

Of Mice and Martians #2

Jason Burnett, jason@jason-burnett.com

PO Box 18496, Minneapolis MN 55418

Momentum. That's the way to keep things happening. For me it is, at any rate. Once I start doing something, I'm able to keep doing it, no problem. But if I ever stop for any reason, I find it hard to start up again. Consequently, a scant 12 hours after releasing *Of Mice and Martians #1* into the world, I've already fired up my word processor and started in on #2. I hope you enjoy it.

Too Big to Edit

The other day a friend of mine announced that he was giving up on George R. R. Martin's *Song of Ice and Fire* partway through reading *A Dance With Dragons*¹ because he was “physically sickened by the loving detail he put into descriptions of sadism and misery that struck me as nothing short of pornographic, in a supremely horrid way.” I got to thinking about this, and recognized he's right – the books have gotten more and more horrific as the series goes on². And I found myself wondering if, given the success of the

1 The fifth book, for those of you keeping score at home. An author has to piss a reader off pretty badly to get them to drop out after investing that kind of time in the series.

2 And considering that book 1, chapter 1 includes Ned Stark – one of the “good guys,” to the extent that Martin has good guys – beheading a criminal with his own hand in front of his sons down to 7-year-old Bran (apparently 3-year-old Rickon gets a pass), that's really saying something.

books and the accompanying TV series, Martin has become too big to edit.

I imagine you're all familiar with “too big too edit.” If not, just listen to people talk about books and you'll hear it soon enough “So-and-so's early books were good, but then they got too big to edit and now everything they write is too long and/or too focused on their particular obsessions and/or they keep dragging out a series because they know people will keep buying it.” Author's I've heard accused of being too big to edit include:

- Robert Heinlein
- Stephen King
- Anne Rice
- Anne McCaffrey
- Mercedes Lackey
- Frank Herbert
- J. K. Rowling
- John Norman³

3 Just checking to see if you're paying attention – I've never actually heard anyone say this about Norman. But if you plot the ratio of “alternate earth

- Robert Jordan
- Piers Anthony

And I found myself wondering: What is it that causes authors to become too big to edit? Are they simply unaware of the phenomenon? Or are they aware of it but don't think they're falling victim to it? What, if anything, can be done about it? Why do some authors seem to be immune?⁴ And of those authors who seem to be immune, are they in fact immune, or does it just seem that way?

Of course, as I've neither written a novel nor worked for a publisher, I'm left with more questions than answers here. I'm curious to hear what you have to say on the subject.

A Story To Look For

While reading Southern Fandom Bulletin v. 10 #1, I came across a flier for Contraflow, which took place in New Orleans last October. Looking over the list of guests, I saw George Alec Effinger listed as “Memorial Guest of Honor.” This seemed fitting: During my time living in New Orleans, I never saw a con flyer that didn't feature George Alec Effinger as a guest. All of this got me to thinking about my favorite George Alec Effinger story, “Skylab Done It,” which I remembered reading in a copy of *Fantasy & Science Fiction* that I picked up from a newsstand in New Orleans on a field trip with my school's gifted program when I was in junior

swashbuckling adventure” to “BDSM and male-supremacist philosophizing” in each volume of the series, the case pretty much makes itself.

4 For example, I've never heard the charge leveled against Iain (M) Banks, despite the length of some of his books.

high⁵. What surprised me when I looked the story up on ISFDB was that it had never been republished. Anywhere. Ever. So if you're reading this, and you find yourself in the position of editing an anthology, you could certainly do far worse than including “Skylab Done It.” You really can't go wrong with the story of a Louisiana boy whose mother starts World War III when she accidentally detonates a bomb that his father had brought home from the nuclear plant where he worked.

