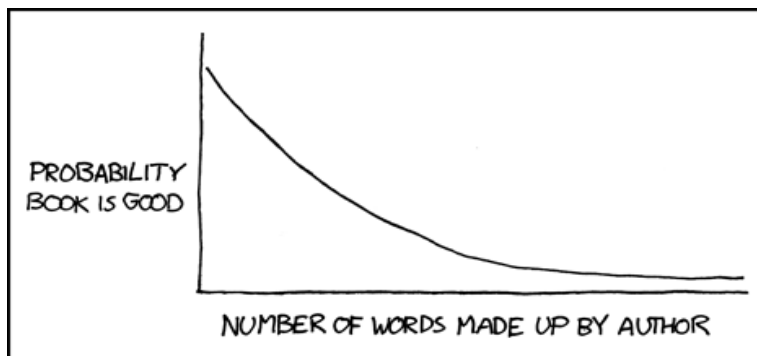
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"THE ELDERS, OR FRAÁ'S, GUARDED THE FARMLINGS (CHILDREN)  
WITH THEIR KRYTOSSES, WHICH ARE LIKE SWORDS BUT AWESOMER..."

## Editorial Cabal

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David Speakman

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Heath Row (2009-2011)

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### REVIEWS EDITOR

Heath Row

### FICTION EDITOR

Jeff Redmond

### PUBLISHER

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### DISTRIBUTOR

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### SUBMISSIONS

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**Tightbeam** (Hyperspace Tightbeam), No. 264, February 2013, ISSN (pending). Published by The National Fantasy Fan Federation. A one-year subscription is \$18 in the United States and its possessions, payable in advance in U.S. funds. This issue was started on January 5, 2013 and completed on January 30, 2013. The editor was David Speakman. The editor of the next issue is, again, David Speakman. Submissions may be emailed to him at [cabal@n3fmail.com](mailto:cabal@n3fmail.com) or via U.S. mail at: David Speakman, PO Box 1925, Mountain View CA 94042. All opinions herein are those of the writers and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of other members of N3F except where so noted. **Submission deadline for the next issue is April 15, 2013.** This non-commercial zine is published through volunteer effort.

# Letter from the Editor



## Tightbeam: The Springboard of Ideas

My first instinct in writing this editorial was to scream, “WE’RE BACK!” in the largest font I could get to fit the page. But, instead, I borrowed the sub-head for the zine that was used in the days when Sally A. Syrjala, Owen K Laurion and David Heath, Jr. were editing the clubzines in the 1980s.

Whether it printed letters of comment, fan-made art and fiction, or was just used to share recipes or fannish gossip & tips, TB was always a springboard of inspiration, discussion and ideas.

As we re-separate from TNFF after more than a decade as a reborn zine, I gotta tell you, the pressure is daunting as I join a pedigree of TB editors that I am not sure I am worthy to join. I mean, **Marion Zimmer Bradley** is the one who decided to call this publication “Tightbeam,” for Pete’s sake.

In this issue, we’ve mixed old and new from both members and non-member, some fresh and some aged in our slush pile for years—with the goal to entertain and—hopefully—to provoke your imagination.

Reaching back into the vault, we present Part 1—the first four of 10 pages—of an SF yarn by the late **David Heath, Jr.**, out of print for 33 years.

In the realm of fiction, member **Angela Myers** contributed a short story that is moody, creepy and a little bit shaggy dog fun. **Britney Carter**, who last appeared in N3F’s pages with a Star Trek fanfic, submits original poetry.

And, of course, **Heath Row** is back with is popular review section where books and film get a critical take with reviews by fans for fans.

I look forward to hearing what you think of this issue.

Keep getting your geek on,  
David Speakman

## ART CREDITS

Jonas De Ro:  
1, 3, 28

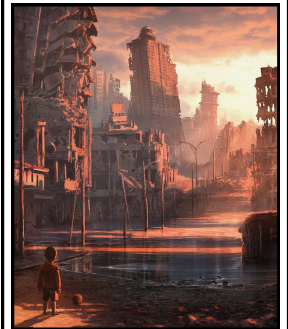
xkcd:  
2

David Speakman:  
3

Karen Indigo Ravenlilly:  
7

Robert Miller:  
6, 12, 13, 25

David Heath, Jr.:  
14-17



Cover Art: “Forsaken”  
By Jonas De Ro

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# Letters of comment

2012.12.17

**Wesley Kawato**

Chino Hills CA

**DAVID SPEAKMAN:** Jeff Redmond told me you were the one who edited “The Doctor’s Dilemma.” **[[TB 263]]** For the most part, the editing was okay, but it seemed like you didn’t understand the meaning of the term, “Time Lord.” If you’re not a Dr Who fan, then I can understand how that term can be confusing. We hardcore Dr Who Fans often make the mistake of assuming certain terms, like ‘Time Lord’ are understood.

A Time Lord is a citizen of the Planet Gallifrey who understands the secret of time travel. That’s a large portion of Gallifrey, but not the entire planet. There are certain small groups that have rejected time travel technology. The Vogons are the most well-known of these groups. I’m telling you this in case you get more Dr Who fan fiction by various people. My whole story was about the last Time Lord left alive. I regret that I didn’t come across as well as I hoped. That’s partly my fault. I assumed my story would be edited by someone very familiar with Dr. Who. I now realize I shouldn’t have made that assumption.

Jeff Redmond’s story *Androidess* will be

published in Nova SF #30, which is now scheduled for Feb. of 2013. Publication had to be delayed because I couldn’t get enough stories to fill the issue until (very) late September. By then there was no way to finish the master copy in time for a November 2012 publication. I hope to have Nova SF #30 out in time for the Gallifrey One convention at the LAX Marriott during President’s Day Weekend. I’ll be selling magazines in the dealer room.

Copies of Nova SF are available for \$6.50. California residents add 45¢ sales tax. Checks are okay, but make them out to Wesley Kawato, not Nova SF. Mail all orders to:

Nova SF Magazine  
% Wesley Kawato  
17983 Paseo Del Sol  
Chino Hills CA 91709-3947

*[[Hey, Wesley. I’ve been a fan of the Doctor for many years. As for my editing, I printed your story as submitted to me by Jeff Redmond verbatim.*

*The \*only\* change I made was that I broke up your paragraphs with some carriage returns - solely because very long paragraphs which are hard to read by some.*

*Being that this is a fanzine, I attempt to*

*(Continued on page 5)*

take a **very** light touch on editing submissions content at all. (I even resisted the urge to change your use of “Dr” in the above letter into “Doctor” - which is both more accurate and preferred by Whovians.)

As for your intent - maybe my own Doctor Who fandom clouded my judgment, but it seemed rather obvious that your story bridged the gap between the 8th and 9th Doctors fairly well.

And, thanks for the reminder to buy of copy of your zine. I do hope you enjoyed the choice of accompanying art to the story. -ed.]]

