

# ALEXIAD

(ΑΛΞΙΑΣ)

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Recently I grew tired of lugging the heavy bag and stopped to rest outside a local coffee house. Another woman stops, introduces herself as H. and offers to buy me a drink. She has a face of sad compassion and for a moment I am tempted to offer to buy her a drink. I suspect I could do considerably worse than to befriend this compassionate woman. But the moment passes and I remain my introverted self. I still sometimes wonder if I passed on a beautiful friendship.

Last night was Halloween. I always enjoy Halloween. That is my favorite time of the year for it always marks my birthday. As a child I liked the fact my birthday cakes were always decorated Halloween style with witches, ghosts and black cats. As a teenager I hated it. Now that I'm older I miss the Halloween decorations. I sailed through birthday number 50 but for some reason this birthday has been different. I feel the full weight of 53 and I don't know why. Perhaps it is because local radio has been playing up the anniversary of the Cuban missile crisis. I came into this world at the tail end of what could have been nuclear annihilation.

— Lisa

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Comments are by JTM or LTM

The 90th Running of the Hambletonian (1st leg of the Trotting Triple Crown) was **August 8, 2015** at Meadowlands Racetrack in East Rutherford, New Jersey. Pinkman won, defeating the favorite, Mission Brief.

The 61st Running of the Yonkers Trot (2nd leg of the Trotting Triple Crown) was **September 5, 2015** at Yonkers Raceway in Yonkers, New York. Habitat led wire-to-wire and beat Pinkman by 3½ lengths

The 123rd Running of the Kentucky Futurity (3rd leg of the Trotting Triple Crown) was **October 10, 2015** at the Red Mile in Lexington, Kentucky. Pinkman came back to win by 1 ¼ lengths with a stretch run.

Our **Nineteenth Anniversary** is **November 22, 2015**.

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## Reviewer's Notes

I find myself more and more isolated. The fan who had passed into Bloch's Eighth Stage of Fandom had isolated himself by actions; arguments with fans and authors alike. But that is past now. What I am seeing is a field where there is nothing interesting available, an internet-driven magnification of "500 channels and nothing on". What is published is not what I find interesting.

Earl Kemp's reaction to the collapse of the pro magazines was *Who Killed Science Fiction?* But he could draw on the resources of a community where there were connections and commonality. No one killed science fiction, it faded away in its derivatives.

Another feature (as in, "It's not a bug, it's a *feature!*") of the internet is the ability for an error to become established fact, if it gets in there first. For example, a recent discussion of SF asserted that SF fans had disdained *Star Wars* when it came out. Masses of evidence to the contrary were produced, while supporting evidence was lacking. We can be sure, therefore, that the original claim will become the established truth from now on.

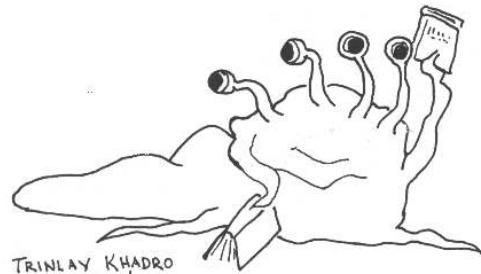
And meanwhile my personal life drags. I have started the process to get Social Security disability; what with anemia, Crohn's, and diabetes I don't seem to be very jobbable. How this will work out is a different matter altogether. Grant had no trouble but he was pretty clearly disabled, what with the stroke and his circulatory problems. On, and the judge decided in favor of the city. I have appealed but that costs \$\$\$ I don't really have.

The deadline is my birthday. This may say something.

— Joe

## RANDOM JOTTINGS

by Joe



Matthew Inman is the proprietor, artist, and writer of the site **The Oatmeal**:

<http://theoatmeal.com>

As Dave Barry ventured to read *Fifty Shades of Grey* so we don't have to (see *You Can Date Boys When You're Forty* (2015)), so Matthew Inman ventured into the original, with similar results:

First off, the author creates a main character which is an empty shell. Her appearance isn't described in detail; that way, any female can slip into it and easily fantasize about being this person. I read 400 pages of that book and barely had any idea of what the main character looked like; as far as I was concerned she was a giant Lego brick. Appearance aside, her personality is portrayed as insecure, fumbling, and awkward — a combination anyone who ever went through puberty can relate to. By creating this “empty shell,” the character becomes less of a person and more of something a female reader can put on and wear. Because I forgot her name (I think it was Barbara or Brando or something like that), I'm going to refer to her as “Pants” from here on out.

<http://theoatmeal.com/story/twilight>

Not surprisingly, Ana Steele of *Fifty Shades* is just like Pants, er Bella. It says something about modern reading tastes that readers seem to be graduating from the original to the fanfic. (As you know, Bob, *Fifty Shades of Grey* started out as a *Twilight* fan fiction titled “Master of the Universe”, which has been ruthlessly hunted down and deleted since the book came out.)

Inman's analysis shows how *Twilight* follows the romance template; beautiful but blank woman finds powerful man with a hidden need and turns out to be the one to fill it. I suppose its reassuring to the many readers who want to put on the role.

Then there was the scandal I read about of romance novel plagiarism. (No, don't say “How can they tell?”) In this case, it was a writer who wrote gay romances plagiarizing straight ones. The markets were distinct enough that no one noticed for a while.

Lisa watches *NCIS*. Thanks to the USA Network running marathons, there will be days where hour after hour she watches Gibbs, DiNozzo, Abby, Ziva, and the wise old doc Ducky Mallard (David McCallum). Yes, as in Ilya Kuryakin of *The Man from UNCLE*.

Indeed, when Gibbs was asked what Durky looked like when he was younger, he said “Ilya Kuryakin”. So I'm not the only one who does that, see?

Another interesting point was that the writers used the real-life backgrounds of the actors to flesh out the backgrounds of the characters. Going to make it hard for the reboot there, but . . . In particular, Pauly Perette, who plays the forensics staffer Abby, has a degree in . . . criminal forensics. On the other hand, she's working on a documentary about Mark Lane, who trashed that field, so there's that.

**R. Graeme Cameron** has been reviewing old fanzines (and not-so-old ones, like this one) for *Amazing Stories*, which as you know, Bob, has been revived on-line. I find his evocation of fannish history to be enlightening (and occasionally horrifying, as in the case of fanwriter Kent Moomaw, who committed suicide rather than be drafted).

But in a sense I have to wonder if Graeme isn't raging against the dying of the light. When Nonspeaking Klingon Role #6 has a Facebook page with more hits and a number

of fanfic writers describing his passionate passions with Kor, Kang, Kruge, and even Kahless, one wonders how long it'll be worth going on.

## MONARCHIST NEWS

Finding out that the Duke of Addis Abeba is the grandson of Vietnamese Emperor Bao Dai is sort of strange. Okay. Pietro Badoligo, the Italian commander who took over from Mussolini and tried to surrender properly, had been the victorious commander in Il Duce's Abyssinian campaign, and so was made Duca di Addis Abeba (the Italian spelling of Addis Ababa). His grandson, the second duke, married Princess Phuong Mai of Vietnam; their son Flavio is the current duke.

Incidentally, the current Vietnamese pretender is Bao Dai's younger son, Bao Thang. The last King of Laos, Sisavang Vatthana, died in a “re-education” camp after the Communist victory, followed by his son and heir Vong Savang. The current pretender is the last king's grandson Soulvong Savang. The current king of Cambodia is Norodom Sihamoni, son of the famous or notorious Norodom Sihanouk.

## PURSUIT

Commentary by Joseph T Major on  
**SINK THE BISMARCK!**

(1960; Twentieth Century Fox)

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0054310/>

I ran across a comment the other day that British writer Jared Cowie was working on a remake of this for Universal Pictures. Now Hollywood development rumors are more amusing than informative; as you know, Bob, *Stranger in a Strange Land* (NHOL G.127; 1961, 1990) has been about to come out for over forty years.

The movie was (and is) well-regarded, with an Internet Movie Database rating of 7.1 (out of 10), Rotten Tomatoes ratings of 80% on reviews and 76% “would see it again” by viewers, and Amazon.com ratings of 4.6 out of five stars. More specialized commentators also thought well, modeling experts commending the film's use of models, for example. More historically minded commentators have noted some errors introduced for dramatic contrast. There was

enough real drama, both in the real events and in the film, to make this not entirely necessary. It should be noted that searching may be a bit confusing, since a Google search will turn up references to Johnny Horton's song of the same title and to a particularly powerful beer, along with other references, sometimes unpleasant.



The producer is given as “John Brabourne”. This is true but not quite complete; he should properly (or pompously) be styled “The Right Honourable Sir John Ulick Knatchbull, Bt., Lord Brabourne”. The Baron Brabourne of Brabourne in the County of Kent and Knatchbull Baronet of Mersham Hatch had served in the Coldstream Guards during the Second World War, succeeding to the titles upon the death of his brother, who was executed by the SS in Italy after escaping from a train transporting prisoners of war.

Brabourne had *connexions*, as they would say. On October 29, 1946, he married Lady Patricia Mountbatten, daughter of the Earl Mountbatten of Burma (who had previously been Prinz Louis von Battenburg and then

Lord Louis Mountbatten), the notorious naval commander. Mountbatten had been involved, so to speak, with naval films previously, in that he was friends with Noel Coward, who returned the favor by basing the film *In Which We Serve* (1942) on Mountbatten's own career as a destroyer commander, with a little help from Mountbatten in getting real sailors as extras. And, sadly enough, Brabourne's mother and his son Nicholas were killed along with Mountbatten himself in the 1979 IRA bombing, which also injured John and Patricia.

The director, Lewis Gilbert, would go on to direct three James Bond movies: *You Only Live Twice* (1967), *The Spy Who Loved Me* (1977), and *Moonraker* (1979). The screenwriter, Edmund H. North, had done the screenplay for *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951) and would later do the story and screenplay for *Patton* (1970), along with working with Gilbert again on *Damn the Defiant!* (1962), which might be considered the British version of *The Caine Mutiny*.

The screenplay is based on *The Last Nine Days of the Bismarck* (1959) by "C. S. Forrester" [Cecil Louis Troughton Smith], better known for the Horatio Hornblower novels. Forrester wrote several other works about World War II ships, both British and American; the novels *The Ship* (1943) and *The Good Shepherd* (1955), along with the stories collected in *The Man In the Yellow Raft* (1969) and *Gold from Crete* (1971). The latter book also includes his alternate-history story "If Hitler Had Invaded England" (*Saturday Evening Post*, April 16-30, 1960).

The movie might be considered a long episode of *The March of Time*, the newsreel feature of the thirties and forties which had reenactments of current events. And it begins with a newsreel; a title card saying:

HAMBURG  
February 14<sup>th</sup> 1939

An excited German announcer gushes over the events being shown; the launching of a powerful new ship for Germany's *Kriegsmarine*, attended by the Führer himself and the elite of the German government, the Party, and the Navy. The ship's sponsor cracks the bottle of champagne against the prow, the launching crew flips the nameplate of the new vessel over the side, and the

*Bismarck* slides down the launchway into the sea, as the *Deutschlandlied* plays proudly over all.

(The launching took place at the Blohm & Voss shipyard in Hamburg. The shipyard is still functioning, owned by ThyssenKrupp, but being sold to the British firm STAR Capital Partners. The sponsor was Dorothea Sybille Katherina von Löwenfeld, a granddaughter of the ship's namesake Fürst Otto von Bismarck.)

The scene then cuts to London, in May of 1941. After a shot of the Nelson Column, we see a man walking through Trafalgar Square, as pigeons take off and air-raid sirens wail in the background. This is the background to the credit roll.



Then we hear a familiar voice, at least one familiar back then, delivering the portentous line, "This is London." The newscaster proceeds to describe the scene for the viewer. If he seems familiar it's because he is Edward R. Murrow, the broadcaster from London and driving force of *See It Now*, the CBS series of the fifties that specialized in historical recreations. (It's like the broadcaster with Gus Grissom (Fred Ward) at Gordon Cooper's launch in *The Right Stuff* (1983) who looks a lot like Eric Sevareid — yes, it was the real Eric Sevareid, since Walter Cronkite had inconveniently died.)

Back to the man walking through London, who descends into the Operations Room at the Admiralty. This is Captain Jonathan Shepard (Kenneth More). While you couldn't say More had an expertise in playing naval types, he had played Teddy Evans (later Sir Edward Ratcliffe Garth Russell Evans, Lord Mountevans) in *Scott of the Antarctic* (1948) and Second Officer Lightoller (Charles Herbert Lightoller) in *A Night to Remember* (1958), and for diversity, legless air ace Douglas Bader in the biopic *Reach for the Sky*

(1956). More had served in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve during the War reaching the rank of Lieutenant.

Captain Shepard is going to be Director of Operations at the admiralty, deploying ships world-wide. The outgoing Director of Operations introduces Shepard to his valued assistant, Second Officer Anne Davis (Dana Wynter). If you like irony, Dana Wynter was born in Berlin, and her name was originally "Dagmar Winter". Her father emigrated to England, then Rhodesia. She had played in a number of American television shows and then movies, including *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), where she played Dr. Bennell's girlfriend Becky Driscoll.



Second Officer Davis is in the Women's Royal Naval Service, or WRNS, or "Wrens". The perceptive viewer will notice a number of different insignia types on the officers in the Operations Room. Captain Shepard has the "regular" version with a rounded loop on the uppermost stripe, Second Officer Davis has a diamond-shaped one, and many of the officers have the squarish teardrop and wavy stripes of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve — wartime officers (like, say, Kenneth More), and often referred to as the "Wavy Navy". (For the insanely trivia-minded, there was also a Royal Naval Reserve, of merchant officers called into the regulars, and their "loop" was a six-pointed star — such as, for example, we see in *Shackleton* (2002) where Sir Ernest Shackleton, Lieutenant, R.N.R. (Kenneth Branagh) is wearing uniform when he is about to be received by the King before leaving for Antarctica.)

The captain enters his new office and puts some pictures on the desk; a destroyer, and a young man in flight gear. He is interrupted by his assistant, Commander Richards (Maurice Denham) and Second Officer Davis, and

proceeds to lay down the law. Full uniform is to be worn, no eating at desks, and oh yes, addressing an officer by her Christian name (American translation: "first name") is out of the question. If this were an American production perhaps he would end up saying, "I kid you not," and pull out the ball bearings. (That is, like Captain Queeg [Humphrey Bogart] in *The Caine Mutiny*.)

However, before he can get that far, he is presented with a message. This has to be taken to the First Sea Lord, the officer in charge of the Navy. As with all the British senior officers, the character is billed in the credits by his assignment. Many of the people involved were still alive at the time, and there are no doubt valid legal reasons for it, but the result is still distancing. The First Sea Lord at that time was Sir Dudley Pound (Sir Alfred Dudley Pickman Rogers Pound), who had been in the Navy since 1891, commanding the battleship HMS *Colossus* during the Battle of Jutland, and then becoming Director of Operations. The First Sea Lord is played by Lawrence Naismith — who played Captain Smith in *A Night to Remember!*

If his assistant (identified by the cryptic abbreviation "A.C.N.S.", which means "Assistant Chief of the Naval Staff") seems a bit familiar, it's because he's played by Geoffrey Keen, who would go on to play the Minister of Defence in several of the Bond movies, including *The Spy Who Loved Me* and *Moonraker*. Other Bond types involved, in minor, unbilled parts, are Bernard Lee (M.), Robert Brown (M.), and on the other side Walter Gotell (General Gogol). Another unbilled part on a British battleship is played by Ian Hendry, yes, Dr. David Kiel of *The Avengers*. By now it may be beginning to sound like the entire British film industry was a bunch of people who all lived in the same flat somewhere in London, and the only reason Benedict Cumberbatch isn't in this film was that he hadn't been born yet, inconveniently enough.