Fanzine listings

- Alexiad #72
- Broken Toys #24
- Drink Tank #362
- Breaking It All Down #2
- Lake Geneva #3
- Sporadid #21 and #22
- Space Cadet #25
- Fadeaway #39
- SF Commentary #85
- Chunga #22
- BCSFazine #488
- Drink Tank #365

5 According to the story's ISFDB entry (<http://www.isfdb.org/cgi-bin/title.cgi?48856>), it was the March 1987 issue.

Lettercol

My comments are in footnotes, thus tying my note to the information I'm commenting on while still preserving the flow of the LOC.

R. Graeme Cameron (rgraeme@shaw.ca)

Congratulations on your first issue! It may only be four pages but you pack in quite a bit of interesting content. Off to a good start.

One of the advantages of creating a zine for online publication is that the number of pages is not an important issue. If you have the material, you could do ten or twenty pages without the 'extra cost' a paper publication would entail. On the other hand you could publish a shorter, more frequent version, say four to six pages, without having to worry about mailing expense. In short, online publication offers you the 'freedom' to settle in with whatever publication routine works best for you. Given how succinct and to-the-point your articles in the inaugural issue are⁶, I recommend a policy of publishing whenever you have enough material for ten pages or so. That way you don't tie yourself down to an artificial deadline, yet publish often enough to encourage a steady flow of reader comment.

On the subject of DC comics, I had no idea a comics publisher could be so capricious and cavalier about

⁶ One of the things I never learned, either as an undergraduate or in grad school, was how to make a piece of writing longer. My natural tendency is for information-dense writing; this tendency was only aggravated by a couple of professors who imposed strict upper limits on the length of assignments.

alienating their customers. But then considering Hollywood felt free to cancel Del Toro's 'At The Mountains of Madness' Lovecraft movie just as it was set to begin filming, I'm not surprised at anything a so-called 'creative industry'⁷ does anymore. Perhaps the mysterious decisions at DC were the result of a similar process, namely 'new broom sweeping clean in effort to establish credentials no matter what the cost,' or perhaps merely an example of an infestation of 'bean counters.' Or to put it another way, corporate 'biting-the-hand-that-feeds-you' is always done in the name of 'improving the profit picture' and invariably results in the reverse. They never learn.

My own comic interests are lean. As an adult I collected some of the comics I had as a kid, plus comics by favourite artists like Vaughn Bodé, Wally Wood and Rand Holmes, and the occasional series of underground or off-the-wall SF and Horror comics. And of course I have the hardcover editions of most of the EC comics. But I don't collect any more, being very budget conscious since retirement. I am content merely to haul out my favourites from time to time and enjoy them once again.

Must admit, I NEVER collected superhero comics, not even as a kid. I read my friend's comics while they read mine, so I was exposed to Batman and Sub-Mariner and such, but I never bothered to buy superhero comics... wait a mo, I still have a bunch of Metal Men issues now that I think about it, but I acquired them because I thought of it as a science fiction comic. It's not that I actively disliked superhero comics, it's just that I loved SF comics more, and given an

⁷ I'm starting to think this is an oxymoron.

allowance of just one quarter a week, my money went toward Magnus Robot Fighter, Mystery in Space, Space Family Robinson and such-like. I guess I found Martians more believable than superheroes. Weird, but there it is.

I agree licensed world fiction can be just as good and worth reading as original fiction. Franchise fiction, to put it another way. Star Trek and Star Wars would be good examples of the phenomena, but I can't comment because I never read any of those. On the other hand, I still have my five anthologies of Star Trek episodes converted into short stories by James Blish⁸. Many critics accused him of "slumming" but they read enjoyably enough. Actually they are of great interest because he based them on the early versions of the scripts given to him so they tend to diverge somewhat from the episodes as finally aired.

Just took a look at them. Aha! I had forgotten one of the James Blish Star Trek books was an original novel titled "Spock Must Die!" Hmmm, written in 1969 and published in 1970. Would that make it the FIRST Star Trek franchise novel? I wonder.

I note that in his introduction Blish complains about Star Trek being canceled and writes: "I for one refuse to believe that an enterprise so well-conceived, so scrupulously produced, and so widely loved can stay bone-yarded for long. And I have 1,898 letters from people who don't believe it either."