2012.12.17

**Lee & J.J. MacFadden**

Bristol, TN

Hey, all — We just started a writing & reviews bog. ‘Blue Owl.’ If you’d like to check it out, it’s at:

[blueowlreviews.blogspot.com](http://blueowlreviews.blogspot.com).

2012.12.29

**Lloyd Penney**

Etobicoke ON

**DAVID SPEAKMAN:** Many thanks for the latest issue of TNFF (Vol. 71, No. 4) and Tightbeam (263), and I will be winding up my year of fanzine commentary soon, so here goes with a page of remarks.

Wonderful cover! I would definitely like to see more from **K. Cherdrumhai/Pandabaka**. With the quality of work seen here, perhaps there might be a professional sale or two coming her way.

*[[I agree wholeheartedly. And I am proud to do my part in getting her work seen by more people. -ed.]]*

My letter...yes, the Mayans are laughing, either at the enormous practical joke they played, or at the way we horribly misinterpreted their calendar. If indeed this is meant to be a new era on the Mayan calendar, let’s start it off by being a little smarter. Movies... well, we wanted to go to see Cloud Atlas, but there just wasn’t any time to see it. We did see the first Hobbit movie (very enjoyable), and we hope to see some movies sometime this weekend. Looking forward to Monsters University, plus the upcoming Star Trek movie, but as I look at the calendar of movie releases, there really isn’t much more I’d be interested in. That’s just me...

As this is a clubzine, there is plenty of club-related business to keep all the members busy. I think the idea of splitting TNFF and Tightbeam again is a good one... members will feel like they are getting twice as many club publications. Gotta give the folks their money’s worth.

*[[As of this issue, we’ve split the clubzine and the genzine into two parts. I hope you*

(Continued on page 6)



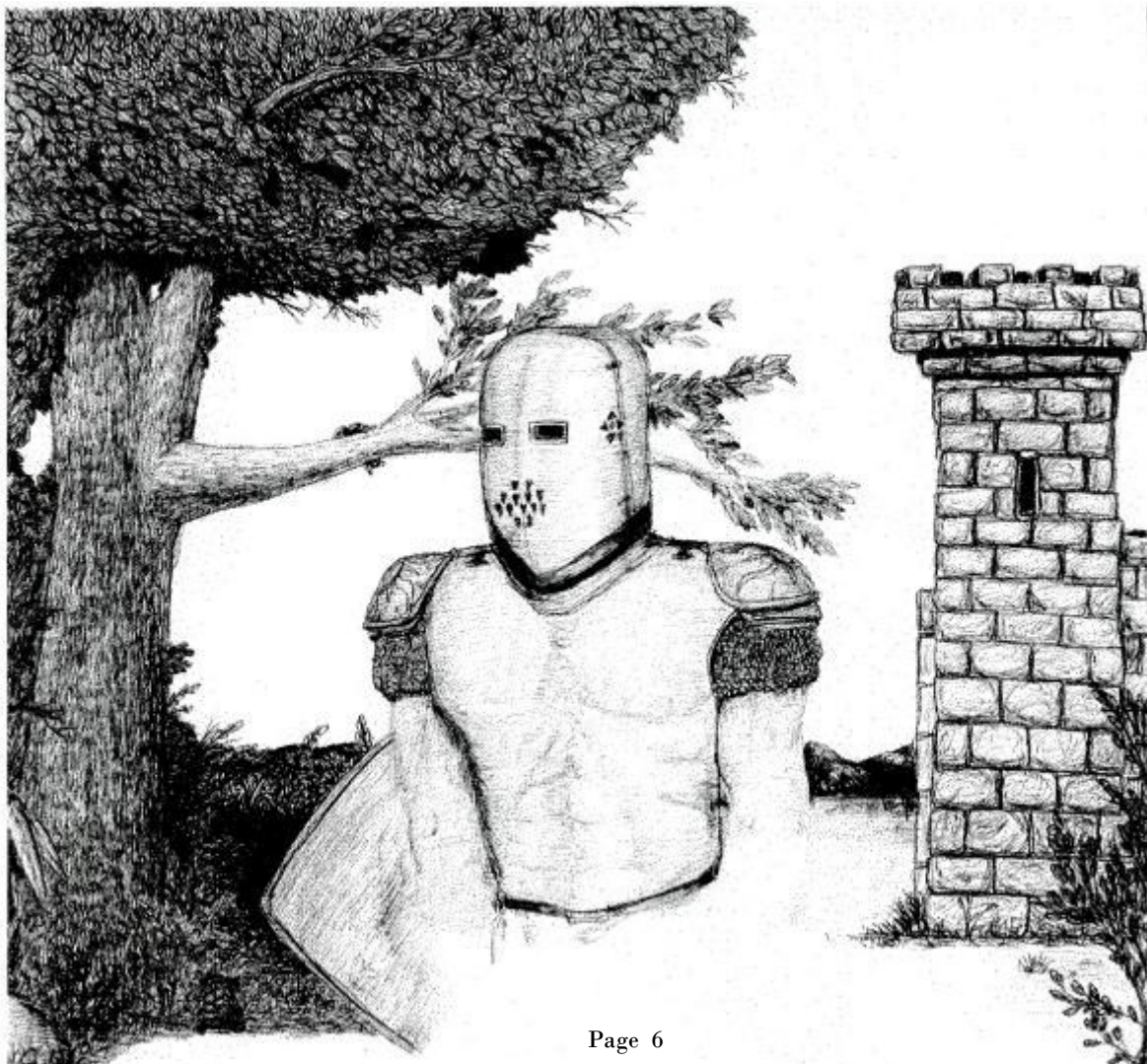
(Continued from page 5)

*like the results.]]*

**Jeff Redmond's** Androidess was an interesting read. If we ever do create androids, how will we treat them? Will they become honorary humans, or will they eventually become property? Would we create them to follow programming only, or would we given them artificial intelligence, assum-

ing we'd have that technology by that time? We treat each other bad enough, but I could only imagine how poorly we'd treat artificial beings who couldn't or wouldn't fight back. Such amazing technology we can imagine...I would hope that we would deserve it if it comes about.

Off this goes to you...many thanks! I hope everyone had a great Christmas, and will have a wonderful 2013. ■





# ASHES TO ASHES AND POINTS BETWEEN

It all started with the gravedigger's strike. Old Reuben Schultz said three dollars an hour wasn't enough. It would have been different if people died more often, but they only did it once, and only a few of them each month. It had gotten to where he had to dig so slowly to earn enough money just to buy a few cases of beer that it shot nearly an entire day. So he just walked away from a half-dug grave one day in October and said he wouldn't go back until he was paid at least twice as much. He didn't mind wasting his mornings working, but he wasn't about to waste his afternoons, too.