The First Sea Lord has enough problems; the Germans are attacking in Crete and the Mediterranean Fleet is taking a battering. And now here is a message from the attache in Stockholm that two German ships are leaving the Baltic. (That Naval Attaché was Captain Henry Denham. The story of how he found out via a chain of reports and rode furiously from the restaurant where his informant had

informed him to the Embassy comes across as something somewhere between Fred Karno and Monty Python.) One of them may be the Germans' new large battleship, the *Bismarck*. With this concern to hand, he orders Shepard to inform the Commander-in-Chief Home Fleet.

The First Sea Lord delivers some comments about how he wants a cold man, no heart, just a giant brain (presumably the Grand Lunar had other duties and Ras Thavas couldn't get away from his medical practice) and the A.C.N.S. gives Shepard a testimonial. He had been more open previously, but now he has "personal problems". The First Sea Lord points out that he is faced with a dire situation. The previous German warship raiders *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* sank twenty-two ships in two months and the *Bismarck* could destroy an entire convoy while standing off out of range.

But the report needs to be checked out. The British had an agent in Norway who could confirm it, but naturally he is a little hard to reach. The First Sea Lord orders it done anyhow, the risk being that great. In the next scene, the agent sees the German ships at sea. He goes back to where he has a radio, begins to send a signal, and is shot before he can finish. (The ships are shown sailing right to left, which doesn't quite fit, and indeed the entire scene is somewhat condensed, as such matters would have to go through the intelligence outfit controlling the agent, which might have been the Department of Naval Intelligence, the Secret Intelligence Service, or the Special Operations Executive, but that would take up too much time and not really be relevant.)

The First Sea Lord is reviewing the situation, which is bad. The Fleet is heavily committed (again, all the described commanders and deployments are correct) and this may be just too much. First the bad news from Crete, and then the signal from the late Norwegian agent about two ships leaving the Baltic. The First Sea Lord decides to give the Commander-in-Chief Home Fleet a call.

The Home Fleet was the primary British naval command at that point in the war; it was stationed in Scapa Flow in the north of Scotland, a harbor far from any large town and not a popular post. It had been established as a base in 1904 (which makes, for example, the renaming of a port in what in our time-line

Hawaii, by the timeline-travelling East India Company venturers of Taylor Anderson's "Destroyer" series, "New Scapa Flow" hard to credit), having been previously used by Vikings.

The C-in-C is also discussing the matters with his staff, in a somewhat more convenient place. (This was Sir John Cronyn Tovey, who had distinguished himself during the Battle of Jutland in command of the destroyer HMS *Onslow*. He would also become one of the few people to have both the [Tsarist] Russian Order of St. Anne and the Soviet Order of Suvorov, and after the war was ennobled as Lord Tovey of Langton Maltravers. He is played by Michael Hordern, who served at a lower rank in the Navy during the war, and would later be knighted for a number of brilliant though minor performances, including Gandalf in the BBC radio adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings*.) He takes the call from the First Sea Lord (and is addressed as "Jack", which was how Tovey was known), gets the bad news, and proceeds to make his



dispositions.

Which are problematic. The Germans could come out several ways and the staff among them choose every one. Baffled, the C-in-C asks if they can get the Air Force to intervene; they take reconnaissance photographs, which find the ships, but the follow-up bombing mission is not as successful. Again, this is more military background, as is Shepard's comments in the next scene, where he is trying to find every warship available to reinforce the Home Fleet. He makes recommendations to the First Sea Lord, who orders the C-in-C, who is also told that the weather is very bad.

Or very good, depending on whose side we are talking about. Now, for the first time, we see the other side. Admiral Lütjens (Karel

Stepanik) is informed of the weather, and begins discussing his plans with his flagship captain, Lindemann (Carl Möhner, billed as "Carl Mohner"). He speaks extravagantly of the glory due the Reich, oh and them too. He had been held down, Germany had been held down, now things would change, and they would be on the winning side. Lütjens gives orders, and the ships set out to sea.



(Stepanik was Czech, had fled to England before the war began, and presumably was unlikely to have a positive perspective of Germans. Fifteen years after the war ended was not enough time for the perception of Germans to become more balanced. [Johann] Gunther Lütjens had been promoted twice between the wars, rising from *Kapitänleutnant* (Lieutenant) to *Fregattenkapitän* (Commander). The most severe distortion, though, was of his attitude; he had become more fatalistic, even after his successful raid of earlier that year, and more convinced that his luck was running out.

(Möhner was a Viennese refugee, and apparently well-rounded, as he was an abstract painter and would go on to direct, write, and compose for films. On the other hand, he also appeared in *She Devils of the SS* (1973), so there's that. Lindemann was described by Burkhard von Mullenheim-Rechberg as "intelligent, humorous and optimistic". He was very devoted to the ship and well-regarded by the crew. To top things off, at the last meeting with Hitler before the sailing, Lindemann disagreed with the Führer, saying that it was entirely likely that the U.S. would enter the war. Oh, and when he married his second wife the service was performed by that patriotic U-Boat veteran Martin Niemöller.)

The British react, sending out their ships to intercept. Shepard has a discussion with the A.C.N.S. about air reconnaissance. The man

also mentions that Shepard's son is in the Navy, and Shepard reacts in his unemotional way, discussing the boy's prospects and his duties.

With the *Bismarck* at sea, Admiral Lütjens preempts Lindemann and addresses the crew, delivering a bombastic, almost arrogant speech about their glorious prospects, ending with the stirring declaration, "Never forget that you are Germans! Never forget that you are Nazis! Heil Hitler!"

(Which, again, is what a British audience then would expect, but apparently not much like what Lütjens would actually have felt. He might have said something like that, he was patriotic and pro-German, but not pro-Nazi, and indeed was notorious for never giving the Nazi salute. Worse yet, both his mother and his wife had a Jewish parent. Oy. Lütjens was one of three senior officers who had signed a petition protesting Kristallnacht; another was the then commander of U-Boats, Carl Dönitz, yes him.)

The film reveals a little more about Shepard. He tells Second Officer Davis that he has had to turn off his emotions. One of the officers on extra duty has asked for liberty to see off his girlfriend, who is leaving on one of those convoys that they are so worried about; liberty denied, duty is duty. Then comes the capper; Shepard gets told that Lütjens is in command of the German ships. He doesn't react, except to comment emotionlessly that Lütjens's ships had sunk his last ship.

The British have posted ships in the various passages into the Atlantic; what would be referred to a generation later as the GIUK Gap [Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom]. On the bridge of the cruiser HMS *Suffolk*, we see British sailors grumbling in the usual fashion, spiced by the possibility of being sunk in near-freezing water. And then the German ships loom out of the mist.

Technology at work; the British are tracking the Germans on radar. The captain of the *Suffolk* orders them to evade; on the bridge of the *Bismarck* Lütjens decides not to get distracted.

(The captain of the *Suffolk* was Robert Meyrick Ellis. The actor playing "Captain of the *Suffolk*" was Ernest Clark, who had had a minor role in the "heroic-ending" 1954 version of *1984*, appeared in the BBC television series *H. G. Wells's Invisible Man* (1958-59), and played a Royal Navy officer in

*The Baby and the Battleship* (1956) with John Mills (who, you will recall, played Captain Scott in *Scott of the Antarctic*), Richard Attenborough — and Michael Hordern!

Now that they have an idea of where the enemy is going, the squadron that has sailed can be dispatched, and the Admiral on *Hood* starts giving orders. (Again, this is what the real admiral did. His name was Lancelot Ernest Holland; he was known as a gunnery specialist. “Admiral Hood” is played by Walter Hudd, a character actor with a long string of appearances, including in *Satellite In the Sky* (1956), a British-made thriller about the first manned spacecraft having a nuclear weapon on board.)

The admiral’s orders are repeated to the *Prince of Wales*. On the bridge of that ship (an interesting point; in the first scene on the bridge of each ship, the shot includes in the background a plaque on the bulkhead giving the ship’s name and launch date) the officer of the deck orders that the captain be informed, and asks how the workers on board are doing. The subordinate says “They’re loving every minute of it.”

It has been established that the *Prince of Wales* is not fully prepared for combat, and that there are a number of shipyard workers still on board doing final modifications. And bunking with the crew. They complain about sleeping in hammocks, being taken to an unknown destination, and the like. It’s a wonder they didn’t call a strike.

Then the captain makes an announcement of what is going on; that they are going in to battle at dawn. To which one of the dockyard workers says, “They can’t do this to me, I’m in a reserved occupation!”, i.e. presumably exempt from being called up for service.

(The captain of the *Prince of Wales* was John Catterall “Jack” Leach. Leach had made Captain’s rank when he was thirty-nine, back in 1933. He would command the *Prince of Wales* for the rest of her epochal career, taking the Prime Minister to Placentia Bay to meet President Roosevelt, and going down with her when the Japanese attacked them on December 10, 1941. His son Sir Henry Leach was First Sea Lord during the Falklands War.)

They keep the Admiralty informed too, and this provokes a comment from the A.C.N.S. to Second Officer Davis about Shepard needing all the help he can get, taking over at such a crisis. It seems he’s only cared

about the Navy and his family. For the first time we learn his son’s posting; he’s an air gunner on a Swordfish torpedo plane. And then the A.C.N.S. says about Mrs. Shepard, “He hasn’t spoken about her and I haven’t asked.”

Come the dawn, the various players run to their positions. The A.C.N.S. opines, “Good old *Hood*, she’ll get them,” and on board the *Hood* and *Prince of Wales* the crew (and the workers) go to their positions. Many of these scenes were filmed on board the last British battleship, H.M.S. *Vanguard*, including the ones inside the turrets. This is an almost too detailed portrayal of the process, one that doesn’t exist any longer. Perhaps steampunk writers might like to see how that sort of thing worked in real life.

Then the battle begins. The two sides open fire. They are maneuvering for best position when — the *Hood* blows up.



Everyone reacts, from Lindemann saying, “Unbelievable,” to Leach saying “Good God.” And the crew are also shocked, stunned and dazed. Leach forces himself to say “Make to the Admiralty from *Prince of Wales*. Tell them . . . tell them the *Hood* has blown up.” In the Admiralty Operations when the message arrives Shepard and everyone else are stunned, unbelieving.

This is followed by another catastrophe; a shell hits the bridge of the *Prince of Wales* and almost everyone there is killed. The plotting officer below the bridge in message room sees blood dripping through the communications tube from the bridge; which is a shattered wreck. The captain has survived somehow; he shouts for help, and orders the ship to break off the engagement.

(While most of it is all too true, this scene has some errors. The smallest one is that they show the German ships firing to starboard,

when the British were to port. The maneuvers of the ships are correct, however. Somewhat higher up, the script has Lütjens ordering them to open fire, when he had actually held fire until Lindemann said, „*Ich lasse mir doch nicht mein Schiff unter dem Arsch wegschießen. Feuererlaubnis!*” (“I’m not letting my ship get shot out from under my arse. Open fire!”) Admiral Holland orders the *Hood* to fire at the *Bismarck*, but the gunners seem to have thought the *Bismarck* was the lead ship.



(The limitations of special effects then prevented what would have been a stunning visual. The explosion that sank the *Hood* broke the ship’s back, and the bow section reared up, then the forward turrets fired before the section sank, as the *Prince of Wales* passed by.)

(The “Captain, *Prince of Wales*” was played by Esmond Knight. He had been acting since he was nineteen, and would go on to play in a variety of films, including *Superman IV: The Quest for Peace* (1987 — the year he died), *Doctor Who: The Space Pirates* (1969); *A for Andromeda* (1961), two versions of *The Invisible Man* (1959 and 1984, with Ernest Clark in the first), not to mention many mundane movies including *The Chronicle History of King Henry the Fifth with His Battell Fought at Agincourt in France* (1944). But Esmond Knight had been in the Navy. He had been on the *Prince of Wales* in this action. Sir Ludovic Kennedy says it better than I ever could:

This same shell did for Esmond Knight too. He remembered hearing the salvo, ‘like a great rushing

cyclone’, then everything went hazy and he was having a dream about the band playing in Hyde Park, there was a high, ringing noise in his head and he came to, thinking he was dying, feeling a little sad about it, nothing more. He heard the crash of another salvo and cries of ‘Stretcher-bearer!’ and ‘Make way there!’ He was conscious of a weight of dead men on him and screams and the smell of blood, and the dreadful thin noise some men make when dying. ‘Get me out of here,’ he shouted weakly, and strong hands pulled him to his feet. ‘What the hell’s happened to you?’ a voice said, and Esmond turned and looked at him and saw nothing. The man whose delight in life was visual things, painting pictures, watching birds, was already among the ranks of the war-blinded, would never see the Harlequin Duck or Icelandic Falcon, or anything but dim shapes again.

— Ludovic Kennedy, *Pursuit: The Chase and Sinking of the Bismarck* (1974), Page 88

(Knight had been in the observation post above the bridge. He was completely blind for about two years and then recovered limited sight in one eye. Even more remarkably, he stuttered, and had to overcome *that* before going on. He turns in a very impressive performance, but one wonders how he made himself do it.)

There are portrayed various international reactions, ending with Edward R. Murrow giving the bad news. He mentions that there were only three survivors from the *Hood*, and ends with the comment that there must be great rejoicing in Germany, and on the *Bismarck*.

(The three survivors were Midshipman William John Dundas, Ordinary Seaman Robert Ernest “Lofty” Tilburn, and Signalman Albert Edward Pryke “Ted” Briggs. Dundas had been on the compass platform. He remained in the Navy throughout the war and afterwards, retiring in 1958-9 at the rank of Lieutenant-Commander. He died on November 2, 1965 as the result of an automobile accident. Tilburn had been fighting a fire on the main deck. He remained in the Navy throughout the war and retired in August 1952, subsequently serving as second

President of the HMS *Hood* Association until his death on February 24, 1995. Briggs was also on the compass platform. He remained in the Navy throughout the war and afterwards, gaining a commission, and retiring at the rank of Lieutenant in February 1973, being made M.B.E. in June of that year, becoming the first and the third President of the HMS *Hood* Association, until his death on October 4, 2008.)

Flushed with victory, Lindemann goes to the admiral's quarters to report the damage; there is a fuel tank leaking. They should turn back and get the shell hole patched up. Lütjens replies that the captain is being naïve; the Führer is going to ask "Where are the convoys?" So they must go on. Since in the previous operation Lütjens had sunk 22 ships and disrupted the convoy system in the North Atlantic, his command has a certain point. However, there is a sense of "Evacuate? In our moment of triumph? I think you overestimate their chances."