I'm afraid I'm not au courant with survival realty shows, not

⁸ The library in the town I grew up had these and I remember reading and enjoying them.

being at all interested. If I'm trapped in the wilderness I die in the wilderness, plain and simple. So I avoid the wilderness⁹. As for the collapse of civilization, I figure I'll just be one of the mutant scavengers haunting the ruins. I certainly don't believe building myself a well-fortified, well-stocked bunker out in the wilderness is the key to long-term survival. I'm more inclined to suspect that joining a highly mobile, extremely well-armed and profoundly ruthless gang of mercenary-like thugs that scour the countryside besieging and looting said well-stocked survivalist bunkers is the genuine key to long term survival. Course, at my age I wouldn't be much good in the actual assaults, but as a former accountant I'd be good at listing the loot and keeping track of how it was shared out¹⁰, not to mention keeping track of all the spare parts on hand for maintaining the armoured cars vital to our efforts. "Locusts 'R Us" would be a good name for the group methinks.

By all means list the zines you read. Even better, add a capsule critique. Not enough reviews of zines are published in zines. (Hence some faneds have the impression nobody is reading them, not even the people they send them to.) I'm guilty of this myself. So we need more people like you (to write reviews, however brief) to make up for people like me (too busy writing my own stuff to review other people's work).

⁹ If only every who isn't capable of dealing with the wilderness would follow your example.

¹⁰ This image amuses me greatly, as I can't help but picture the stereotypical grey flannel suited accountant travelling around with a group of *Road Warrior*-esque marauders.

At any rate, to assuage my guilt I will attempt to write a loc for every issue of 'Of Mice and Martians' you send me. (I'm a sucker for anything that has 'Martians' in the title.)

You are no doubt aware there are a number of traditions as to how to DO a loc column. The worst, or at least the one I like the least, is to rip locs apart and print by theme, say take everyone's paragraphs commenting on your DC Comics article and print them together, followed by everyone's comments on your licensed fiction article, and so on. This strikes me as an artificial construct, and a lot of unnecessary work for the editor.

Fairly common is to print the loc in full (or at least the parts you're willing to print) and give your editorial 'rebuttal' at the end. But this can be confusing.

What I like to do is print the loc as is but interject my responses after the appropriate paragraphs. Not every paragraph, just the ones I feel like responding to. Some people hate this practice with a passion, but I feel it adds a 'conversational' tone with the added virtue of being clear and precise as to what is actually being discussed. But that's just how I see it. You may have a different perspective. It's your zine after all. Do with it as you will.

At any rate, feel free to print as much of (or as little as) my loc as you see fit.

Cheers! Graeme

Lloyd Penney (penney@bell.net)

Many thanks for Of Mice and Martians 1, and as always some comments are here for you. I'm not sure how many I can make on a four-pager, but it's the attempt that counts.

I've brainstormed titles for myself in the past, and I have a few in mind, but I simply don't have the time to produce a zine right now. Let me win a lottery, and you might even get a paper copy.

I've heard so many complaints about what comics look like these days, and how many storylines have been prematurely ended, or characters re-invented. I never got into comics myself, but I can see how those who do enjoy the stories would be outraged over this reset to attract a whole new readership, and as a result, alienate the old readership.

Novelizations...when I was more into Star Trek than I am now, I bought and collected all the novelizations, for original ST, plus TNG¹¹. As time went on, I couldn't afford them any more, and I lost a lot of interest. Possibly some of that came about from whether they were considered as canon, a la Holmes. So much is canon and so much is not, and this applies for Trek, Star Wars, Doctor Who (some radio shows are canon), and many more properties.