Since it was October, and since the grave Reuben had been digging wasn't for a townspeople anyway, but only for an indigent being buried by the county, Algernon Smith, the village mortician, put

the body in its casket into an unheated back room of the funeral parlor for the duration.

\* \* \*

The autumn day was exceptionally beautiful. A haze lay over the newly harvested fields, the trees blazed with color, and the bracingly chill air had that special autumn stillness. Algernon Smith, having no clients at the moment except for the unfortunate gentleman residing in his back room, strolled down the boulevard taking deep breaths of the marigold and leaf-smoke scented air.

"My, doesn't he look dapper!" said Adelaide Peterson to her friend, Harriet Reinke, over the fence. "I think gentlemen look so—so—gentlemanly—in black suits with

*(Continued on page 8)*

vests and homburgs. Especially tall, slender gentlemen like Mr. Smith.”

Algernon bowed slightly and tipped his homburg as he walked by.

“How do you do, Miss Peterson, Mrs. Reinke?”

“Very well, thank you, Mr. Smith.”

Algernon strolled on down the boulevard to Fields of Flowers, his favorite health food store. He had developed a craving for licorice drops, and Fields of Flowers was the only store in town that sold licorice drops with genuine licorice flavoring. He carried his selection to the checkout and started to fish the money out of his change purse. When he looked up, he noticed that the proprietress had red eyes as if she had been weeping.

“Begging your pardon, Mrs. Zwick, not intending to be presumptuous, but it appears that you have been weeping.”

She sniffled and blew her nose on a red bandana handkerchief. “It’s my husband, Mr. Smith. He needs his gallstones removed. Poor Harry. He’s suffering so much with them. Why, the poor man can’t even eat his fatback and turnip greens any more, and he does love them so. We have insurance, of course, but it won’t cover everything, and you know how our little store here brings in just enough money for us to live on.”

She sobbed, her shoulders shaking so

that the loose flesh on her upper arms shivered.

Algernon did indeed know about the little store, and he knew about Mr. Zwick’s infamous gall bladder. He reached across the counter and patted Mrs. Zwick’s dimpled hand gently.

“Now, now, Mrs. Zwick. Don’t you worry. I’m sure it will all work out.”

He reached into his inside breast pocket and withdrew his wallet.

\* \* \*

The county sent Algernon Smith three more indigents, and he discovered that he had only one of the caskets that met state specifications for the burial of indigents. He put one body in the remaining casket, another in a lovely, expensive coffin he kept for the occasional funeral of a towns person, and the third he embalmed and placed on top of one of the three coffins now in the unheated back room of the funeral parlor. Then he sent an airmail letter to Hienkle and Hienkle, LLC, Manufacturers of Fine Final Resting Places for Your Loved Ones.

Two weeks later, he received a reply. His caskets were back-ordered and could not be shipped until February.

That December was one of the coldest on record. Two indigents were discovered frozen to death in the rail yards. Algernon

*(Continued on page 9)*



sighed when they were delivered to him, thinking about the back-ordered caskets and the small amount of money the county paid him to bury indigents. If only one towns person would die, Algernon would make enough money on the funeral to cover all his accumulating expenses. And after all, at least six people past ninety years old lived in the village. It wasn't really too much to hope for.

Algernon went to his supply cabinet to take out the embalming fluid to prepare the latest indigent for eternity. He discovered only one full container. He carefully removed all the boxes and tins in the cabinet, but it was quite true. He had only one full container of embalming fluid. He embalmed one of the indigents and simply laid the other in the unheated back room of the funeral parlor, which, by now, was fortunately very cold.

January was no warmer than December. The temperature dropped to fifteen degrees below zero, and there it remained for three weeks. The little apartment above the funeral parlor was cozy, however, and Algernon owned a heavy, black camelhair overcoat he had bought thirty years ago when he graduated from the Wolfenbarger Academy of Mortuary Science. Each day he bundled up in his overcoat and a nice black wool scarf Miss Pe-

terson had knitted him for Christmas and walked to pick up his mail at the post office. His black, ankle-high oxfords crunched on the frozen snow, and his breath blew from his nostrils in twin jets of moist steam, crystallizing on the individual hairs of his small, neatly-trimmed mustaches. This particular day, he picked up his current issue of Mortuary Digest and started back to the funeral parlor.

He had just passed Mrs. Anderhous's home when he realized he had not seen smoke coming from her chimney in all the time he had had her house in view. And now that he thought about it, he had not seen smoke coming from her chimney when he had passed it on the way to the post office, either. In that amount of time, with the temperature so low, the furnace should have come on. His heart leaped. Something must be wrong. After all, Mrs. Anderhous was 86 years old. This might be the funeral he had been waiting for.

He turned and walked back. He noted that the paint was peeling off the front of the house, and the gate had a broken hinge so that it dug into the snow as he opened it to go into the yard.

Algernon tapped lightly at the door. Mrs. Anderhous did not answer, so after waiting a few minutes, he opened it cautiously and stepped inside. He discovered Mrs. Anderhous huddled under a pile of blan-

*(Continued on page 10)*

kets in a chair in front of her kitchen stove.

"I beg your pardon," said Algernon, trying not to let his disappointment show. "I don't intend to intrude, but it appears that your furnace is not functioning properly."

A tear rolled down a line in her cheek and caught on a wisp of yellowish hair.

"I couldn't pay my fuel oil bill," she said, her voice quivering from cold and the weakness of old age, "and the oil company won't refill my fuel tank until I do. I don't know what to do. I don't have any money, and my Social Security check isn't due for ten more days. It's been such a cold winter."

Algernon blinked once, then reached into his inside breast pocket and withdrew his wallet.

\* \* \*

Algernon Smith hadn't yet received his backordered caskets by the beginning of March, so he called the company long distance.

"Yeah, well, ya know, it takes time, ya know," said the company's secretary, snapping her gum.

"But I require them immediately, you must understand," insisted Algernon.

"Yeah, I understand, ya know. But I can't build em myself, ya know. Oh yeah. They're goin' up twenty-five bucks too. Inflation, ya

know."

Algernon carefully counted his funds. He had ordered embalming fluid, which also had been backordered. It was the more crucial of his needs. He would simply have to reduce the number of caskets he had on order. March promised to be as cold as a normal February anyway, and Reuben still refused to go back to work, so the dearly departed could safely remain in the unheated back room of the funeral parlor a few weeks longer.

About the middle of March, Algernon heard a soft tap on the door of the funeral parlor. He opened it and adjusted his gaze downward until he saw the top of a brown beanie. The little face beneath tilted upward until he saw the freckled face and brown braids of the little girl who lived around the corner.

"Wanna buy thome Girl Thcout cookith, Mithter Thmith?" she asked with a gap-toothed grin.

Algernon bought twenty boxes.