The First Sea Lord has come in and is managing the situation; assessing the enemy's plans, gathering resources, and making sure there is the right public image. Then there is a call, which the First Sea Lord receives on a speakerphone. A familiar rumbling voice commands:

I want to make it unmistakably clear that there is absolutely nothing as vital to the nation at this moment as the destruction of the *Bismarck*. You are authorized to employ any means at your disposal, regardless of risk and regardless of the price that must be paid. This is a battle we cannot afford to lose . . . I don't care how you do it, you must sink the *Bismarck*. Good luck to you.

The Prime Minister has spoken. Now where are they going to get the means? Shepard has a suggestion; send in the squadron at Gibraltar, Force H. The First Sea Lord wonders if it would be possible to leave the force's aircraft carrier, the *Ark Royal*, behind, but Shepard submits that such a course is not possible.

Then we see why the First Sea Lord may have been thinking that way, as mail is being handed out, including to Tom Shepard, air gunner on a Fairey Swordfish torpedo bomber.

His father has written, a sad, loving note. The other sailors begin a bit of revelry, grumbling as they will, and Tom says he's asked his father to transfer the ship to England so he can see his girl. Then the Captain makes an announcement that the *Ark Royal* is about to sail into the Atlantic after the *Bismarck*, and Tom gets mobbed.

(Tom is played by John Stride, who would appear in *The Omen* (1976) and in a modernization of Shakespeare's "Julius Caesar" with the ominous title of *Heil Caesar!* (1973).

(The Captain of the *Ark Royal* was Loben Edward Harold Maund, who had previously served in the Operations Division of the Admiralty. He was played by noted Shakespearean actor (with alas no snafu credits) Mark Dignam.

(The ship shown leaving Gibraltar for the Atlantic is the actual HMS *Victorious*, shots of which were used for the original ship as well.)

The *Bismarck* is still being shadowed by the British cruisers. The Home Fleet commander tries one of those "any means", ordering the aircraft carrier *Victorious* to launch an airstrike. On the other side, Admiral Lütjens has the *Bismarck* fire at the British cruisers to cover the detachment of his cruiser, the *Prinz Eugen*.

The *Victorious* launches the air strike. The film makers used a very simple way to simulate the launch of a Swordfish from a carrier; they filmed a real Swordfish being launched from a real carrier. (The way Michael Bay would do in *Pearl Harbor* (2001) with an actual B-25, supervised by actual Doolittle Tokyo Raiders.) The airplanes used in this shot still exist.

The planes make their attack and score one hit, which is as it actually happened; by way of contrast, no Swordfish were shot down in spite of the one shown in the film. The need to cut short the film left out one of the unusual incidents of the battle. The attack was observed by U.S. Coast Guardsmen on the Greenland Patrol ship USCGC *Modoc* (WPG-46), which in spite of flying a large U.S. flag was nearly fired upon by the *Norfolk*.

Informed that the damage is light and will be repaired in a few hours, Lütjens has an idea. The *Bismarck* will zigzag as if to disrupt a submarine attack. The British following will do likewise. Then, when they are used to it, the *Bismarck* will stop zigzagging and speed

up, evading the shadowers. Which ploy achieves its goal; the next scene shows Shepard and the operations staff being embarrassed by this clever stratagem.

Then they have to work out which way the *Bismarck* is going. Shepard makes an interesting point; a German commander has to be aggressive, he can't show weakness. Lütjens will therefore not return to Germany, but will head over to France. This was of course the same point that Lütjens made earlier. He can join forces with his previous command, the *Gneisenau* and *Scharnhorst* and be a serious threat.

The squadron from Gibraltar, Force H, goes north to participate in the search for the *Bismarck*. They launch a strike of Swordfish. This finds nothing, and to cap it off, two of the planes don't come back. Is Tom Shepard on one of them? No point in telling his father.

(The commander of Force H, who never appears in the film, was Sir James Fownes Somerville. Somerville had been born in Weybridge, fortunately escaping the destruction of the town by Martians ("What I Saw of the Destruction of Weybridge and Shepperton", Chapter Twelve, *The War of the Worlds*; he was out of town that day) and served in the Royal Navy from 1897 on, retiring with suspected tuberculosis in 1939. Since he hadn't signed a letter of political protest and appended his rank, he was recalled later that year. His next notable service was the distasteful effort at neutralizing the Vichy French fleet at Mers-el-Kebir. In 1942, Somerville would come so very close to avenging the attack on Pearl Harbour; as liaison to the American Chiefs of Staff he was apparently the only British officer who could endure Ernest King.

Shepard starts planning for air patrols. Having done that, he makes Second Officer Davis an offer; she should be his assistant, because she's clever, and in return he promises not to be so brusque. Since she has already had an offer to go to the States, she is conflicted. But before she can answer, they get interrupted. Tom Shepard's plane is lost. Already stunned, Shepard breaks down and reveals his terrible secret; his wife was killed when a bomb hit their house, the only house destroyed in the neighborhood. He withdrew emotionally; but one can't be the Stoic, unaffected by the sufferings of others, and not be human.

Then the news comes in; the *Bismarck* has been found again, by a Catalina flying boat. On the *Bismarck*, Lindemann is concerned, Lütjens is confident.

(One thing they didn't mention is that the Catalina was piloted by a U.S. Navy aviator, Ensign L. B. Smith, sent to "train" the British in the use of the Lend-Lease aircraft.)

Lütjens arranges for air cover, is informed that the British are 200 miles behind them and so will never catch up, and gets a signal congratulating him on his birthday, which was May 25. For some reason he seems incredibly flattered that it's directly from the Führer. He is already planning a second sortie, a battlegroup including the *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*, which would give the British very great trouble. (This is from a passage in *The Last Nine Days of the Bismarck*.)

(What's ironic about this given what we now know is that at the time the British decrypters at the Government Code & Cypher School at Blechley had not broken the naval Engima code machine settings. But they had broken the Luftwaffe ones — and the Luftwaffe Chief of Staff General Hans Jeschonnek sent a long signal to the naval command asking about the well-being of his son, who was a sea cadet on board the *Bismarck*. This gave the GC&CS people a break into the naval keys. A more common break was birthday greetings; German commanders had a almost fanatical habit of sending birthday wishes to their fellow commanders, which provided known texts to test against the encrypted signals. Somerville may have known about this when he sent the signal:

EVERYBODY WISHES  
EVERYBODY ELSE A VERY  
HAPPY CHRISTMAS AND NEW  
YEAR. NO FURTHER SIGNALS  
ARE TO BE MADE. THINK OF THE  
SIGNALMEN AND THE PAPER  
SHORTAGE.

(There is very little information about Japanese cryptoanalysis, but the Germans had broken some of the British naval cyphers, and the Italians were also very good at that.)

However, the *Ark Royal* can launch a strike and slow down the *Bismarck*. The pilots fly off, quite confident, since they can use the new magnetic torpedo exploders, which will

detonate below the ship, causing much more damage. The ship will be easy to identify, since she'll be alone.

Except . . . the cruiser *Sheffield* was detached to shadow the *Bismarck*, which the captain of the *Ark Royal* finds out entirely by accident. He snaps out an order to send a signal to the strike, in plain language, "Look out for *Sheffield*."

The air crew of the strike see this lone ship and get into position to attack. Below, the bridge crew of the *Sheffield* see the planes coming and note that they're using the ship to form up before striking the enemy. The *Swordfish* get into position, make their attack runs, drop torpedoes — and watch them blow up when they hit the water. Except one, which the *Sheffield* does evade.

(The captain of the *Sheffield* was Charles Arthur Aiskew Larcom. He was played by John Horsley, who had a long career as a character actor, including two different roles on *The Avengers*. The scenes on the bridge were shot on the cruiser *HMS Belfast*, which is now preserved in London.)

The chastened fliers return to the ship and prepare for another launch. They will not be using the magnetic exploders, which seemed to be a little too sensitive. (Thus the Fleet Air Arm shows itself far more perceptive and observant than the U.S. Navy Bureau of Ordnance, which when confronted with a similar result from their magnetic exploders, declared that the torpedoes worked but that the stupid submarine guys didn't know how to use them properly and were making excuses.) The captain comes down and says that this is their last chance to slow down the *Bismarck* before she gets to safety.

The second strike goes off. The next scene is the attack on the *Bismarck*. (Thus leaving out one of the more striking incidents. The *Swordfish* were ordered to fly to the position of the *Sheffield*. They had shown they could find the *Sheffield*. The commander of the strike sent the ship a signal, "Where is target?" Captain Larcom replied, "The enemy is twelve miles dead ahead.") The strike bores in, dropping torpedoes, which explode properly this time — including one directly aft, disabling the rudder. There is some frantic action on the bridge of the *Bismarck*. Then the scene cuts to Shepard trying to make sense of what's going on, and why is the *Bismarck* sailing on a course that leads straight to the

oncoming ships.



There are some destroyers coming in, and the commander of the flotilla orders the ships to attack. Meanwhile Lütjens tries to buck up the crew's morale with some comments about how they can still fight and all Germany is behind them; there are submarines coming, too. They also sink one of the destroyers, which have fired torpedoes.

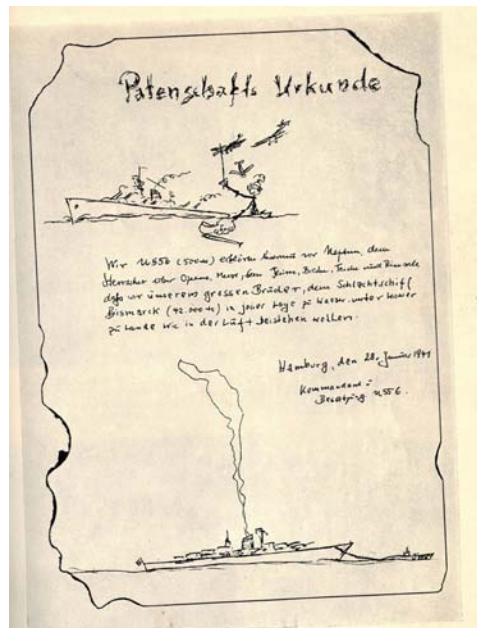
(The commander of the real destroyer squadron that attacked the *Bismarck* that evening was Philip Vian, already famous for having rescued British prisoners from the German supply ship *Altmark* with the announcement, "The Navy's here!" Vian would go on to command the aircraft-carrier squadron of the British Pacific Fleet in the final campaign against Japan. The Captain (Destroyers) was played by Peter Burton, who had been in *A Night to Remember* and would go on to play Major Boothroyd in *Dr. No* and the assistant to the Minister of the Interior in *A Clockwork Orange*.)

(The destroyers included the Polish destroyer *ORP Piorun*. Her commander, Eugeniusz Józef Stanisław Pławski, began his attack by signaling to the *Bismarck*, "I am a Pole." He then fired his main guns at the ship, for defiance, if nothing else.

(Vian's destroyers claimed several hits, but none were confirmed. On the other hand, no British destroyers were sunk in the attack, unlike in the movie.

(As for submarines . . . when the *Bismarck* was working up, the submarine *U-556* was doing so as well. Her captain, *Kapitanleutnant* Herbert Wohlfarth, was a friend of Lindemann's, and so the *Bismarck*'s band played at the commissioning of *U-556*;

in return, Wohlfarth gave Lindemann a certificate pledging to protect the *Bismarck* in all the seas of the world. When the *Ark Royal* was flying off the fatal strike, *U-556* was right between her and the *Renown*. He could have sunk or damaged them both — except he was entirely out of torpedoes.)



The operations staff is coordinating the accumulation of ships. Shepard goes to report the situation, and the First Sea Lord considers the efforts, after which he offers him condolences on the loss of his son. Shepard goes back to his desk, where he has to answer a call from the A.C.N.S. Tom Shepard his son is alive, he has just been rescued.

Shepard cracks.

The cold man with no heart, just a giant brain, withdraws into the back room of his office and tries very hard not to cry. The good news is too much for him to bear. Davis looks in, tries to go reassure him, then realizes that he had better be alone just now.

But the *King George V*, the flagship of the Home Fleet, and the *Rodney* have closed with the *Bismarck*. Lindemann is depressed, there being two ships against them, and Lütjens, having read the Führer's last message, tries to

energize him. And so the fight begins.

The movie does not try to prettify the realities of a naval action. The *Bismarck* is pounded to ruins. Men are blown apart. The wounded are led through wreckage, only to die when more wreckage topples or shells hit. When fires get too close the damage control officer orders the forward magazines flooded, and men struggle desperately to get out.

By now the people in the operations room in London are getting affected by the report. Davis says she ought to cheer, but can't bring herself to, and the A.C.N.S. says "It's always that way." And the viewer pities the Germans, too.

The British ships are running low on fuel, and Admiral Tovey orders them closer to finish the job. (He seems actually to have said, "Get closer, get closer, I can't see enough hits!") The gunnery officer of the *Busmarck* reports that they only have "A" turret. This contradicts the bit about the forward magazines. (To nitpick, the officer would have said "Anton" turret. Also, the forward turrets were knocked out early in the action.)

As Lütjens and Lindemann argue about the ship's fate, a shell hits the bridge, and Lütjens is killed. The surviving bridge crew look him over and one says he was so proud of his congratulations from the Führer. Aft, a survivor reports that all the bridge crew are dead, and the officer (a commander, from the three stripes on his uniform sleeves. Oels, the executive officer? Müllenheim-Rechberg, the senior survivor? They probably didn't care) orders "Abandon ship!" and men began to jump over the side.

Admiral Tovey is told that the cruiser *Dorsetshire* has arrived and he orders her to sink the *Bismarck* with torpedoes. It is still a point of contention whether the *Bismarck* was scuttled by the engine crew or torpedoed, and as we see the engine crew evacuating while water floods the engine spaces, the movie may be said to equivocate. Burning, shattered, the *Bismarck* capsizes and goes down. Men are still trying to escape from flooding compartments, and their desperation is cruelly displayed. Admiral Tovey orders the *Dorsetshire* to try to rescue survivors, has a signal sent to the Admiralty, and finally says, "Gentlemen, let's go home."



In the Operation Room, the First Sea Lord comes down to congratulate everyone and inform Shepard that the Prime Minister wants to see him in the morning, for some reason. Pleased, they shake hands, and the admiral leaves. Shepard has a message sent off. Davis comes up to congratulate him, and he says, crisply, "Take a message: Request the company of Second Officer Anne Davis for dinner." She accepts. So much for his policy.

He looks at his watch, says she must be tired and it's 9 o'clock, so they had better go now. She goes off to get ready and so does he, but then he turns back to the table with all the ship models, reaches down, picks up the model with the swastika flag, and thoughtfully puts it in his pocket.



They go outside. *It's nine in the morning.* After an embarrassed pause, Shepard says they might as well have breakfast, a couple of watching sailors comment about the general cluelessness of the high command, and Shepard and Davis walk off together, crossing the same square he had crossed alone at the beginning of the movie. (The matelots weren't the only people to wonder how an operations officer wouldn't keep track of the difference between 2100 hours and 0900 hours.)