As I look at the stack of zines and e-zines I will respond to, I

¹¹ My golden age of Star Trek novel collecting came in the mid to late 1990s, when DS9 and Voyager were both on the air. During that time, they were putting out 4 Star Trek novels a month, one for each series. It was a number of books that I could afford to buy and could find time to read, and the numbered series of books appealed to my love of order. Then they stopped numbering the books, running mini-series, varying the number of books each month, and otherwise making it difficult for collectors. This time of disorder coincided with me starting grad school and marked the end of an organized effort at collecting on my part.

have noticed that a fair number of them are now annual zines, like *Argentus*, *File 770*, *It Goes On The Shelf* and a couple more. I have the time to get caught up on fairly frequent zines, and take my time with the annuals.

Time to go, the bigger the zine gets, the bigger this letter will get, and I promise I will write a bigger one with the next issue. Looking forward to it!

Yours, Lloyd Penney

Mark Plummer (mark.fishlifter@gmail.com)

This isn't a criticism, but merely an observation that in your first issue you manage to pick three issues to discuss and I really don't have anything to say about any of them¹². I don't especially like the Superhero subgenre and actively dislike serials so have little to offer on the subject of DC comics. And I realise this will probably make me sound like one of those elderly judges asking who or what 'The Beatles' might be -- thinking about it that one may be coming full circle now such that give it a few years and *only* elderly judges will know who The Beatles were -- but I really hadn't noticed there was a survival reality show genre. Perhaps there isn't in this country, given that we have so much less wild to survive in -- although I guess that means there is scope for a show in which teams are challenged to exist for

¹² For not really having anything to say, you certainly wrote quite a excellent LOC -- I can only imagine what you might have produced had I hit on a topic close to your heart. Seriously, though, I'd be gobsmacked if everyone was interested in everything I wrote about. Maybe something in this issue will be more to your taste.

three weeks on half-eaten abandoned takeaways in the car park of a retail estate just outside Swindon. And if there isn't such a show already I think I'll be getting on the phone to Channel 5...

On 'licensed-world fiction', so do you think it's simple prejudice that such works rarely if ever find their way onto personal or collective best-of-year lists or award short-lists?¹³ You say that such work 'can be just as good as completely original fiction' but do you think the best examples can stand alongside the best completely original fiction?¹⁴

As a kid I was something of a fan of the Target Doctor Who novelisations, although I think they were at least in part a surrogate watch-again feature in a world where the show was rarely if ever repeated and we didn't have VCRs. At 12 years old I was happy enough to read and re-read Brian Hayles's novelisation of *The Curse of Peladon* or Terrance

¹³ I don't think I'd say *just* prejudice, as it's certainly far from the only factor, but it certainly doesn't help. For example, I think that *The Mists of Avalon* deserved better than it got when awards time came around, but it was dismissed as "just a retelling of the Arthurian legend."

¹⁴ Right now, probably not. I'd attribute at least part of that to the prevalence of "any original fiction, however bad, is superior to any licensed-world fiction, however good" attitudes and the editorial interference that comes from writing licensed-world fiction in the current publishing business model, which would tend to discourage the best authors from working on licensed-world fiction. That being said, I think that if you were to rank all books on a scale of 1 to 10, even though there almost certainly won't be any 10s in licensed-world fiction today, the 6-9s in licensed-world fiction would be just as good and just as prevalent as 6-9s in original fiction, and there will probably be some 4-5s in original fiction which could be improved a point or two by moving into a licensed world rather than forcing the author to try filing off the serial numbers.

Dicks's retelling of The Genesis of the Daleks, but I suspect I'd have been happier still to simply watch them again.¹⁵

A few years ago, when I occasionally reviewed books for the BSFA, I got to read a number of Star Wars novels. Many were set after the original trilogy, and so I think do fit your model of providing a prefabricated Starfleet -- or at least a prefabricated post Imperial new republic -- that a writer could develop and decorate. It's odd, then, how often that development led to the pilots of X-winged fighters flying along heavily defended trenches to drop bombs down small holes. In some respects, the more interesting books are those which constrain themselves by being set between two of the original movies, such that you know where everybody starts out and the writer has to do something interesting with them while knowing where they all have to end up.