A few days later there came a slightly firmer knock. This time Algernon Smith didn't have to look down quite so far to see the green uniform and golden curls. This Girl Scout's smile had a kind of professional perfection, and Algernon Smith recognized her as the daughter of the local orthodontist. Her grandmother was one of those townspeople who was past ninety

(Continued on page 11)

years old and very well-to-do. Algernon Smith bought twenty more boxes of cookies.

\* \* \*

By April, Reuben had gone back to work, and Algernon had been able to lay to rest two of the indigents who had spent the winter in his unheated back room. He had received the shipment of embalming fluid, and had prepared the rest of the indigents for burial. As soon as he received the order from the casket manufacturing company, he would be able to send most of his clients to their final resting places. Then the county sent him four more indigents and he received a notice from the chemical supply house that the price of embalming fluid was going up by fifty percent, effective immediately.

Again, Algernon carefully counted his funds. The townspeople had been healthy beyond all credulity all winter, and his wallet had become steadily thinner and thinner. He ordered the few supplies he could afford and hoped for a real funeral soon.

As if to make up for the extra-cold winter, April quickly became warm and green. The smell of hyacinths filled the air. In the funeral parlor, another smell began to fill the air, drifting forward from the unheated back room. As Algernon left one morning

for his daily trip to the post office, Mrs. Reinke waved him over to the fence.

“Mr. Smith, do have any idea what that peculiar odor is? Could there be a gas leak in the neighborhood?”

Algernon blanched and gulped.

“It’s nothing to worry about, Mrs. Reinke, I assure you. I’m having a slight chemical problem. “

He turned and walked quickly away.

When Algernon returned from his walk in the fresh air and opened the door to the funeral parlor, he realized the full extent of his chemical problem. He laid his National Geographic on the table and began to calculate exactly how much money he would need to embalm, lay to rest in caskets, and bury the remaining bodies in his unheated back room. Every way he counted the money he had in his wallet, it was simply not enough. It would have been if the price of embalming fluid, caskets and grave digging had not gone up. But they had, and the amount paid by the county for the burial of indigents had not. Algernon sighed, a breath of air heavy with the unwelcome signs of spring, and as he pondered the equity in his little funeral parlor and wondered how he would repay a loan, he absently opened his National Geographic.

On the inside front cover was an advertisement for TransSea Airlines. Palm trees

*(Continued on page 12)*

gently waved their fronds in an ocean breeze. White-caped waves bathed smooth sand beaches. Scantly clad women appeared to sway gracefully to exotic music.

"Escape to Tahiti," screamed the headline, "the Unspoiled Paradise."

It caught Algernon's attention with unprecedented thoroughness. Tahiti looked so peaceful, so beautiful, so inviting. He read the rest of the ad.

"Only discriminating tourists have discovered the lively pleasures of Tahiti," it continued, "and you can become one of those tourists. Special prices—this month only!"

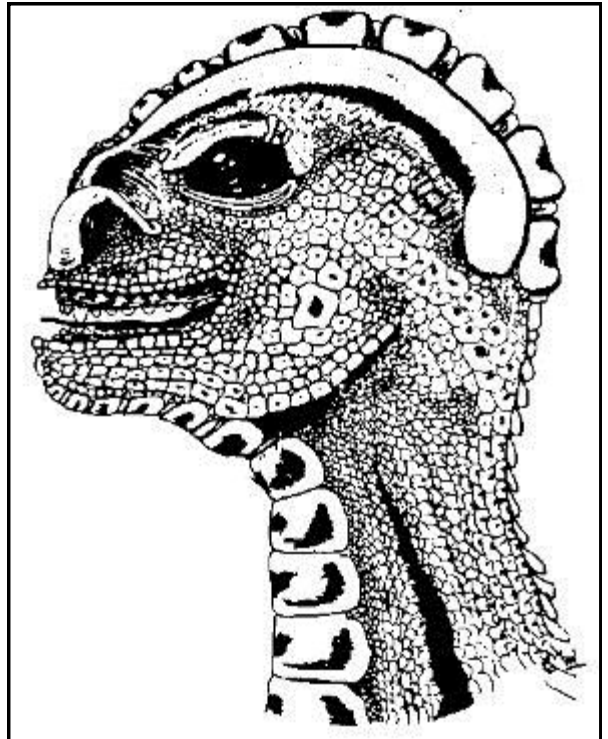
The price named was surprisingly low. Algernon looked at the money spread out on the table—the money that was inadequate to bury the indigents stored in the unheated back room of the funeral parlor. He counted it again. It was just a bit more than the special one-way price listed in the airline ad.

He carefully gathered all the bills, inserted them into his wallet, and placed the wallet into his inside breast pocket. He glanced briefly at the door to the closet where all his black wool, three-piece suits hung. He picked up the National Geographic and tucked it under his arm. He placed his homburg carefully on his head, walked out the door of the funeral parlor,

and closed it gently behind him. He'd buy a Speedo when he arrived. ■

\* \* \*

*"Ashes to Ashes and Points Between," a short story by AH Myers, is included in her short collection of dark humor, "All On a Summer's Day," available as an e-book for Kindle or Nook. Myers, writing as Angela Parson Myers, also is the author of "When the Moon Is Gibbous and Waxing," an urban fantasy published by Etopia Press for Kindle and Nook and now available in paperback.*



And in the night's sorrow  
The winter passed  
A low, unrecognized death  
Under a blanket of torn, soiled white  
Somber wailing fading to reaching  
Whisps of hopeless needing  
Falling helpless pleading  
And it understands not where to go  
Opened eyes unseeing  
That is all it knows.





FEDERATION OF  
FREE STARS



DURING THE  
FIRST ERA OF  
EXPANSION.

ART & STORY by

David  
Heath Jr.

THE STARSHIP  
'GRAB,' COMPLETING  
A MINING SWEEP  
NEAR PROCYON  
WILL SOON BEGIN.



A  
TREASURE  
HUNT...

CAPTAIN OF THE  
PRIVATE REGISTRY  
'GRAB,' ROBSON  
J'CKSON EARTH

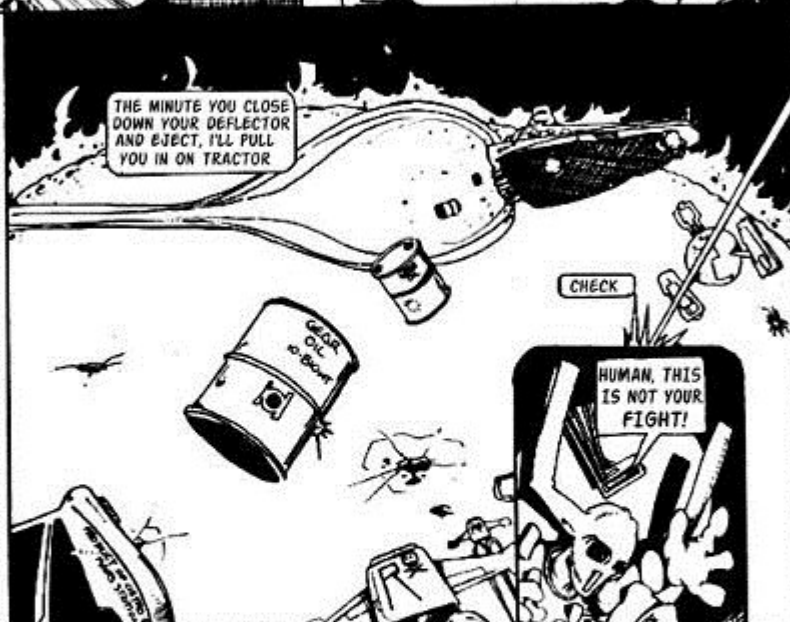
WHAT THE  
DEATON RAYS!?  
OUT HERE?