There were first-rate war movies done in Britain in the fifties and sixties. The number of veterans helped, and there was no specialized career course for them. Nowadays, you wouldn't have anyone like Fusilier Maurice Micklewhite becoming headliner star Sir Michael Caine. Having seen the elephant, as they say, they brought to the story an awareness of the costs and the losses.

But, as all things must, they aged and passed on. George Macdonald Fraser, late Lieutenant, Gordon Highlanders, late Private, Border Regiment, has recounted how he strove to make an actor look like he and his fellow squaddies from the Forgotten Army had looked. It didn't always work.

Now what could be done for a new version? Obviously, a lot of the mentioned points could be put in; people endure longer movies these days. The script could appeal to the American market by mentioning Ensign Smith the Catalina pilot and the *Modoc*. There would of course be references to cipher breaking.

As for the Germans, the most likely change would be to switch the characterizations of Lütjens and Lindemann, with Lindemann being the confident one and Lütjens being more depressed and thinking his chances had run out. Which brings us to one of the most incredible events reported by Burkhard von Müllenheim-Rechberg, the senior surviving officer. Some survivors in the water claimed they saw Captain Lindemann walk forward on the bow of the ship as she was going down, and salute as he went down with the ship. The only problem with this is that some critics would reject it as "too Hollywood". Somewhat less melodramatically, having scenes with Wohlfarth and the *U-556* would provide an extra level of depth.

More generally, a new film could get over the cliché this movie had of always having the Germans sail from the right of the screen and the British from the left. This made some of the combat scenes unrealistic. A new film could use more computerized images, and thus get such dramatic scenes as the guns firing for the last time as the *Hood* goes down.

It might also include some of the unseemly comments and events that took place, such as the *Dorsetshire* having to leave survivors because of the suspected presence of a U-Boat, or Churchill wanting some of the commanders put before a board of inquiry for not being aggressive enough.



**O ALMIGHTY** God, the Sovereign Commander of all the world, in whose hand is power and might which none is able to withstand: We bless and magnify thy great and glorious Name for this happy Victory, the whole glory whereof we do ascribe to thee, who art the only giver of Victory. And, we beseech thee, give us grace to improve this great mercy to thy glory, the advancement of thy Gospel, the honour of our Sovereign, and as much in us lieth, to the good of all mankind. And, we beseech thee, give us such a sense of this great mercy, as may engage us to a true thankfulness, such as may appear in our lives by an humble, holy, and obedient walking before thee all our days, through Jesus Christ our Lord: to whom with thee and the Holy Spirit, as for all thy mercies, so in particular for this Victory and Deliverance, be all glory and honour, world without end. *Amen.*

— *Book of Common Prayer*

HALT, PASSENGER  
 Commentary by Joseph T Major on  
**ROGUE MOON**  
 by Algis Budrys (1960)  
 Best Novel Hugo Award Nominee



When we read of some of the things done during the Cold War, we can be properly revulsed. And yet . . . When the Berlin Wall finally fell open at the end of 1989, the enthusiastic German activists in what was ceasing to be West Berlin were overjoyed to discover a community of Vietnamese *Gastarbeiter* in the other part of the city. Here, they assured themselves, were those who had personally suffered the scourge of imperialism, and who could revive their efforts towards promoting a progressive, social future. And so they met their comrades, longing to receive Das Wort. Which turned out to be:

"It was absolutely necessary . . . The war against the Communists was a just war, and the Americans ought to have won. They pulled out too soon and like cowards."  
 — Peter Schneider, *The German Comedy: Scenes of Life After the Wall*, Page 102

But the internal border of Berlin was still wide open in 1959. America had been shocked by the success of the Commies in sending probes into orbit, then around the Moon. A massive project was in train to create a cadre of Single-Combat Warriors to save the skies from being Red. (And, in response, the Chief Designer was authorized to collect first-rate pilots of the Soviet Air Force to send up as Spam in a can, provided they beat the capitalists.)

With the other hand, as it were, Korolev the Chief Designer was busy sending probes to the moon. The second crashed into the surface; the third took blurry photographs of the far side. The American probes were not so successful, and indeed, with the exception of



the Pioneer 4 probe, none succeeded.

And here's where our story begins, with a shell-shocked man trying to describe something. Since he's utterly incoherent, what results is less than useful. Finally, the boss, Dr. Edward Hawks, has the victim sent off to a mental facility for ECT, to obliterate the memories. He proceeds to the main laboratory to meet with another scientist, Dr. Sam Latourette. They are discussing the actions that put the shocked man into that state; investigating something inexplicable. On the Moon.

The facility is being managed by an electronics company, though the Navy is paying the fees. Hawks has a meeting with the company's Director of Personnel, Connington, who has a solution to the problem of investigators going crazy. He knows of a man who has the mental wewithal to endure whatever it is on the Moon, and proceeds to take Hawks there.

The adventurer, Al Barker, lives on the coast in a house that it is almost impossible to get to. The road there is blasted into a cliff side in such a fashion that any car going up or down has a very high possibility of going off the edge. Which characterizes Barker's life; he has been "living on the edge" all his life, from being an operator for the OSS to doing increasingly riskier exploration ventures. He didn't make it all the way back, having lost part of one leg. He has a live-in girlfriend who also likes to live on the edge, as we see when she has put his artificial leg where he will have to crawl out of the swimming pool he is in to get to it.

Their discussion seems less than fruitful. Connington drives away down the hazardous road, and Barker denounces Hawks as a coward because he doesn't want to risk his life going down the road. To which Hawks replies, "You're a suicide. I'm a murderer." And with this he sets out to walk into town.

It's a sign of how much the times have changed when Hawks finally gets to a gas station. It's a shack, with a proprietor sleeping in the back, which leads to confusion when a driver comes in to get a fillup. She confuses Hawks with the proprietor, but the man comes out, proceeds to fill the tank, even spilling gas on the ground to get a round number, and has to take the five-dollar bill the driver gives him in to get change. Yes, it was like that in 1959.

Boorishness, however, is still the same. The driver offers Hawks a ride into town, and he accepts. The driver is a fashion designer, and perhaps thought vulnerable because she was a woman. Yet she seems willing to accept Hawks's need for someone to talk to.

In spite of his defiance, Barker is at the site even earlier than when asked. Hawks has to explain what's going on. He is going to be scanned, zapped, and duplicated, with one version being reassembled on the Moon, and the other in a sensory-deprivation setup on the site. The deprivation will enable the Earth version to detect the experiences of the Lunar one.

This is because a more successful lunar probe saw a strange structure on the Lunar surface. The Commies might exploit it! So the Navy sent a receiver to the site, and amazingly enough it landed there. The first man copied to the Moon assembled a habitat, then went into the structure — and was killed.

Which has been the fate of a long string of successors. The structure has arbitrary and inexplicable rules, the breaking of which is fatal. It is not possible to communicate from within it; radio signals are masked, and actually handing anything out of the structure kills the person inside. All they have are terse notes from intruders, made before they died.

There is space for a discussion of identity and personality, but Hawks — the inventor of the transporter — has decreed that anyone transported is ipso facto dead, even though someone with the same body, the same memories, the same attitudes, will still exist on Earth. This is a potentially interesting problem cut short by fiat. Barker takes the deal. And so he is zapped off to the Moon, to die.

Again, it seems incongruous to read of the signal for the creation of a person being recorded on magnetic tape. (It would seem to take longer in reality than it does in the book.) So begins Barker's first adventure.

Over the next few weeks the journey is repeated over and over. Barker goes a little farther and dies again. Meanwhile, the others don't do so well. Hawks begins to see his rescuer, Elizabeth Cummings, to discuss his painful life. He evidently did not fit in school. When he had the chance to get a good science teacher, the man left for another job, and he had to learn physics from a Spanish teacher who was learning one lesson step ahead of the

class (with somewhat less enthusiasm than Bernardo de la Paz of *The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress* (NHOL G.159; 1965, 1966)). And when he expressed enthusiasm for school, he was told "You're not here to have fun!"

Meanwhile back at the eyrie, personnel director Connington is getting it on with Barker's girlfriend Claire. Perhaps they deserve each other; Barker beats up Connington before letting them go.

And Hawks's assistant, Dr. Latourette, is dying of cancer. Hawks refuses to let their stored copy of him be remade, since the previous Latourette would have to be brought up to speed on the developments in the project.

Finally, Barker thinks he can get all the way through. Hawks decides to go along with him. The structure won't directly kill two people entering. Now Hawks goes through the same procedure.

The inside of the structure is alien, with incomprehensible vistas and structures. As previously the elaborate description of the copying and dispatch could now be understood as a version of the STAR TREK transporter, so is the view of the inside of the structure comparable to the down-the-monolith sequence in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). Barker-L leads Hawks-L through this confusing, complex structure, evading hazards and scrambling through oddities, past bodies. Finally, they get out alive. The structure has been transited; now it can be studied.

Now Hawks-L and Barker-L have to make a choice. Barker-L decides to go into the lunar habitat, presumably to do what he can. Hawks-L, in keeping with his previous attitudes, goes out and stands on the lunar surface, waiting for his oxygen to run out so he can die.

Back at the site, Hawks-E and Barker-E are debriefed. Their perceptions of the inside of the structure differ, often greatly. Now they can go on to something else. And Hawks-E looks at a note his former self wrote: "Remember me to her."

This was not Budrys's only discussion of a question of identity. *Who?* (1958) has a Western researcher being maimed in a laboratory explosion, kidnapped by a Communist team, and returned with an artificial arm and a metal shell over his head. The plot deals with the attempt to find out if

the man returned is the man taken. Given that transplant methodology was not so common, Budrys could deal with the consideration that the returned man's fingerprints on his one surviving hand matched the originals by wondering if the arm had been transplanted. In other words, he didn't know about immunological rejection. And indeed, Damon Knight pointed out that the mechanical parts were irrelevant; the book could have been an ordinary story about trying to identify a physically mutilated man.

More to the point, Knight argued that the point made about identity is made unanswerable by auctorial fiat. Which is the same thing that happens in this book; the philosophical idea of the continued identity of an exact copy can be discussed, but by Hawks's fiat, it is declared to be solved.

Barker's motivations are hardly as unique as Budrys makes them seem. Reading about mountaineers climbing on increasingly difficult routes, on polar explorers making more and more difficult crossings, not to mention experimental pilots and the like, would indicate that people with that motivation of wanting to go to the edge are hardly rare — or hardly as anomalous. How would Budrys deal with people like the Italian mountaineer Cesare Maestri? (Ironically, Maestri's notorious faked climb of Cerro Torre in Argentina was also in 1959.) Maestri then would almost certainly have been classified as the sort of man who wants to get himself killed that Connington has for Hawks. He was also hardly the only climber of that sort, then or now.



One could see that sort of risk-taking attitude become more common later, as all the

“safe” routes had been climbed. What would Hawks make of Sir Chris Bonington, the devoted mountaineer, Sir Ran Fiennes, the polar explorer and inveterate runner (seven marathons on seven continents in seven consecutive days), or the greatest climber in history, Reinhold Messner? Or would he consider them on a level with Chris McCandless, who went off to Alaska and died (see *Into the Wild* by Jon Krakauer (1996))?

Some would consider Barker to be a different sort of man:

“There are men in this world who go about demanding to be killed. They argue in gambling games; they jump out of their cars in a rage if someone so much as scratches their fender. These people wander through the streets calling out ‘Kill me, kill me.’ Luca Brasi was such a man. And since he wasn’t scared of death, and in fact, looked for it . . . I made him my weapon. Because I was the only person in the world that he truly hoped would not kill him.”

— *The Godfather* (1969)

This seems more the attitude that Connington has towards Barker, which makes his flirtation with Barker’s girlfriend seem remarkably hazardous. Given that she is in her own way as unpleasant as Connington is, always taunting the others about their “manliness”, again, perhaps they deserve each other.

A more recent reader would find the lack of stress on Barker’s background to be out of keeping with more contemporary attitudes. He is a Mimbreno Apache — Chihéne (“Red Paint People”) — whose parents managed to stake and keep a silver deposit, so he is independently wealthy and able to afford the extravagant lifestyle displayed. His only Indian attitude shown is a disgust for liquor.

Hawks has his own problems. He is a loner, and one with a need to talk. His life seems to have been curiously restricted; he is forty-two and yet his relationship with Elizabeth seems very much like a high school first date, if not even more confined. In his analysis of the book in *More Issues at Hand*, James Blish says that Hawks is looking for a mother. Perhaps not, merely a counselor; but

Hawks comes across as a man who succeeded in one field and was totally uninvolved in others.

The prevailing opinion is that the book is, in various ways, about death. One of the original titles made the point; it was *The Death Machine*, and the book was reissued in 2001 under that title. The book is laden with speculations about death and dying. Between Hawks’s declaration that anyone transported is dead, and Latourette’s actual dying of cancer, the issue is constantly on view, never mind the constant deaths in the structure. The modern obsession with death and the dead (vampires and zombies) is shallow and inane by comparison.

As for the structure, Barker sums it up, after his first venture into it: “Hawks, it didn’t care! I was *nothing* to it!” A cosmic indifference, that is. One could get the same response from any character from a Lovecraft story, before he went totally and incurably insane or was eaten by the Things. Not just the structure, but the universe itself doesn’t care, and you’re *nothing* to it. But then, would a real risk-taker like Hawks be so high-strung and so philosophical?

And yet, there is no explanation. The structure kills people, but that seems only to be a side effect. What its real purpose is, why it is there, who left it there, are never answered. Is this only the beginning of the story? Or is the exploring the aim? The answer might be from T. S. Eliot: “We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.”

It is uncommon for such a work to take an artistic flyer, and yet Budrys does precisely that. When Barker is being fitted for the space armor, he begins quoting passages from a play about Merlin making armor for the best knight, which somewhat to his distaste turns out to be Sir Lancelot. Merlin seems to have foreseen the adulterous matter that broke up Camelot, and yet now he has to facilitate it. Budrys seems to have meant this as a reflection on the theme of the book, since another proposed title for it was *The Armiger*, a reference to the fictional play. (Another was *Halt, Passenger*, a quote from the gravestone motto which accompanies the dedication, to editor Larry T. Shaw — another focus on death and dying.)

Was this justified? The effort to place this base on the Moon, to staff it with golems, copies of men stranded there, unable to be teleported back, unable to be taken back, and having no identity if they do return, seems cruel, if not ghoulish. Yet . . . was the war worth winning? Budrys drew on his own family’s experiences to write another book, *The Falling Torch* (1959), though apparently jr had other motivations for his story. Was it worth not becoming like Lithuania?

No one ever seems to consider that exploring the structure might be worth doing simply because it was unknown, in the oft-quoted words of George Mallory, “because it is there.” That seems to be never even a consideration; an absence.

This book, far more than the usual run of science fiction, is of its time. The technology, barring the transporter, is of when it is set, the time it was written, 1959. So are the social attitudes. These will combine to make the more sensitive of contemporary readers shun the work.

The works of the fifties were simple, brief, and often filled with stock characters and situations. These works were more adventurous than those of later writers; they asked questions about the human condition, they speculated about the differences that change might bring. *Rogue Moon* is a prime example of such a work, asking questions about the human condition that later writers seem not to be up to asking.