Comics adapted from a primarily text framework run the risk of Getting It Wrong in my experience. I know what the characters and places look like, and yet the adapting artist so often have a wholly different (and thus fatally flawed) idea.¹⁶ I note that the licensed title comics you read are all based on a framework from a primarily visual medium so I guess we should all have a common view. Even so, I

¹⁵ These sound functionally similar to the James Blish Star Trek anthologies that Graeme mentioned above, and they were probably enjoyable in much the same way, but I think either of these is qualitatively different from the books being produced in their respective franchises now. While I don't think the Doctor Who novels have reached this point (and they may never), there have been a number of Star Trek books recently where the characters from the TV/movie series don't show up at all.

¹⁶ You've also here described the experience of going to see a movie based on a book - and people vary (widely!) in how much latitude they're willing to allow the adapter.

remember -- again at somewhere around the 10-years-old mark -- having a number of Star Trek and Dr Who annuals with comic strip stories. Presumably the writers and artists shared a common perspective with me of the appearance of the characters, how they spoke and so on, yet I often found the stories were subtly and indefinably not quite right.

Best...Mark Plummer, Croydon, UK

R-Laurraine Tutihasi (laurraine@mac.com)

Just read your zine; I'm a bit behind in my reading. On the other hand, if I hadn't printed it out, it'd probably be years before I read it. I decided recently that I'd print out the e-zines of people who sent them to me or the links personally rather than trust to list-serves.

I grew up on DC Comics, but I have to admit that I only read them sporadically now. Mostly I follow the works of J. Michael Straczynski.

I sure hope your article on reality shows was a tongue-in-cheek parody. I never heard of any of the shows you talk about. Although I don't watch reality shows as a rule, it's hard not to have at least heard about many of them.

My 2013 was marked by too much illness. It started well enough with two enjoyable trips in spring. My father died in September on the six month anniversary of his 91st birthday. On the other hand, he'd been semi-functional in a nursing home for several years. I had to cancel our Bubonicon-worldcon trip because of being too sick. After all was said and done, I discovered that my illnesses could

probably be blamed on a dental abscess not accompanied by tooth pain because of a root canal. I just talked to a retired nurse at church this morning, and it seems I got off lightly. It could have been much much worse. The tooth in question will come out and be replaced by an implant, but the appointment has been postponed until June when my insurance should cover it. I certainly hope 2014 will be better.

--

R-Laurraine Tutihasi

laurraine@mac.com

<http://www.weasner.com/>

WAHF: Bill Burns, Bruce Gillespie, Alan White

The End

And that's it for this issue. I had hoped to have more – though at this point I'm not sure what – but between family emergencies and getting sick, that's just not happening. But there is still a bit more white space than I'd like, so here are a couple of more snippets.

I'm writing this on Star Wars Day (May the 4th). Last week the cast for Episode VII was announced. The overwhelming response from fandom (at least from the parts of fandom that I frequent) was an overwhelming “Meh.” I think that what's going on is that Star Wars was state of the art in 1977, then in the almost 40 years since society has changed,

but Star Wars has not. When Episode IV came out, there wasn't really an issue with Princess Leia being a damsel in distress. In Episode VI, it was forward-thinking that she got to go along on the landing mission to Endor. But now people aren't okay with the fact that there's only one viable female character per movie.

Yesterday was Free Comic Book Day. I was working overtime and almost forgot about it entirely. By the time I remembered, it was 5:00. But last year my local shop had Free Comic Book Day comics available the Wednesday after, so my son and I headed out. This year, we were not so lucky. Despite ordering more FBCD titles than last year, they had run out by 3:00 and by the time we got there they were taking titles out of the bargain bin and designating those as free. So I got my pull file titles for the previous week (*Serenity* and *My Little Pony*), my son got a free *Voltron* comic plus a recent back issue of *Transformers*, and all in all we had a nice outing. Even if you don't read comics regularly, you still might want to visit your local comic shop next year on the first Saturday in May.

And... I'm done. I hope you enjoyed this.