WE'RE TOO FAR  
OUT FOR THIS  
TO BE REBEL,  
HAS TO BE...

PIRATES!









TO BE CONTINUED...

# RE: THE REVIEW SECTION

*Unless otherwise indicated, the reviews editor compiles and writes the review section. Members of the N3F are invited and encouraged to submit reviews, preferably by email, although postal mail will be accepted. If you send a review by email and do not hear back within a reasonable length of time, please write to check on its status. Publishers: We are especially interested in receiving new books to consider for review. Heath Row, P.O. Box 372, Culver City, CA 90232; [kalel@well.com](mailto:kalel@well.com).*

**Editor:** Heath Row (HR). **Contributors:** Sarah E. Harder (SH), Lee and J.J. MacFadden (LJM), and David Speakman (DS).

## Books

***Artistic License***, by Emerian Rich (CreateSpace, 2012)

*Artistic License* reads like a romance—without gratuitous sex—with a balanced blend of fantasy, horror, and a dash of mystery. Set in modern times, the novel tells the story of Leslie, a young woman who comes from a long line of famous artists but believes she has no artistic abilities herself. When she inherits her family's estate, she soon discovers a creativity of her own when the things she paints start to come to life. As she strives to understand her family's secrets and her own new-found talent, she must defend herself and the ones she loves from dangerous shadow creatures and the evil-doers trapped within the walls.

I found this story to be very engaging with

delightful ideas and elements I've never encountered in a novel before. I often read well into the night—to my own detriment the following day! Emerian Rich is a successful self-published author, as well as a kind and encouraging person whom I had the pleasure to meet last year at Convolution. I am glad to support such great talent. I highly recommend this work and look forward to reading more from her. Check out her website at <http://www.emzbox.com> for more information. (SH)

***A Fine and Private Place***, by Peter S. Beagle (Viking, 1960)

Beagle takes the supernatural idea of a man who lives in a cemetery who can speak with ghosts and two newly dead ghosts who try to deal with being dead and end up falling in love—and make it seem as natural, commonplace, and human as going out for a drink with friends.

This is a slower, more moderately paced book, but it suits the subject material. Beagle starts out with a bit of whimsy and the fantastic (in the form of a talking raven carrying a piece of baloney) so that when you journey with our lonely cast through mundane experiences and self-reflection you slow down and find the charm in it, discover truths in a relatable way, and trust that there is purpose in this—and that the author is guiding you to a soul-satisfying conclusion.

Beagle may be best known for *The Last Unicorn*, an excellent, pure fantasy work beloved by many. However, in this book he takes on a different style and tone. I remember thinking several times while reading that here is a true author who has mastered his craft. I would recommend this to everyone, but especially to anyone who



wants to be an author. This work is an example of quiet genius. (SH)

***Intrigues***, by Mercedes Lackey (DAW, 2011)

Though it would be best to read the first of the Collegium Chronicles before *Intrigues*, it isn't vital. *Intrigues*, the second book in the series, follows Herald Trainee Mags and his Companion, Dallen, as Mags struggles to fit in with the other Trainees at the Collegium.

Companions are white, horse-like creatures with blue eyes and a talent for telepathy. The telepathy is called "Mindspeech," and some humans have it, as well. Mags does. Companions bond to their Chosen people and are very close to them.

There are lots of personal issues in Mags' life; all his friends have problems that need sorting, and Mags himself has problems, as well. Most troubling is the vision at the heart of this story: Farseers have seen the king covered in blood, with a shadowy, foreign-born figure next to him. Because Mags is foreign, suspicion immediately falls on him, and he starts being harassed by the other Trainees.

It will be up to Mags to prove himself innocent—but how can one prove oneself innocent of a crime not yet committed? Fortunately for Mags, he has Dallen and his human friends, who stick up for him. Still, things are rough, and Mags takes it to heart.

On the plus side, the Collegium is developing a new sport: Kirball. Kirball will help Trainees get used to what it's like to be in battle, which they will all face one day. The Kirball scenes are lively and exciting, as team members work together using their wits, skills, and Gifts, or magical powers.

Mags is also learning espionage techniques from Nikolas, the King's Own Herald. Nikolas is

teaching Mags to be stealthy and not draw attention to himself. That's a problem when Mags becomes something of a hero and his friend Lena, a Bard Trainee, writes a song about him.

This is a very entertaining book. One thing we didn't like about it was the fact that, when everything comes to a head and Mags' friends turn on him, the friends never apologize for their part in the fighting, though Mags does.

On the cover: The swords and masks background is pretty cool, but Dallen's and Mags' faces could be a little better done. The overall composition is pleasing, however. (LJMJM)

## Movies

### ***Aeon Flux***

*Aeon Flux* is a hit-and-miss live-action big screen adaptation of a series of animated shorts that first appeared on MTV's Liquid Television series (which also spawned *Beavis and Butthead* and the film *Office Space*) in 1991. The film succeeds in capturing the look and feel of the original cartoon, which was virtually a silent film—but fails where it departs from the original as cheesy dialogue mars an otherwise entertaining film.

Imagine a society 400 years in the future when the entire population of Earth exists behind the walls of Bregna, a single city of 5 million. The rest of humanity has been killed off long ago by disease associated with industrial activity.

This is the world of *Aeon Flux*, starring Oscar-winning actress Charlize Theron in the title role. She plays a Monican agent working covertly to overthrow the oppressive government, led by the Goodchild dynasty. The Goodchilds are similar to the old Chinese dynasties and rule with a caring, iron fist. Under their care, Bregna has grown into

a very well-manicured and very ordered society.

Imagine Singapore, where instead of being publicly caned or beaten for violating laws after the fact, the landscape itself smacks down violators of the social order. You don't need ugly "Keep off the Grass" signs when the grass itself is beautiful, but razor sharp enough to cut through flesh, bone, and the soles of shoes.

The plot of the film revolves around Monican agents trying to take out the Goodchild dynasty—and a mysterious ailment (of which only the government knows) that threatens the few remaining humans.