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A VERY CHINESE COUP  
Review by Joseph T Major of  
**BOMBARD THE HEADQUARTERS!**  
by Steven P. Digena  
(Sea Lion Press (Kindle); 2015; \$4.99)  
<http://sealionpress.co.uk>

In 1969, Marshal Lin Piao (Pinyin: Lin Biao) was the second most powerful man in the Peoples’ Republic of China. He found out what the worth of such a position was before he died in a mysterious air crash on September 13, 1971.

Sea Lion Press is a new outfit that publishes different sorts of alternate histories. For those who are tired of time-traveling Nazi zombies intervening in the U.S. Civil War only to be balked by steampunk lesbian vampires, this is good news.

The Plan 571 that Lin’s son Lin Ligu (Lin Li-kuo) had developed to overthrow Mao and raise his father to supreme power had the brilliance of a plot to take over America orchestrated by a Klan klavern of five guys with a pickup truck and two shotguns, one of which actually had ammo, and a six-pack of beer bottles full of gasoline (until Bubba got confused and drank one).

Digena has the coup being taken over by Daddy and better organized. So our story begins, with the Chairman’s train crashing, and urgent reports that B-52 and F-4 have both been shot down. It turns out that F-4 is Jiang Qing (Chiang Ch’ing), and indeed the putative Gang of Four gets four-flushed.

Not everyone accepts the results, though, and there is fighting and dying in the streets of Beijing (Peking) as the very Chinese coup is resolved . . .

There are various difficulties in the exposition. One can question the use of Pinyin romanizations, since Wade-Giles was used then, but modern readers might not comprehend them. Coup stories themselves are all too easy to render as mere shootouts; consider Damon Knight’s criticism of Taylor Caldwell’s *The Devil’s Advocate* (1952) and compare that with the more serious plotting, in both senses, of Robert Moss’s *Moscow Rules* (1985).

Still, it’s an alternate history without vampires, zombies, and/or steampunk.

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DANCES WITH WEREWOLVES  
Review by Joseph T Major of  
**WOLVES OF THE NORTHERN RIFT:  
A Magic & Machinery Novel Book I**  
by Jon Messenger  
(Crimson Tree Publishing; 2015; Priceless)

It seems sad that Faerie must give way to the soulless nature of brass and steam. Or does it have surprises?

In this case, we have a very capital-intense oil-drilling community (I mean, a city with a tunnel system for extreme winter conditions?) that has problems with werewolves, and a very persuasive on-site CEO.

The investigators, an Inquisitor and his assistant, a medic, arrive to figure out what is going on. Only perhaps the real boss isn’t quite who or what he seems to be.

And then a guest at a ball turns out to be a werewolf herself. Messenger’s description o

the transformation is startling. This isn't your basic Larry Talbot turning into a mattress at the full moon, kiddies.

As the investigation proceeds, it turns out that the oil-drilling boss is very persuasive. How else did he get the local tribal leaders to sell their mineral rights for nothing? And this is only the prelude to some really portentous considerations . . .

This isn't your ordinary steampunk book or your ordinary faerie adventure. It's worth a look, anyway.

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### SCIENCE FICTION THE SHIT OUT OF IT

Commentary by Joseph T Major on  
*THE MARTIAN*

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt3659388/>

Go see it.

Amazingly, Ridley Scott has produced a film that the author can see and come away thinking that his work hasn't been violated.

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### YOU'RE SO VAIN

by Joe

There was a partial solar eclipse on **September 13, 2015**, visible in Angola, Namibia, South Africa, and Antarctica, with maximum at 72.1S 2.3W in Marie Byrd Land. It was part of Saros 125, which began February 4, 1060 and will end April 9, 2358.

The next solar eclipse will be a total eclipse on **March 9-8, 2016** (the path crosses the International Date Line), visible in Sumatra, Borneo, and Celebes. The maximum totality will be 4' 9", at sea in the Pacific Ocean at 10° 6' N., 148° 45' E. It is part of Saros 130, which began on August 20, 1096 and will end on October 25, 2394.

The next one after that will be an annular eclipse on **September 1**, visible in Africa along a path from Gabon to Mozambique, and Madagascar.

<http://www.hermit.org/Eclipse>

<http://www.eclipse.org.uk/>

<http://eclipse.gsfc.nasa.gov/eclipse.html>

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### HORSE NEWS

by Lisa

American Pharoah scored big in the Breeder's Cup Classic and became the only Triple Crown winner to also win a Breeder's Cup. There was no Breeder's Cup in 1978. The first Breeder's Cup was run in 1984.



For this horse breed issue I decided to take a bit of a different tack. It occurred to me that I had never written about a draft horse breed. I thought it might be interesting to give some time to draft horses. The draft horses which came to mind were the Clydesdales., the mascots of Anheuser Busch beer.

At over 18 hands, around six feet tall, and weighing over a ton, these are majestic animals. They are crosses between Great Flemish horses and local Scottish mares. They were first known as Clydesman's horses and given the name of Clydesdale in 1826. In 1879 United States breeders formed their own association, Clydesdale Breeders of the United States. In 1975 the breed was on the endangered list but increasing popularity has brought their numbers to over 5,000.

I was surprised to learn that as well as pulling wagons loaded with several times their own weight Clydesdales make good trail horses, thanks to their gentle disposition. I cannot quite see myself perched on top of one since I am a short person but it is an impressive versatility.

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### InConJunction XXXV Con Report by Leigh Kimmel

InConJunction is the literary science fiction convention held in Indianapolis every summer. This year it was held over the weekend of July 3-5, 2015 at the Indianapolis Marriott East. That hotel is right in our neighborhood, so close it would be in walking

distance if the area were walkable. However, the lack of sidewalks makes walking a risky proposition, so we drove.

This convention allows the dealers to load in and do some set-up on Thursday evening, so we went over to the hotel right after lunch to get into position. We sat around the big atrium and visited with some friends. I also did some work on my novel.

Once load-in commenced, we got our cart out of the van and started hauling stuff in. We soon had massive piles of stuff in the aisles by our tables as we got everything in and started setting up our structures.

However, there simply wasn't enough time to get everything set up before they closed the dealers' room for the night. So we headed home to wind down and try to get a reasonably good night's sleep.

On Friday we had to get up early to make sure we'd have as much time as possible to finish setting up. Even so, it took us so long that I never got around to getting my art onto the art show.

When the doors finally opened, we really didn't get that much traffic. I knew we couldn't expect the level of sales we'd get at a big comic con or anime con, but there were so few people walking around that it felt like attendance was down.

When the dealers' room closed for the night, we headed over to the con suite to grab some snackies. We got to talk with some friends we hadn't seen since ConGlomeration.

There weren't any parties, so we just headed back home. I tried to get some work done on my novel, but couldn't get much traction on it. At least our cat seemed to appreciate having me home to feed and pet her.

On Saturday we got up early to drive back to the con hotel. We headed over to the con suite for second breakfast and visiting with friends. Then we headed back to the dealers' room to get our tables ready for business.

Sales continued to be slow. We had a couple of really big sales that did bring things up to the level we needed to cover our expenses, but you just can't count on things like that. So we soon began thinking about looking for a larger convention for next year.

When the dealers' room closed for the night, we headed over to the con suite to have the supper we'd brought with us and grab some munchies. We stuck around in hopes of

finding some parties, but no flyers appeared. My husband wanted to get into an Artemis game, but there weren't any other players.

We finally headed back home. I did some work on my novel, feeling rather dispirited.

A THEOCRATIC  
PLUTOCRACY



On Sunday we headed back to the con hotel and got second breakfast at the con suite. Then we went to the dealers' room and tried to get some more stuff sold. We started packing fairly early, but were still packing when the dealers' room closed. I started loading stuff out while my husband and brother-in-law continued to pack, so we were able to get loaded out quickly enough to have some hope of getting to the dead dog party.

When we did get there, we saw some remnants that suggested they'd had pizza brought in, but it had all been eaten while we

were slogging through the process of loading out and struggling to get everything to fit back in our vehicles. We noshed a little on the munchies, but finally we had to head home and scare up a real supper for ourselves. Because we'd reduced our merchandise volume so little and things didn't want to go in the same way, I ended up with a very awkward pile of boxes on the passenger seat of the van. I don't think I would've wanted to drive it even just back from the convention center downtown, but I could barely manage the mile back home. Still, it was dispiriting to work so hard for so little.

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Sasquan  
Con Report by Leigh Kimmel

Sasquan is the 73rd World Science Fiction Convention (Worldcon), and was held over the weekend of August 19-23, 2015 at the Spokane Convention Center and the Doubletree Hotel. This year's Worldcon turned out to be of record size, at least in part thanks to the enormous controversy about the Hugo Awards, and particularly the Sad Puppies and Rabid Puppies campaigns. However, the vast majority of that increase was in supporting memberships, so we dealers didn't realize a large increase in potential customers.

Because we were hauling a van full of merchandise across the country, we hit the road the previous Friday. We only went as far as the Bloomington-Normal, Illinois area the first night because we wanted to spend the night with my family. My parents are both in declining health, and I want to grab the chance to visit them when I can.

While I was on the Internet that evening, the button on my laptop's mouse died on me. What made it particularly aggravating was knowing that we had three brand-new and unopened mice at home in Indianapolis. I'd been having a little trouble with my mouse before we left and had wondered when I'd need to replace it, but hadn't thought to bring a spare mouse with me, so I was stuck using the trackpad.

On Saturday morning we hit the road early and had breakfast on the go. We stopped in Bloomington to get gas, then headed west on I-74 toward Iowa.

In the evening we rolled into Chamberlain, South Dakota, where we had a room for the

night. We were most decidedly into hilly country, and the parking lot was quite uneven. Our room was nice and spacious, and we had a microwave oven to heat up supper. However, the Internet connection was down, so my husband went looking around for what he thought was a business center. Instead he discovered that they had an indoor pool with a hot tub.

We headed over to it and got a good soak in. I had fun watching the three buckets that were hung over the swimming pool. As they filled with water, they'd tip over and pour water all over the swimmers. Afterward we headed back to the room, where I did some work on my novel before we turned in for the night.

Sunday we got up early and had the hotel's complimentary breakfast. Then we got back on the road, heading toward Montana. Shortly after Rapid City, we left the Interstate to follow a US highway that was supposed to shorten the distance. It was some very pretty country, but we went through enough towns that the slower speed limits negated any time savings.

By the time we got back onto I-90, we were very definitely into mountains. However they weren't nearly as rugged as I'd expected for the northern Rockies, more like the ones I'd seen in the southern route, or the Appalachians. A lot of them even were pasture for cattle.

However, that changed after we crossed the Continental Divide. Suddenly the mountains became very rugged and were covered with evergreens rather than pasturage.

We rolled into Butte right in time for supper and checked into our hotel. It had been an EconoLodge, but had become a Motel 6 just weeks before our trip. It was a decent place, but very bare-bones and with a feeling of decline. I did get some writing done in the evening.

In the morning we had breakfast bars and hit the road. We drove to Missoula, where we'd found a GMC dealership. They warned us that they probably couldn't get to us until after noon, so we settled in for a long stay only to have them get the van in and out before 11AM. So we hit the road for the last part of the drive earlier than expected.

As it turned out, that was a very good thing. When we hit the Idaho state line, we ran into some truly nasty road construction. There

were Jersey barriers on either side of the single lane, and a strong downhill grade out of the Bitterroots. Worse, there were so many curves that it made me think they'd laid out the route by letting a giant snake slither down the mountains and paving the trail it made.

By the time we got out of that road construction, I was very ready to be done driving. We did manage to get gas before crossing the Washington state line into high prices.



When we got to Spokane, we went over to the convention center and scoped out the area before checking into the hotel where we were staying. That place was a real crapsack, and to make things worse, they were resurfacing the parking lot. There was also a nasty musty smell in our room, like it hadn't been cleaned properly in ages.

We had supper and then tried to get some work done. I did a decent amount of work on my novel, although the icky smell in the air made concentration difficult. We also discovered that the sink drain was pretty well clogged.

On Tuesday we got up and had the hotel's complimentary breakfast. I considered it extremely disappointing, and had trouble finding anything I actually wanted to eat. We also managed to lock ourselves out of our room, thanks to a communication failure, and had to get new keys.

Then we headed over to the Red Lion Hotel, where we were supposed to form up for load-in. We got there early enough to be second in line, and I settled in to work on con reports while we waited for time to load in.

At 9AM we got to drive into the convention center loading dock. As soon as I opened the back doors of the van, I could tell that part of the load had shifted and I would

have to be very careful unloading to prevent boxes of fragile stuff from crashing down and breaking.

We were supposed to load our stuff on pallets to be hauled in by forklift, but there were several problems with the procedure. We had trouble getting pallets, and then they had only three forklifts running. As a result, we had several points in which we were stuck waiting because we couldn't move on to the next step until someone else did something.

However, we did end up feeling less tired by the time everything was loaded in than we would've had we hauled everything in cartload by cartload. I took the van back to the hotel and hiked to the convention center, where I set to work building our structures and getting everything into place. We were done in time to head back to the hotel for a late supper. However, my husband soon found that the supposedly walkable distance was more than his legs and feet could handle. Worse, when we got back we discovered that the maids hadn't even touched our room (although maintenance had unclogged the sink). We had to go to the front desk to get fresh towels.

That evening the hotel's WiFi started really acting up. My husband played some games on the iPad while I worked on my novel. This sort of thing is why I am very wary of storing all one's data on the cloud, as opposed to using it for backing up or sharing data — what do you do when you need to work on something and the Internet is down?

On Wednesday morning we got up and had yet another iffy hotel breakfast. The WiFi was still dead, so we headed over to the convention center in hopes of using their WiFi. However, the staff was adamant that no one was to get in before 9AM, so we got stuck sitting on a bench outside waiting. I did some work on con reports, so the time wasn't a complete loss.

Once we got in, we put a few last-minute things up. Then I had some time to walk around and meet some other dealers. I looked at the new t-shirt designs our wholesalers were offering, planning our next order. I also talked business with a lot of people.

I also wanted to get some social-media buzz up on the countdown deal I was doing for Khuldhar's War. I fired up my laptop and was beginning to write a LiveJournal post when it just shut down on me. So I had to quick find an outlet and restart it so I could finish. It was giving me a "service battery" message, which

was very strange considering that the battery is still in low double-digit charge cycles. I saw some stuff online that suggests it might just be a glitch in the calibration, not the battery itself, and would be amenable to software fixes.

When the doors opened, we actually had some pretty decent traffic. I knew we wouldn't have the crowds we get for the big comic cons, but after two painfully small sf cons earlier this year, I wasn't sure what to expect. It was good to have solid traffic and decent sales, although a lot of people were just looking at this point.

When I went out to buy more time at the parking lot, the sky was this weird yellowish color, and the sun was red while still high in the sky. It was a really freaky feeling, but I knew there were wildfires in the area, so I figured it was the smoke in the air refracting the light, similar to the greenish color of the sky before a tornado.

After the dealers' room closed for the evening, we headed over to the con suite. It was crowded enough that our luggage cart was a real pain to work around. It was even worse when we tried to catch the shuttle bus to the party hotel. We decided that on future nights, we'd take our stuff back to the van after the dealers' room closed for the night.

The party hotel was a long way from the rest of the con, apparently as a result of corkage issues. We lost a good chunk of our time waiting for the Helsinki party to open. Then we went to the DC bid party and talked to them about parking issues. At least this concom is thinking about the issues of parking large vehicles (such as what dealers are apt to drive), and not leaving us to our own devices.

As the evening wore on, I went back to retrieve the van and pick up my husband. That meant figuring my way back to the parking lot, which looked very different from when I was a passenger. We also had the problem of connecting for pickup. By the time we got back to the hotel, I was ready for bed, but I made sure to get a few words in on my novel.

On Thursday we didn't push so hard to get moving early. We arrived just in time to be let in and got our tables open for business. I did a little looking around, but didn't have a lot of time to kill.

Sales seemed a little slower, but maybe I was just starting the day tired and my feet noticed it more when I was stuck standing around. By the time the dealers' room closed

for the evening, it hurt just walking over to the lot to renew my parking receipt and drop off our stuff. I walked back to the con suite and just sort of collapsed in a chair. It was all I could do to get up to eat some food I could see on the table in front of me.

Later they brought in some pasta catered by a local restaurant. By that time I'd noshed enough on the salad stuff that I wasn't all that hungry. I did have a little, but that was all I could hold.

Then we headed over to the party hotel, but that was a colossal waste of time. The Japan party was an hour late in opening, and the New Orleans party was postponed until Friday. We went back to our hotel a little annoyed, and got even more so when we discovered the maids had missed our room a second time. The WiFi was completely dead, so I pulled out a notebook and did some more notes on my novel before turning in for the night.

On Friday we were happy to discover that the hotel had finally gotten their act together and had the WiFi working again. As a result, I was able to get some sales information off to our consignor before we headed back to the convention center.

I noticed as we drove to the convention center that the sun was still reddish even while fairly high in the sky, which suggested we were getting a fair amount of smoke from the wildfires to the west of Spokane. We parked and headed over to the convention center, but had to wait for about fifteen minutes in the chilly air before the doors opened and we could go in.

We got our tables open and I did some more looking around, since I didn't have to do laptop stuff on the convention center WiFi. Then the doors opened and we started doing business. I noticed several times just how yellow the light through the windows was getting.

In the afternoon I went to the Elizabeth Bear signing, which had some really long lines. We had a bunch of books to sign, which meant I'd need to go through the line multiple times — and then I discovered that Alma Alexander and Stan Schmidt were signing at the same time. I was hoping to get through with Elizabeth Bear in time to get to their lines, but as I made the third and final trip, I could see I wasn't going to have time. But another person in line mentioned to Alma

Alexander that I was missing her autographing, and she went to our booth afterward and signed them there. And as it turned out, Stan Schmidt had already signed the only book of his that we had.

By this point, the odor of smoke was quite noticeable within the convention center. The view through the windows looked obviously smoky, and I heard that they'd had to shut off the smoke alarm system to prevent false alarms.

By the time the dealers' room closed for the evening, the air was thick with smoke. I walked over to the parking lot to drop off our stuff and update our parking slip, and the smoke had blotted out the sun. I started spinning a narrative about walking through a post-apocalyptic landscape, and bits of ash fell on me while I was at the van. When I got back to the convention center, I took a couple of pictures of the smoke-shrouded skyline.

Then I headed up to the con suite to join my husband for supper. This time they had a variety of meatballs, which we could have on rice or on submarine sandwich buns.

After that we caught the bus to the party hotel. We'd hoped to see the San Jose party, but they were running behind. We did get to the Heinlein Society party, where we had chili. We also got to the Sime-Gen Party, but neither Jacqueline Lichtenberg nor Jean Lorrah were there, so we'd carried their books with us for nothing.

Then we headed back to our hotel. At least this time the maids had done our room, so it wasn't a colossal dump. I did a little writing before we turned in for the night.

On Saturday we went to the hotel's complimentary breakfast simply because we were annoyed with their grudging attitude toward providing amenities. Then we headed over to the convention center to get in on the breakfast for the dealers. There was a brief mixup when we thought that catering had dropped the ball on us, until we discovered that the food was in the back of the room rather than the front.

Then we got our tables open and settled in to do business. We had some fairly decent sales, although they tended to come in spurts.

In the afternoon I went to stand in line for some more autographs. The line for Robert Silverberg was so long I decided not to even try to get any of his books done, but that may have been a mistake, because I was pretty

close to the front and probably could have gotten through one time and still gotten the others done, especially after Kris Rusch canceled.

Then I headed back to our booth to keep things going until it closed for the evening. We finally had some substantial book sales, which did take down our book stock a decent amount. We also sold some t-shirts, which will help reduce the bulk we have to haul back over the Rockies. However, we didn't see a lot of reduction in the little fiddly stuff that takes so much time to pack up.

When the dealers' room closed for the night, I hauled our cart of stuff back to the van and got a fresh parking slip. At least the air was a lot clearer than it had been on Friday, so it was a far more pleasant trip.

When I got to the con suite, I was happily surprised to discover that this time they'd catered a chef to carve a huge roast for us. The main con suite was so full that we ended up in one of the overflow rooms, where we could supplement our meal with salad and munchies.

Afterward we decided to just skip the parties and head back to the hotel, because we both needed to catch up on our sleep. We arrived to make the unhappy discovery that the maids had missed our room yet again. This time the desk clerk told me I had to bring my dirty towels back to get clean ones. We were pretty thoroughly fed up at that point.



I tried to do some bookwork, but soon discovered I was too sleepy to deal with numbers. I did get a little work done on my novel before we turned in for the night.

The next morning we made one last trip to the breakfast nook for what they passed off as food. Then we took our stuff out to the van and got checked out, vowing we'd never, ever stay there again.

We got to the convention center and got things open for business. Sales were slow, but picked up right about the time I needed to go off for some signings. I got a little work done on my novel while waiting for the Kate Elliott signing, which was good because I didn't have a moment's spare time after that.

Because this con wouldn't let us retrieve our vehicle and start loading until we were packed, we had to start packing the small fiddly stuff early if we were to have any hope of being on the road at a reasonable hour. We thought we could get them to cut us some slack because my husband can't lift heavy loads. But no, the dealers' room coordinator insisted that she had to hold everyone to the same rules (except one dealer was allowed to bring his vehicle and start loading while another person on his team was still packing, but they're con insiders).

Fortunately a friend of ours dropped by and pitched in to get all the t-shirts boxed up, which cut some of the time. But they were still grumbling about clearing us to load out when the structures weren't disassembled yet, because they didn't understand how late in their process those items are packed.

We weren't the only dealer who was having problems with these procedures. One of our wholesalers was right by the door, and as I passed through, he vented his frustration about being expected to pack while the forklifts were going in and out right where he needed to pile merchandise.

When I finally did get to retrieve our van, I got more hurry up and wait at the marshalling point. I arrived just as they'd sent three vehicles to the loading dock, so I had to sit until there were more openings. I used the time as best I could, moving our personal possessions into the front passenger seat and setting up the tie-downs in the middle of the cargo hold.

Finally I got my card and was able to drive over to the loading dock. However, the hurry up and wait wasn't done yet. Now I had to stand in line and wait for a forklift to become available to move all our pallets to the van. Even when they did, I was receiving them in the wrong order, which hampered my ability to work efficiently. The pallet with the big gridwall panels was one of the last to arrive, and by that point a bunch of other pallets were between it and the van, so I had to work my way around them.

By the time we were finally finished loading and ready to pull out, we were almost an hour behind schedule. The air was hazy with smoke from the wildfires, and as we drove east toward the state line, there were patches of smoke almost like fog.

We stopped at the Idaho rest stop, amidst towering evergreens that filled the air with a welcome resin scent. I talked with another traveler about what a blessing it was to have a nice place to pause and to have clean water and a tidy place to pause.

After that we had to go through the construction zone in the Bitterroots. At least going uphill I wasn't worried about the van speeding up just from the heavy load. But I was very glad to get across the state line into Montana, although we still had over a hundred miles to go to get to our hotel reservation for the night.

By the time we got in at our hotel, we were so exhausted we just wanted to get to sleep. However, I was aching so bad that I got only fitful sleep. It was particularly frustrating because this hotel actually had a hot tub, but it closed for the night mere minutes after we arrived. If we'd left on schedule, we would've had an opportunity to soak out our aches and pains, and I might've gotten a solid night's sleep.

However, there was nothing to do the next day but force ourselves out of bed and press on to our next stop of the journey. At least this hotel had a reasonably good breakfast, so we got a good start on the day.

As we drove through what felt like endless expanses of Montana, one problem of substituting caffeine for sleep became intensely acute. Rest stops were few and far between, and caffeine is a diuretic as well as a stimulant. There were several points at which I was in considerable distress by the time we got to a place where I could use a restroom.

It was just nightfall when we got to Rapid City, South Dakota. We'd used reward points to get a free stay at a nice place, and they actually had a pool with a hot tub. Since we had some time before we needed to turn in for the night, we headed down for a good soak. I think it did help me relax and get ready for a good night's sleep. I also got an actual page of notes done on my novel.

The next morning we headed down for the hotel's complimentary breakfast. They had a wide variety of foods, and even real china and

silverware. We enjoyed it so much that we didn't really push hard to get moving, which turned out to be a mistake. The long trip across South Dakota and Minnesota turned out to take more time than we'd expected, and it was getting dark by the time we got to Iowa. So we got to our next hotel just in time for bed, and I only got a few words jotted down on my novel.



The next morning we got another nice breakfast, and then we headed over to my folks' place. We had one very close call in Peoria when we needed to get from I-80 to I-74. There were road construction signs, and I'd dutifully gotten over into the left-hand lane. But the actual construction began after the ramp, so I needed to get over to it, except people were passing me on the right. I was barely able to get on the ramp before I ran out of time.

When we arrived at my folks' place, they were running errands. We just carried in our stuff and I started a load of laundry, and then

we both took naps. In the evening we visited a little and I did a little more work on my novel.

On Thursday I did our final load of laundry, and then it was time to say good-bye. At least our trip back to Indianapolis went pretty smoothly, and we even were able to stop by the Brownsburg branch of our bank on the way in and make a fairly nice cash deposit before they closed.

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### Archon 39 Con Report by Leigh Kimmel

Archon is a science fiction convention held every fall in the St. Louis area. This year Archon 39 was held over the weekend of October 2-4, 2015 at the Gateway Convention Center and the Doubletree Hotel in Collinsville, Illinois, one of the Metro East suburbs.

We left on Wednesday afternoon and drove over to my folks' place in the Bloomington-Normal area. This gave me an opportunity to visit with them, something I don't want to pass up these days. As we get older, I'm seeing more and more that we can't take it for granted that we'll have all the chances we'd like to have to see each other.

On Thursday we went the rest of the way to Collinsville. We left shortly after breakfast to allow plenty of time for road construction and traffic backups. However, we encountered only one major delay, which meant that we arrived before our room was ready and wound up stuck in the lobby waiting. I did some work on a story for Liberty Island's Halloween contest.

Once we got in, we connected with our friends who are crashing in our room in exchange for help loading us in and out. Then we had supper and went over to the convention center. The art show was ready, so I was able to get my art set up. However, registration was running behind, so we got to sit around and wait for almost an hour before we could get our badges.

That business taken care of, we headed back across the way to our hotel and settled in for the evening. I tried to get some book reviews written, but ran out of time before I could finish them. We needed to get up early to be ready to load in the next morning, so it behooved us to turn in at a reasonable hour.

On Friday we got up and had breakfast. We also made the unhappy discovery that the

hotel's key cards demagnetize easily, which is going to be a huge hassle with multiple people sharing the room. Every time we have problems with a key and need it recoded, we have to collect all the keys and get them all recoded at once.

Then we headed back to the convention center to set up. Because we wanted to make sure we had a good position to load in from, we went there extra early, which meant waiting. I used the time to get a head start on my con review.



Once the doors opened, we started hauling stuff in. Because we had so many people helping and were able to get one of the convention center's flatbed carts as well as our own cart, we got everything in really fast. Then we all started working on getting everything set up. The biggest problem we were having was keeping everyone coordinated so we didn't get into each other's way, and we got the priority stuff out before it got crowded out by less important merchandise.

Even with a few little glitches that had to be fixed, we were finished well ahead of opening time. We even had some time to walk

around and see who else had set up.

When the doors opened, we had a brief flurry of business when a whole bunch of people came in and saw the thing they did not want to risk getting away from them. After that, things slowed down and we were doing as much standing around as actual selling.

In the evening we went to the artists' reception. Because it starts before the dealers' room closes, we each hurried over to the art show to get some food, then hurried back to be around in time for closing. Once we got our dealers' tables covered, we headed back to the art show to really enjoy it. I did run our personal stuff out to the van for safekeeping, which did take a little time, but we still had enough time to look through the whole place.

We also decided to go over to the Doubletree to check out the con suite and the parties. However, the con suite was all drinks, and I didn't see any parties. So we headed back to our hotel to turn in for the night. We did have a little time to unwind, but there wasn't really much writing time. I did want to get a little writing in, just to keep things moving forward.

On Saturday we had the hotel's complimentary breakfast, then headed back over to the convention center. Saturdays are almost always the big sales day, so I spent some of our setup time fiddling around with our displays, trying to figure out ways to get more merchandise out and better display what we did have out.

Once the doors opened, we had fairly steady sales. I had to consciously adjust my expectations downward, since we've really had them altered by doing the big comic cons. However, I was happy to see a lot of our books going out. People were actually buying a fair number of books at a time, even if they didn't reach the point at which our volume discounts kick in. It might not be like the days when we could count on emptying three or four trays of paperbacks and a box of hardcovers, but it was better than several recent science fiction conventions have been.

When the dealers' room closed for the evening, we headed back to our room to take it easy for the evening. We had a little drama when one of our friends discovered she had lost her badge, but she figured out it must have fallen off outside and headed out to retrace her steps in search of it. After that, we settled in to rest and relax. I got some notes made on a

story I want to write some time in the future, and then we turned in for the night.

On Sunday we had breakfast, then started gathering up our stuff to get checked out. We also had to make sure our roommates had all their stuff out of the room before we got finished checking out. We also heard from them that yes, our other friend had indeed found her badge and all was well on that front.

Then we headed back over to the convention center. This time we were able to come in through the rear entrance of the dealers' room rather than walk all the way around, which saved time and effort. I got a few more things out on display, then looked around. I got to see some photographs from Larry Smith's van accident on his return from Dragon\*Con. That was a really close call, and made me aware of just how lucky we've been some times when I was pushing hard and driving tired.

When the doors first opened, traffic was pretty slow. I went over and picked up my unsold art, then started packing merchandise. At that point, things really started picking up, to the point that I didn't even get a chance to eat my lunch. About the time the doors opened, I was to the point I was almost sick with hunger, and demanded that I have a chance to at least eat my sandwich before I keeled over.

I was quite happy to see several boxes empty or nearly so, and that with some of them badly packed by people who weren't familiar with the optimal way to get a box packed. We also managed to get the van loaded tighter, since we had more room than we had when we headed off. It almost made me wonder if we'd missed a box somewhere, but when I went back in to pick up our personal belongings, I was happy to see that everything was in order.