Directed by Karyn Kusama, whose only other film was 2000 female boxing movie *Girlfight*, and starring Oscar winners Theron and Frances McDormand (*Fargo*) as well as Oscar-nominated Sophie Okonedo (*Hotel Rwanda*), the film has a definite feminist slant. That is a good thing for this movie. In what could have devolved into a fetishist exploitation flick with scantily clad women with guns (like some of the scenes in *Sin City*), Kusama pulls off a lyrical film that is stunning in its visual beauty, but cold and distant—like the call of a mourning dove.

This cold distance means *Aeon Flux* is not a film that will find a mass audience. It is more of an art house science fiction film, with more in common with *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* or *Brazil* than *Star Wars* or *War of the Worlds*.

*Aeon Flux* also is a little heavy handed in its anti-science and anti-genetically modified themes. Bregna takes lethal measures to keep wilds of nature from encroaching upon its over-manicured walls.

But the weakest point in *Aeon Flux* is the writing. Audience members were openly snickering or even outright mocking some of the clichéd dialogue. I haven't sat through dialogue this bad

since George Lucas unleashed *Attack of the Clones*'s teen angst love scene between Anakin and Padme upon us a few years back.

The screenplay by the writing team of Phil Hay and Matt Manfredi (*Crazy/Beautiful* and *The Tuxedo*) steals many of the one-liners from Peter Chung's original MTV series but fails to capture any of the excitement or cutting-edge mood and attitude. That flaw is probably why the studio chose not to prescreen *Aeon Flux* to film critics—fears of dealing with reviews like "Aeon Sucks." Because, frankly, parts of this movie really do suck.

Thankfully, the stunning art direction and top-quality acting save this film. It is worth seeing for the visuals alone. (DS)

### ***Alien Vs. Predator: Requiem***

Move along. Nothing original to see here...

I honestly didn't think I'd pay to see a movie worse than *Spider-Man 3*. I was wrong. When this film came out in theaters, I plopped down \$10.25 to see a little gem (if by "gem" you mean load of crap) called, *Aliens Vs. Predator: Requiem* (or *AVPR*, for short).

Now, I have to say despite its many, many flaws, I still found myself amused – slightly. The film almost walked the line between campy spoof humor and kick-butt action. The special effects and the art direction were top notch. The cast was good – sometimes very good. But the main problem was that the subplot of humans in danger and the dialogue writing sucked—big time.

Here, the main characters that draw the audience into the theatres are the acid-blooded Aliens and the techie-savage Predators. The problem: Neither of these characters talk – the most noise either of these makes is a clicking growl or screech. That means the supporting

humans must have interactions and dialogue worthy enough to draw the audience into the story enough for us to suspend disbelief in what is a pretty unbelievable concept. That just doesn't happen.

Matters don't get much better when the plot holes are so big that it's hard to follow the story because the audience is talking out loud asking valid questions such as, "Now, why didn't they just drive away in the tank?"

With not-so-witty banter such as, "You're too stupid to talk, shut up!" and "People are dying; we need guns," screenwriter Shane Salerno is living up to his track record of writing really bad movies. He's responsible for two other piles of bad dialogue in 2000's *Shaft* remake and 1998's *Armageddon*. I seriously wonder how he continues to dupe movie studios into paying him money to write.

It's a shame.

The Alien franchise is one of the best in science fiction horror history. But with this film it devolves to the level of self-aware bad camp. Sad. (DS)

### **Hard Pill**

Premise: A gay man unhappy with his life takes part in drug trials after a pharmaceutical giant develops a pill that may "cure" homosexuality. So, what would happen if scientists found the cause of homosexuality and said they developed a pill that could "cure" the condition. The film follows the life of a gay man named Tim, played by Jonathan Slavin (*Inconceivable*, *Summerland*), who doesn't feel like he fits in with the rest of the gay world. After he enrolls in a drug company trial, the film follows his life as he tries to change his sexual orientation from gay to straight. The film also focuses on how his decision and the outcome of the drug trial affects the

men and women Tim's life.

One of the great strengths of science fiction is that it can use its "what if" factor to show a morality play of a possible future to question the morals of today. In fact, science fiction television has a long and proud history of doing just this, from the original *Star Trek* and *Twilight Zone* in the 1960s to today's *Battlestar Galactica*.

Ironically, for an issue film, this is where *Hard Pill* is its least effective. The film is muddled and unfocused. As the main character experiences his transformation, the people around him struggle with his changes. But as the final credits roll at the end of the film, it is anyone's guess about what the thematic purpose of this film is. The film's weakness ultimately is that it fails to take a stand of any kind. Not let nature be, not whether homosexuality good or bad, not anything. It leaves the viewer wanting—in the bad sense.

Written and directed by John Baumgartner, *Hard Pill* has the infuriating knack for starting compelling stories but never fleshes them out to be anything but distractions. That is annoying. Especially in the case of the romance between Tim's commitment-phobic friend Joey, played by Scotch Ellis Loring (*Wonderfalls*), who stumbles accidentally into a relationship with gay activist Brad, played by Timothy Omundson (*Judging Amy*, *Deadwood*, *John Doe*, *Xena: Warrior Princess*). The relationship between these two builds, but the story is dropped without any form of resolution.

The sole bright spot of this film is the acting talent, which is top notch. Each performer rises above the material and uses what little is there to shine in their own way. (DS)

### **King Kong**

This movie is proof that director Peter Jack-

son (*The Lord of the Rings* trilogy) is no one trick pony. This newest—and possibly best — version of *King Kong* had even the most jaded movie goers squirming in their seats and jumping at startling moments.

Somehow this film pulls off being a lyrical fantasy, an action adventure, a horror film, a comedy, a tragedy, a road movie, a biting commentary on exploitation of the innocent by the powerful, a buddy film, and a love story all rolled up in one. It really is that good.

Some critics have complained about this new *King Kong's* length, usually saying something akin to how at three hours, it could use a good trimming. I'm not so sure.

In Peter Jackson's hands, we get a movie that starts out on a slow burn—like the first big hill of a rollercoaster. The extra-long buildup is worth the payoff of the second half of the film. Jackson gives us time to become involved in the lives of the characters of this film. We get to know them—and suffer and laugh with them. We feel for them. This version of *King Kong* is a movie with a soul.

For a good portion of this film, there is no dialogue. Lead actress Naomi Watts (*The Ring*, *Tank Girl*) plays "Ann Darrow," the beauty. But in this 2005 version, she is not played as much a damsel in distress as a survivor and fighter. Watts has that gift some great actors have of being able to communicate through her eyes, emotions and intent pouring out of her. Her meaning and intent crystal clear without the need to actually utter a word.