Then we hit the road back to my folks' place. We had good weather and made good time, and I was even able to get two loads of laundry done before bedtime. I also did most of our bookwork, and made some notes on stories I want to get written.

On Monday we stayed for lunch with my parents. Then I carried out our personal belongings and we hit the road home. We got back in time to deposit our cash money and get to the meal at one of the local churches.

2017 NASFiC

San Juan, Puerto Rico  
<http://www.sanjuan2017.org/>

2018

New Orleans  
<http://neworleansin2018.org>

San José

<http://www.sjin2018.org/>  
Proposed Dates: August 16-20

2019

Dublin  
<http://dublin2019.com/>

2020

New Zealand  
<http://nzin2020.org/>

2021

Fort Worth

2022

Chicago  
Doha, Qatar

2023

Paris  
<https://sites.google.com/site/parisin2019/>

2025

Perth, Australia



Every so often a convention collapses spectacularly. Garth Spencer observed the case of IFCon Victoria. Now this was not your sort of con; it featured media, cosplay, and didn't have memberships, but "weekend passes" and the like.

The chairman collapsed and went to the hospital for surgery four days before the con — and canceled it. He said he was the only person running things. This may have been true.

NoLaCon II had its own problems. John Guidry was doing far too much of the work, I understand, and it got too much for him to handle. But there was a network of volunteers who had experience in running cons already there, so the con went on.

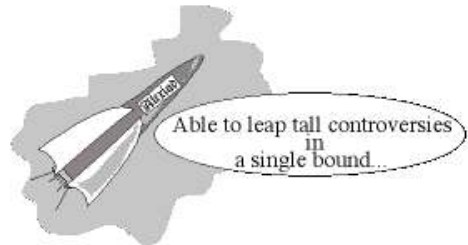
This may be eroding. The people for whom cons are a participatory event are aging and tiring. Those for whom cons are a consumer event are becoming more and more the norm.



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 Letters, we get letters
 

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From: **Rod E. Smith** September 28, 2015  
 730 Cline Street, Frankfort, KY 40601-1034 USA  
[stickmaker@usa.net](mailto:stickmaker@usa.net)

Don't recall if I told you already, but my Sasquan photos are at:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/116299515@N07/albums/72157658023108241>

In re. 1177 B.C.: *The Year Civilization Collapsed*, several conquerors of Ancient Egypt found that they had to leave the established bureaucracy in place. The country was too large to run, otherwise.

There is a surprising amount of stuff still to find in Egypt. In just the past few years searches along the western shore of the Red Sea have revealed a drydock and a couple of ports. All were associated with nearby storage facilities dug into hills, most of them sealed when the Egyptians left. These contained shipping related items, including a coiled hawser, left just as it was in antiquity. One of these tunnels contained the oldest papyrus found, dating back to 2600 BC. Among these are documents by men who worked on the Great Pyramid of Khufu! Some of them were written by an official named Merer who wrote about the last year of Khufu's reign! He mentions reporting to Ankh-haf, Khufu's half brother. How cool is it to have a connection like that to the past? The October, 2015 issue of *Smithsonian* has a long article about these discoveries.

Just now the buzz is about the possibility of hidden extra chambers in Tutakhamen's tomb.

Joy V. Smith wishes me luck with my novels. Thank you. No update on the novel front, yet, but I sold a short story to an anthology! I'll provide more info here when I have it.

An interesting addendum on Civil War medical stuff from Fred Lerner.

Richard A. Dengrove speculates that both the Union and Confederacy gave up on balloons because hydrogen was hard to get. Hydrogen can be produced by several fairly simple chemical reactions, including dosing iron with acid. Here is an excerpt from an online article about Civil War ballooning: Balloons were normally inflated with city gas when it was available, as in Washington and Richmond. In the field, Thaddeus Lowe designed and the Navy Yard constructed special inflation wagons. Charged with dilute sulfuric acid and iron filings, they generated hydrogen. These portable gas generation wagons gave the Union balloonists the ability to deploy more freely in the field.

Of course, the South could very well have run out of sulphuric acid.

Or, as all the readers of *L'Île mystérieuse* know, they wasted it building a balloon so the Governor of Richmond could communicate with General Lee's army at Petersburg, when he didn't feel like riding over.

— JTM

John Hertz September states "[N]either Clark Kent nor Superman changes identities in a telephone booth. I can't say where that came from."

I believe that comes from one of the early Fleischer Superman cartoon, the incredible "The Mechanical Monsters." This does, indeed, show Clark entering a phone booth in an alley beside the gem exhibit which was just robbed, a rapidly moving silhouette, and Superman emerging. Consider that these entertainments also came up with the "Faster than a speeding bullet!" opener.

Closing with a historical tech tidbit. Large home iceboxes were sometimes built against an outside wall, and an access door cut all the way through. This way the iceman could refill the ice chamber without disturbing the household or dripping water from melting ice on the floor.

From: **Milt Stevens** October 5, 2015  
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In *Alexiad* #82, Joseph laments the state of current SF. Sturgeons Law suggests there should be somewhere around 100 to 150 fairly good SF or fantasy novels published in a year. The problem is to find them. It's been decades since I randomly picked up a novel to read. Before I invest any time in a novel, I must have some reason to think there will be a return on my investment. It is tempting to avoid all novels with vampires, werewolves, or zombies. I only make exceptions for writers I think are worth more than half a damn.

I always avoid reading the first novel in a series. If possible I also avoid the second, third, fourth, and fifth novels in a series. I only read series with three credible recommendations or a Hugo nomination.

Unfortunately, series now seem to be the norm. And worse yet, the only one I find is Volume Two.

There are many SF and fantasy novels from the past that have good reputations. While I keep working at it, there are still quite a few I haven't read. There were years in the past where I was busy with other things and didn't read much SF. Also, I started reading SF in the prozines. For quite a few years, I thought of prozines as THE place to find SF. I really regretted giving up on the magazines. However, I finally had to accept that the money and the talent had moved to novels, so my reading attention had to follow.

Lisa writes about her experiences with ebooks. Apparently, the change in media has not changed her collectorish urges. My reading is entirely in audio books. These are a subset of ebooks, but I have a fair number of them on my Kindle Fire. I have several sources for audio books, and I can get just about anything I might ever want. I find I have no urge to collect audio books. When I want an audio book I download it and read it. Some are downloaded to flash drives. Those I erase after reading. If I want them again, I'll download them again.

So why don't I collect audio books? In

times past, my personal habitats looked like a sorcerer's den with printed matter everywhere. That was the way I liked it. The smell of decaying book paper was the smell of home. You may have noticed that you can't smell electrons. I can't either. Without smell, or touch, or even anything to see, my collectorish urges remain dormant.

There is now a NASFIC bid for Puerto Rico. I don't know much about Puerto Rico, but I'd suspect it is rather sticky in August.

What does Puerto Rican fandom think?

— JTM

From: **R-Laurraine Tutihasi** Oct. 7, 2015  
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There are more than just Kindle and Nook apps for the iPad. There are also iBooks (epubs and PDF formats) and Kobo apps. There are free books for all of them. Project Gutenberg is the best source for older books. They're mostly offered in several formats.

There are other sites, though I do have concerns about their files.

—JTM

Typing '40s and '60s make no sense, since an apostrophe is used to indicate missing letters or numbers, such as can't for cannot. Where did George (Price?) get such a crazy idea?

From: **Trinlay Khadro** September 29, 2015  
 1734 S. 56th Street, West Allis, WI 53214-5821 USA  
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Sorry it's been so long since you've heard from me off of Facebook. I haven't done a zine for a bit. Last month was just crazy and there was much I am still not able to write about.

However, never every DiY an "Intervention"; they're inappropriate and abusive without a Psych. professional in charge, and they're inappropriate and daaging

when applied to Depression, anxiety, or anything **not** a substance abuse issue. (I was left home alone feeling I'd had TIA's or some massive neurological melt down and with my daughter at the hospital overnight and later for a week because of an "Intervention" pulled by a soon to be ex-inlaw.)

Apparently there is a late night "reality" show *Intervention* that has led this person (and others) believing that they can DiY. As far as I can tell the INTENT of this one was to trigger a suicide and possibly a commitment to a nursing home . . . it failed to do so.

Secondly, can we add a PSA to the next ish? I was texting a local fan and I noted a sharp increase that day in typos from her (compared to her normally low rate of typos), and that most were from the left side of the keyboard. Further discussion revealed her arm "felt weird" but this dismissed it as being caused by the fall she had the day before. I managed to get her to go to the ER "Just in case." Turns out she'd had two small strokes! New meds and some time off work and she'll be OK.

If anyone notes messages, posts, emails, etc. with lots of errors from someone who is usually a careful typist, or something wildly odd "for that person" try to get them to the ER or a medical evaluation. These things can hit fast and often are very treatable if caught and treated quickly.

From: **Joy V. Smith** October 14, 2015  
8925 Selph Road, Lakeland, FL  
33810-0341 USA  
[Pagadan@aol.com](mailto:Pagadan@aol.com)

Thanks for the latest issue of *Alexiad* with the news, reviews, letters, and more. Among the reviews, my attention was caught by your review of *X-Day: Japan* because I'm reading a memoir by Herb Rhodes: *Hungry for Wood: An American Memoir: From the Shores of Iwo Jima to the Tundra of Alaska*.

*Hungry for Wood* is the meaning of Hoquaim (an Indian word), his hometown in western Washington. He covers a lot of territory, including the invasion of Iwo Jima — with the slaughter of the Marines and others, the fear of having to invade Japan, the dropping of the H bombs, the relief after the surrender, and the landing on Japan after that, in which they were prepared for resistance. Lots of interesting — and horrifying —

military background and details. (He was a Navy gunnery officer with the amphibious assault forces.) I learned a lot. I think you might enjoy it.

I don't know enough about Flashman to appreciate fully your closing story, but it's another interesting and full issue.

The important thing is the old friend he's visiting.

— JTM

From: **Robert S. Kennedy** Oct. 20, 2015  
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Thank you for Vol. 14, No. 4 (September 2015), Whole Number 82.

This has been one of the hottest Summers here that I can remember. One day it was 109°. So, of course during the months long heat wave my 28 year old air conditioning failed. The air conditioning company I called recharged it and it worked fine, for a while. Then it failed again. Apparently there is a leak in the system. They sprayed in a sealer that sometimes works and sometime does not work. In this case it worked and the a/c has operated fine since. But, considering the age of the a/c and even much older furnace, I may be looking at replacing both for the cost of many \$\$\$.

At least you haven't had to replace a hot water heater — and replace it again, two days later.

Over a month ago I was in the kitchen about 10:00 p.m. preparing for the next day. Suddenly I was on the floor. Oh well, I grabbed the counter and started to pull myself up. I got about half way and was on the floor again. Another try with the same result. So, there I am on the floor and the first thought that comes to mind is the ad of the woman on the floor saying: "Help, I've fallen and can't get up." Several hours later I worked my way to a bathroom and was able to get up on the toilet seat. I was then able to stand up so brushed my teeth and went to bed. Several days later my doctor ordered some test, an X-Ray and a CT Scan (I think that's what it's called). There was a broken bone in the lower

part of my spine. Probably caused by the fall. So far no explanation for the fall. There are a number of other problems into which I will not go. Hopefully, one of these days I will be back to reasonably normal for my age.

Being that I enjoy *The Lost Fleet* series by Jack Campbell your review of *Beyond The Frontier: Leviathan* was much appreciated.

As the result of your review of *Bombs Away: The Hot War* by Harry Turtledove it has been ordered from the library.

*Edge of Tomorrow* was obtained from the library. I have no idea why it was on the Hugo ballot for Best Dramatic Presentation, Long Form. On my rating scale of 1-5 I gave it a 1 and that was being nice.

*The End of All Things* by John Scalzi (2015) was obtained from the library. I enjoy the Old Man's Universe. If the Colonial Union and the Colonial Defense Forces were a reality today I would immediately join.

It ain't easy being green.

— JTM

That's about it. Not much. But I wanted to keep up my record of having responded to every *ALEXIAD*.

From: **Darrell Schweitzer** October 21, 2015  
6644 Rutland Street, Philadelphia, PA  
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Sending me *Alexiad* by PDF/email is not a great inconvenience. I can print it out myself, two-sided, and the result looks very much like the real thing, save that a few of the cartoons don't reproduce well.

The one problem is that I could well miss it in my inbox and not get to it for a while, which has happened. It's been a good 3 weeks, so I am late with any response.

I had the same experience you did with Windows 10. Despite all the hesitation and dread, it seems nothing to be afraid of. It solved a lot of performance issues for me. The browser that comes with it, Windows Edge, is terrible — unusable on some websites, particularly Facebook — but I found another one called Opera, which I recommend.

Did the genre leave you or you leave the genre? I am afraid we are all turning into Grumpy Old Farts together, my friend. I can remember when there were elderly fans

insisting that SF had gone to hell ever since F&SF started, or since David H. Keller stopped writing, or whatever. We, however, have a somewhat more defensible position, if we are holding as an ideal the best SF of the '50s and '60s: *The Stars My Destination*, *The Left Hand of Darkness*, *Davy*, *The Big Time*, *The Space Merchants*, etc. One thing which HAS been lost in modern SF and fantasy is economy. Books today are expected to be fat and slow. A modern writer might take the whole first volume of a series to accomplish what Heinlein did with such apparently effortless ease in the first chapter of *Double Star*. There was certainly a time when a book like *The Stars My Destination* couldn't be published in SF because it's too well-paced, too well-written, which makes it too short and not part of an endless series. Fortunately there is enough price resistance to \$9.99 paperbacks that the Bloat Book era may be coming to a close, as economic forces push for shorter books again. But does anybody remember how to write them?

Nowadays we would have Smythe or Foyle going from planet to planet experiencing a series of exquisitely described backgrounds. Impersonating Bonforte? Finding out who abandoned Gully in the wrecked spaceship? How so five minutes ago.

I don't think we need to go back to *The Skylark of Space*, though. I think Lovecraft's evaluation of that one still holds up: dime-novel level writing, stock characters, and a few clever ideas, but nothing of adult interest. (To be fair, Lovecraft had not read the book. He was explaining to a teenaged Willis Conover why he had not, on the basis of what other adult readers had told him. HPL apparently bought about the first year and a half of *Amazing* for the reprints, but gave up on the magazine before the Smith novel appeared.)

The one thing I think I can add about the aftermath of the Hugos this year is that book dealer colleagues are making conspicuous efforts to unload the titles of a certain nominated writer. I've been doing this myself. No success either, though I did sell one paperback at Readercon, to a customer who

actually explained apologetically, “This is part of an early series before he went bad.” As if he had to explain why he was handing me money. (One of the Ferengi Rules of Acquisition states, “Never criticize the taste of someone who is handing you money.”) From talking to fans who did not follow the controversy, but voted, the conclusion I come to is that most of them rejected the Puppies so emphatically not because of the politics, which they didn’t know about, but because of the sheer awfulness of the material. We saw many of the worst nominees of all time. I can only think of what happened when the Scientologists bought LRH a nomination for *Black Genesis* and it finished sixth out of five. (i.e. below No Award.) The problem was, they had forced people to actually read late Hubbard, at which point his reputation was ruined irreparably. (Another writer you cannot unload these days, for any price, is LRH.) The worst thing that may happen to many of the nominees is that people remember them. If you rub people’s noses in shit, they may remember the smell.