Can a computer-generated "cartoon" act? After I saw this film, I'd have to say yes. *King Kong* himself pulled off the most surprisingly good performance. He was "played" by Andy Serkis ("Gollum" from *The Lord of the Rings*) who also pulls off the dual role of playing the ship's

cook. As Kong, Serkis acted out all of the gorilla movements, which computers captured and converted into a computer-animated 25-foot-tall silverback gorilla. The scenes of Depression-era New York city are flawless. The scenes on Skull Island are pulled off with near-photorealism. Kong himself looks alive.

The original story by Merian C. Cooper and Edgar Wallace was expertly adapted and fleshed out by writers Fran Walsh, Philippa Boyens, and Peter Jackson. For true fans of Kong, they included nods to the original movie and cast peppered throughout the film. But by far, the best touches were the backstory on Ann Darrow and the growth of the friendship between her and Kong. (DS)

### ***Nanny McPhee***

Of all the so-called family films I've seen in the past few years, two have stood out as films I've told adults to go see regardless of whether they have children. One is *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. The second is *Nanny McPhee*. This film is a modern classic. Like the latest Potter movie, and like the classic Disney films of the 1930s and 1940s, the makers of *Nanny McPhee* know that evil and dark times are required to make the good times matter.

In the title role, Emma Thompson plays the magical Nanny McPhee, who takes on a physical appearance that matches her charges' behavior. The more ugly the children's behavior, the more ugly the Nanny appears. As the best-known actor cast in a major role in the film, she succeeds in keeping her supporting role from overpowering the other actors and plot of this sweet film. In a bit part, the film's biggest star, Angela Lansbury, does a delightful turn as the pompous Aunt Adelaide, who is near sighted in more than one way.

The true strength of this delightful film is

that it is a true family film. It falls happily into a category of its own. It isn't mind-numbingly boring to adults like most movies for children. Emma Thompson also wrote the script, which is adapted from the *Nurse Matilda* series of children's books by Christianna Brand. It is no wonder that Thompson has won an Academy Award for her abilities to adapt literature for the big screen. With *Nanny McPhee*, she again does an outstanding job. Here the adults have human faults and the children talk like children, not miniature grownups.

Thompson has a gift for dialogue which is rare. Thompson sets a rhythm and lyrical quality in all of her scripts that are reminiscent of the playfulness in some of Shakespeare's farces. *Nanny McPhee* is one of those films that didn't set the box office on fire, but is destined to live for years as a classic family film due to its magical mix of wit and moral relevance. (DS)

## Sunshine

I rented the 2007 film *Sunshine* because I had heard good things about it but never got the chance to catch it while it was in the theatres. Besides, it has Chris Evans in it and I am a big *Captain America* fan—reason alone to watch it, in my book.

I also have been a long-time fan of director Danny Boyle ever since he came out with the film *Trainspotting* in the 1990s. Unlike *Trainspotting*, or even *28 Days Later*, *Sunshine* is not an instant masterpiece of genre film. It is, instead, just a well-made science fiction work that, like so many other films in my favorite genre, tends to fall apart in the third act.

Synopsis: In the future, the sun is dying and a team of scientists are on a possibly one-way mission to reignite the star to save life on planet Earth, which is caught in an ice age. So the crew

embarks on its seven-year mission and is strapped into a huge spaceship that is one part huge bomb headed out to refuel the star and one part escape vehicle. On the way it becomes a well-written human drama, a thriller, and a film about spiritual journeys.

I have several nits to pick. Premise: The science is faulty here. When a sun like our Sol starts to die, it's doesn't get dimmer and cooler; instead, it expands and gets hotter short term. Earth will get hotter and eventually burn like a cinder before the sun burns out. Artificial gravity: I hate this crutch used in supposed realistic science fiction programs. For some reason, when an airlock is re-pressurized, gravity magically appears on the spaceship used. In the case of this film, the ship was large enough for it to be spinning, giving the crew at simulated centrifugal force "gravity." (DS)

## Ultraviolet

If you've been dying for the first big-budget live-action anime film, the good news is your wait is over. The bad news is that it comes in the form of *Ultraviolet*, the new wire-fu sci-fi flick from Sony's Screen Gems genre studio.

The plot revolves around a concept that sometime in the future, scientists will stumble upon an ancient disease (one for human vampirism) and modify it in hopes of creating a super soldier with enhanced, speed, strength, intelligence, and healing ability. Things go awry, and the virus mutates to become very infectious. Society devolves into a war to save itself, led by a pseudo-religious inquisition bent on the extermination of the infected. No, that wasn't a spoiler because it is never fully explained in the film, although an attempt is made over the beginning credits.

The film stars Milla Jovovich (*Resident Evil*,



*The Fifth Element*) as Violet, William Fichtner (*Invasion, Armageddon*) as Garth, Cameron Bright (*Stargate: SG1, The Butterfly Effect*) as Six, and Nick Chinlund (*The Chronicles of Riddick, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, X-Files*) as Daxus.

A few things work very well in this film. A true fan of freeform plot anime or wire-fu (*Matrix, Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*) films will probably thoroughly enjoy this film. The special effects are stunning, the camera shots are gorgeous, and the feel is very ... Japanese. As a semi-silent film or a work of visual art, this film succeeds. But alas, films in the American action-adventure tradition tell a story with a clear beginning, a clear middle and an end that resolves something. *Ultraviolet* lacks these conventions. Now, for an audience that doesn't care, that can be a good thing.

But, for an audience who wishes to find a good hour-and-a-half of swashbuckling fun, this lack of clearly defined story is not good at all. For the vast majority of the American film-going public, *Ultraviolet* will probably be seen as boring or confusing. The writers and director fail to explain to the audience why they should care if the main character lives or dies.

Otherwise it is a gorgeous, dreamlike and exciting film destined for cult status. But as a mainstream film, something is missing—something big. After watching *Ultraviolet*, I left the theatre with a definite feeling that I had witnessed a film with much potential that just didn't live up to its promise. In essence, there was no there there, to borrow Gertrude Stein's famous quote. (DS)

### **V for Vendetta**

*V for Vendetta* is a science fiction film made by the people who brought us the *The Matrix* series and is based on the 1982 to 1985 graphic

novels (long-form limited-run comics targeted to an adult audience) written by Alan Moore with the art of David Lloyd.

The world that this story inhabits is an alternate future United Kingdom. A series of events, including war and a plague-like disease has crippled most of the world, but miraculously left Great Britain largely untouched. Well, except for the fact that the country is now run as a fascist state that is a curious cross between Hitler Germany and Orwell's Big Brother.

The basics: A masked man with a mission to overthrow an oppressive government befriends a scared nobody of a girl who is stronger than she realizes. Trivia: This release of this 2005 film was postponed six months because of the London subway bombing.

Science fiction has a long tradition of showing dystopic futures where technology has been abused and society has suffered. Some of the best science fiction books and films such as *Blade Runner, The Matrix, The Terminator, Alien, 1984, The Handmaid's Tale*, and *Brave New World* are set in dystopian futures. As a dystopic warning film, this movie works.

To understand the world of *V*, one must look at the time in which the story was written. The early 1980s was the height of the worldwide AIDS panic. Popular culture was dominated by extremes; either the rampant commercialism of *Dynasty* and *Dallas* or the nihilistic influences of such films as *The Day After* and *The Hunger* or musical artists as Joy Division and the Sex Pistols.

With that in mind, the producers attempted to update the story for today's audiences. They partially succeed. But at its essence, *V for Vendetta* is a child of the 1980s with all of its neuroses intact. Too bad it took almost 25 years for film technology to catch up and be able to do

this classic science fiction story justice.

Back when I was in college—which coincidentally was in the 1980s—a professor challenged me and my fellow students to come up with one sentence that defined the difference between what is and is not art. It took us more than one class period, but eventually we came up with a workable answer: Art is the work product of a person that evokes an emotion in the audience whether they enjoy it or not. Now, I've later learned that that definition of "art" doesn't apply 100% of the time. But in the case of *V for Vendetta*, it does.

This movie is disturbing. It raises issues an audience going to a science fiction action film will not be expecting. It asks disturbing questions of the audience. It deals frankly with issues and uncomfortable themes seemingly ripped from today's headlines such as the elimination of gay rights, the use of religion as a shield for violence, and supposedly neutral television news organizations spouting partisan rhetoric.

I firmly believe that rabid conservatives will hate this film. They will probably mistakenly see it as a leftist attack on George W. Bush and his allies in Europe. That is naive being that the story was conceived in the early 1980s when the former President was busy running the Arbusto oil and gas exploration company in Texas.

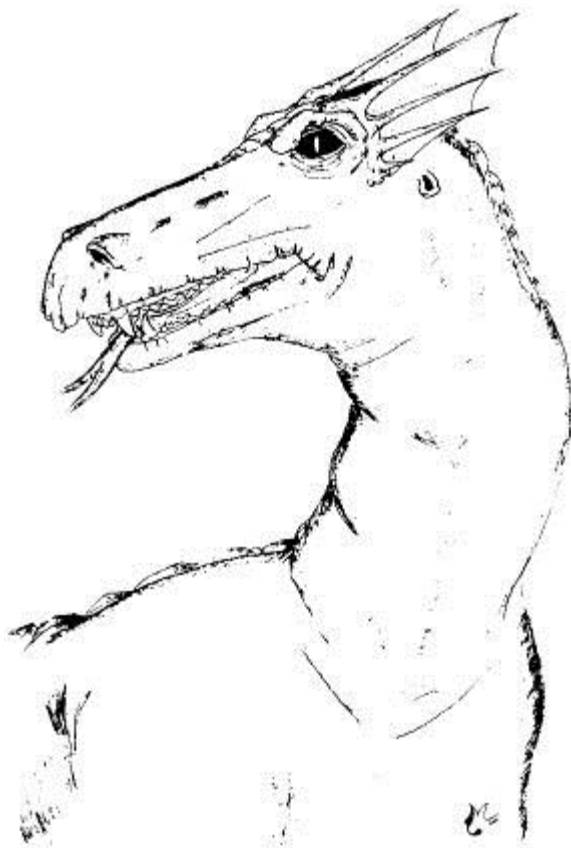
Likewise, I firmly believe rabid leftists also will find much to hate in this film. Lines such as "Governments should be afraid of the people" and ruminations on the lack of an armed general public are enough to put a chill in the heart of most dyed-in-the-wool liberals.

This is because at its core, *V for Vendetta* is neither liberal or conservative. It is a film with a Libertarian ideal. Yes, Libertarian with a capital "L."

Natalie Portman (*Star Wars*) as Evey and Stephen Rea (*Interview with the Vampire*, *FearDotCom*) as Finch carry this film. It is through their eyes that the audience discovers both the depths of fear and the true consequences of life in a totalitarian society.

Hugo Weaving (*The Matrix*) provides the voice of V, the mysterious masked man that tries to overthrow the government. Somehow he pulls off what may seem impossible, making a sympathetic and tragic character of a man in a mask that looks like a humorous cross between Batman's Joker and the Phantom of the Opera.

(DS) ■



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Tightbeam relies upon contributions from its members and readers. This means that your submissions make each issue possible.

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**Art**

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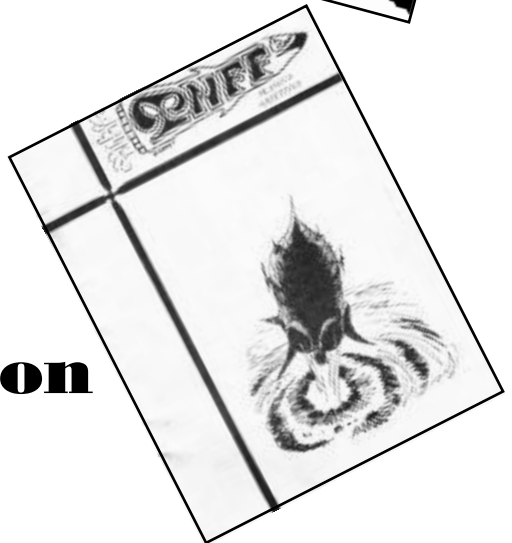
**Con reports**

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# National Fantasy Fan Federation Application

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Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_ Male: \_\_\_\_\_ Female: \_\_\_\_\_ Birth date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Applicant: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Interests. Please select any and all of the following that you're interested in or would like to get involved in

\_\_\_\_\_ APAs (amateur press associations)

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Which would you prefer?

\_\_\_\_\_ A PDF of The Fan emailed to you \_\_\_\_\_ The clubzine printed and mailed to you \_\_\_\_\_ Both

How long have you been interested in science fiction and fantasy? \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you been involved in fandom? \_\_\_\_\_

List any other clubs you are or have been a member \_\_\_\_\_

List any conventions you've attended: \_\_\_\_\_

What prozines and fanzines do you read, if any? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your favorite type of sf/f? \_\_\_\_\_

Who are your favorite sf/f authors: \_\_\_\_\_

Are you interested in online activities? If yes, what type? \_\_\_\_\_

Which, if any, of the following would you be willing to help the club with?

\_\_\_\_\_ Artwork \_\_\_\_\_ Recruiting at conventions \_\_\_\_\_ Writing for club publications

\_\_\_\_\_ Organizing activities \_\_\_\_\_ Corresponding \_\_\_\_\_ Publishing

\_\_\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Sponsoring Member (if any): \_\_\_\_\_

Regular dues are \$18 per year (\$22 for Joint Memberships) which includes subscriptions to the club's fanzine as well as other activities and benefits. Make checks or money orders payable to William Center (the treasurer). All payments must be made in U.S. funds. Mail dues and application to N3F, PO Box 1925, Mountain View, CA 94042. Please allow at least eight weeks for your first clubzine to arrive. You can also sign up online at <http://n3f.org>



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