The Puppies apparently have learned nothing, and are going to keep on doing it every year, until they become the equivalent of the Harold Stassen presidential bid, i.e. an annual joke. I can’t imagine the Finns and other Europeans attending the Helsinki worldcon will have much use for them.

When self-proclaimed defenders of “Science Fiction As It Was” pass over the biography of Heinlein in favor of a collection of rejection slips, it says something about their motives and knowledge.

Taras Wolankysy: There is not necessarily any relationship between “progressive” politics and “progressive” literary tastes. Mack Reynolds, *Analogue* writer and hardly a literary innovator, was a Socialist. Gene Wolfe and R.A. Lafferty, among the most innovative and unique voices in the field, are/were both conservative Catholics.

I’ve seen the film of *The Martian*, which I highly recommend. The only science point I question is whether or not a Martian sandstorm could actually be that destructive, given how thin the Martian atmosphere is. Otherwise it is a very good attempt to play by the rules, something the Sci Fi movie public

probably doesn’t understand. Then again, this film is only mildly speculative. It is almost a latter-day equivalent of aviation fiction, like *Gravity*. Given that space travel has now been a reality for longer than most people have been alive, it is about time we had some films that gave some hint of what real conditions in outer space or on known planets are like. I am 63 and cannot quite remember the beginning of the space age. I was not aware of Sputnik. I do remember Yuri Gagarin and Alan Shepard.

From: **George W. Price** August 21, 2015  
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September *Alexiad*:

The new type face for Lisa’s comments is painfully hard to read, with those full-size capitals and teeny-tiny lower-case letters. The size contrast is disconcerting, and the lower-case almost needs a magnifying glass. Can’t you find a face which is both distinctive and easy to read?

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Lisa again. Her column on “Ebooks” mentions “a really big trailer and the semi to pull said trailer.” No, the part that pulls — with the engine and cab — is a “tractor.” Strictly, the “semi-trailer” is the cargo body with wheels only at the back — the front end rests on the tractor. (Loosely, the entire rig — tractor plus semi-trailer — is a “semi.”) If the trailer had wheels at both ends it would be a “full trailer.”

When I was in Europe for the 1970 WorldCon, I noticed that semis were not much used. The standard rig was a truck (not a tractor) with a full cargo body towing a full trailer (and sometimes two trailers). In this country we occasionally see a semi-trailer rig pulling a full trailer. That second trailer is usually a semi-trailer with the front end resting on a “dolly” — a separate set of wheels hitched to the trailer ahead of it. Come to think of it, I don’t know if the European full trailers usually have wheels at both ends; some may be semi-trailers like ours with the dolly wheels added.

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Jerry Kaufman says “I can’t figure out how anyone can live on minimum wages that are less than \$10, as they are in much of the US. But I know that George Price and many of your other regular correspondents will help me figure this out.”

Glad to help. The answer is simple: Most of those low-wage jobs are not held by people supporting themselves and a family. They are entry-level jobs for beginners still living with their parents. Go to a McDonald’s and see how many of the crew are middle-aged people who might be making a career of burger-flipping. Nearly all are kids who will (we hope) move up to something better as they gain work experience. Forcing up the minimum wage will not benefit the poor much, because about 80% of such workers are in families that are not poor.

Those pushing for a higher minimum wage seem to think that wages should be set according to how much is needed for a decent living. No, wages are ultimately set by how much the worker produces — if his product cannot be sold for at least as much as he is being paid, then the boss can’t afford to hire him at all. The trick is figuring out how to help workers produce enough to justify higher wages. Laws ordering the boss to pay more than he can afford won’t do it. Capital investment in more-productive equipment works a lot better.

\* \* \* \* \*

Alexis Gilliland continues to dispute my contention that debasement of money is theft, “when it is more like entropy, the disordering of a system that naturally happens over time.” This seems to see politicians as mindless automatons who just can’t help spending more than honest taxation brings in, making up the difference by debasing the money. The Devil makes them do it. If so, that’s all the more reason to design institutions (like the gold standard) to resist that entropic degradation of the public finances.

Alexis continues, “A case can also be made that a stable currency tends (needs?) to be supported by theft. Between about 1814 and 1914 Great Britain enjoyed stable money because it was milking India for all it was worth, the stability of the British pound being maintained by the theft of Indian treasure. Can George offer a counter example?”

Now that’s a claim I never heard before. Are you really, really sure? My understanding is that the British Empire never paid for itself in terms of loot to the government. Maintaining the empire was a net drain on the royal treasury. (Of course, many British subjects made private fortunes doing business in India, but that’s not the looting that Alexis implies.) The British kept their empire out of a sense of pride (or hubris, if you prefer) at being the world’s dominant nation. When they lost that pride in the 20th century, they discarded the empire with no harm at all to their prosperity.

As for a counter example, that’s easy. As I discussed in the April 2013 *Alexiad*, the United States had relatively stable currency throughout the 19th century, as shown in Historical Statistics of the United States 1789-1945. The Federal Reserve Bank of New York Cost of Living Index was 65 in 1820 and 100 in 1913, with a low of 51 in 1843 and a high of 103 in 1866. Then we created the Federal Reserve, went off the full gold standard in 1933, and abandoned gold altogether under Nixon — and that cost of living index is now about 2300.

And the U.S. maintained that stable currency without looting anybody. The American Indians had no treasure to loot, and the land that we conquered from them was mostly given away to settlers or sold very cheaply. The federal government supported itself primarily by tariffs on foreign trade.

Of course, the federal government then was much smaller, with far fewer tasks to pay for — no welfare state entitlements. And apparently we were blessed with politicians immune to entropy, with a higher standard of morality, better able to resist the urge to debase the money.

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Richard A. Dengrove doubts that the price of gold will remain stable enough for it to serve as a monetary standard: “It defeats the purpose if it goes up and down like a yo-yo.” True. But the price of gold now jumps up and down because the demand for it reflects the ever-changing trust or distrust in our fiat paper money. If there is no fiat money, that factor disappears.

The central attraction of gold as money is that it is trustworthy: the amount in circulation

is not subject to political control and so remains fairly constant. To be sure, the amount in circulation will vary as the demand for holding cash (as compared to savings and investment) changes in response to business conditions, but that should be a relatively small fluctuation.

The non-monetary (industrial) demand for gold would, I believe, be too small to affect the price much. That's because as more of the world moved to the gold standard, the monetary demand for gold would greatly increase, and the industrial demand would become a relatively much smaller part of the total.

Sue Burke asks me, "Is there enough gold in the world to back today's level of currency and commerce?" My answer is a resounding YES! That's because there is no necessary fixed God-given ratio between the price of gold and the prices of everything else we buy and sell. If we go to a gold standard, all other prices, as expressed in weights of gold, will quickly adjust to the available quantity of gold compared to the amount of business to be done.

Now I grant that the process of adjustment might be very hairy indeed, but I think it should be tolerable if done reasonably slowly. (Don't try to change the whole world instantly!) As one country after another legalized the use of gold as money, the market would over time reset all prices in terms of gold, and the previous fiat currencies would fall into disuse (and good riddance to them).

This of course assumes a free market in gold. If governments instead tried to arbitrarily set prices (in terms of gold) at what the rulers thought they should be, then we would get a dreadful mess indeed. One cause of the Great Depression appears to have been the insistence of the British government on fixing the gold value of the pound at a level different from the actual market value.

From: **Sue Burke**      October 23, 2015  
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After flooding South Carolina and the Bahamas, Hurricane Joaquín headed east across the Atlantic, but it was pretty tuckered

out by the time it reached Spain. It brought moderate rain to the west coast on October 10. Then it dropped even more gentle rain on Madrid. The rain held off, though, for the fireworks on October 11 at the Royal Palace to celebrate the eve of Día de Hispanidad. I love fireworks and live less than two miles from the palace, so I watched them from my bedroom window, since I'm on an upper floor of an apartment building.

The rain also held off for the traditional military parade with 3,400 soldiers the next morning. The Guardia Civil horse unit (and a unit of street cleaners) assembled a block from my house. I admired the mounts and dress-uniformed riders during my walk to buy the morning newspaper. Not long after that came the flyover of 53 aircraft, including jet fighters and a variety of helicopters, to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Spanish Air Force. I admired that from my home office windows: six screeching jets flew low overhead trailing red and yellow smoke to sketch the Spanish flag across the sky, frightening the pigeons and wild parakeets. As usual, the Spanish Legion's mascot, a goat named Pablo with his own little uniform, was the star of the parade.

Other Día de Hispanidad activities included concerts and free admission to national museums and royal sites, including the Prado and several palaces and monasteries. The Casa de América cultural center featured a Latin American folklore show to celebrate the Hispanidad of the day. All this may have been designed to stress the unity of Spain and its inheritance (with no mention of Columbus) in the face of the independence movement in Catalonia. Although only 47.7% of voters in Catalan regional elections on September 27 chose one of the two pro-independence parties, those parties won a slim majority of the seats in its legislature due to disparities in the way seats are allocated. However, one of those parties is neo-conservative and the other is extreme leftist, so they hate each other and might not work together even on shared goals.

All this is a run-up to national elections on December 20th, and polls show that no party is likely to get even 25% of the vote for Parliament, so the resulting coalitions will probably be unstable. Most observers agree on only one thing: after the dictator Francisco Franco died in 1975 (with no commemorations this year), King Juan Carlos I proclaimed democracy, and then politicians

scrambled to create a constitution. In their haste, they could only put out the biggest political fires. Others have continued to smolder, and with the passage of time and with today's bad economy – still 21% unemployment – those embers have flared up. There are no rules for what might happen next.

We live in interesting times.

I agree with **George W. Price** that the issues of *Roe v. Wade* and same-sex marriage would have reached a more peaceful consensus had they followed the normal political process, but I don't agree with his interpretation of the 10th Amendment because he ignores a few crucial words. It says: "The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people." (Emphasis mine.) Powers the Constitution does not mention might not fall under the authority of each individual state. They might be reserved to citizens themselves. I believe the Supreme Court interpreted the Constitution correctly when it ruled that we have powers that the government, whether federal or state, cannot deny us. But which powers? It's the job of the Supreme Court to decide. It has decided, whether we like it or not, that they include the power to abort and the power to marry.

I also agree with **Taras Wolansky** that the novelette by Thomas Olde Heuvelt didn't deserve the Hugo, but I disagree that his story was the worst. I think it was the best of a bad lot. Some of us left-wingers did in fact read all the stories and give them careful consideration. "Championship B'tok" was a part of a longer series, so not everything in the story made sense and not everything was resolved. It wasn't a real novelette and shouldn't have been nominated for that category. "The Journeyman: In the Stone House" wasn't bad and even kind of fun despite not much happening, but it was hardly the year's best: not original enough and not exciting enough. The storyline in "Totalled" by Kary English was distracted by side issues like an arrogant research director, who was a mere stereotype and supplied false conflict, while the real conflict – life after death – received little attention. The story failed to reach the emotional heights it could have for lack of focus. Not a bad story, but not one of the year's best, and not worthy of a Hugo.

**Joseph Major** asks if we had to answer

the questions three to get in to see the Holy Grail in León, Spain. Yes, and they were: "How many tickets do you want? Would you like a guided tour? Where are you from?" (That last question is for tourism analysis.)

But not, "What is the air-speed velocity of an unladen swallow?"

Speaking of bedbugs, as we have from time to time in these columns, the Cine Doré movie theater here in Madrid had to close for over a week in September to get rid of an infestation of a particularly aggressive tropical variety. Several other buildings in the area were also infested. Fortunately, I don't frequent that theater.

Instead, I went to Cines Ideal safely three miles away to see *The Martian*, which was titled *Marte* (Mars) in Spain for some reason. It opened on October 16 to rave reviews praising its realism instead of, they said, the usual science fiction melodrama or fuzzy metaphysics. I saw the *version original* (original English version) with subtitles. How do you say "I'm going to have to science the shit out of this"? *Voy a tener que recurrir a la ciencia para no cagarla*. Literally: "I'm going to have to resort to science in order not to shit on the thing (mess it up)." Considering the difficulties of translating slang, this wasn't bad, but I think something was lost. Be warned that the Latin American translations are different, depending on the country. Spanish is a varied language.

By the way, Cines Ideal and many other movie theaters across Spain had a *Back to the Future* marathon starting at 4 p.m. on October 21. Some people came dressed as Marty McFly or in other costumes, and the President of Madrid Province tweeted a picture of herself posed next to the clock in the provincial hall, which resembles the one in the Hill Valley, holding a sports almanac that had appeared in the trilogy.

**Sheryl A. Birkhead** asks how many people attended Hispacon XXXII. Organizers said 155 paid to attend and about 250 more people came to various free events held in municipal buildings.

I don't know how many are expected at Hispacon XXXIII, which will be held October 30, 31, and November 1 in Granada, but my husband and I are going. The Ghost of Honor

is Washington Irving, since he spent some time there exploring the Alhambra, and I'm organizing a reading of a translation of "Sleepy Hollow" in his honor to help celebrate Halloween. I'll report back on the fun.

Meanwhile, daylight savings time will end on October 25, and I get an extra hour of sleep!

It ended a week later here.  
Not that I got any more sleep.

— JTM

From: **Brad W. Foster** October 24, 2015  
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If sending out new issues as email attachments will save you money, and let you continue to do those new issues, then I'm all for it.

That first review of Verne's *Five Weeks in a Balloon* reminded me of how I devoured everything I could find by Verne when I was a little kid. It was all so new to me then. I wonder how I would react to them now if I read them again after 50 some years since the first time? I might have to pull out some of those and give them a try again...

The note from Robert Kennedy about staying in the super-brand-new Davenport during Worldcon this year reminded me of a thought I had staying there. On my own, I would never be able to afford to stay in a hotel like that, but with the committee offering, took them up on it. Nice place, though they did go out of their way to make the place of switches in the rooms (and what those switches would or would not control) kind of odd. You also needed to use your electronic room key to be able to access the floors where the actual rooms were. Thought this was a nice security feature, until we were busy one evening and no time to get dinner, so decided to order a pizza to be delivered. And ended up that I had to physically go down to the lobby to get it, since the delivery guy could not come up in the elevator. Something about being in a luxury hotel, but having to go "pick up your delivery", seemed a bit . . . odd. But, hey, not complaining, still a blast!

Cindy and I actually saw "The Martian" this past week in a real movie theater. I think

we manage to do that on an average of . . . ummm, once a year these days. But love the book so much, and heard such good things about the flick, wanted to check it out. Not disappointed, great fun, even knowing what would happen.

It was the first time we'd been to a movie since *Star Wars II: Attack of the Clones*.

— JTM

Hey, I should go draw a picture or something!

From: **Richard A. Dengrove** Oct. 25, 2015  
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I mark this as the first *Alexiad* I have had to download rather than receive in the mail. There's no difference for me. I imagine some with a less advanced computer will have more problems. Or am I the one who is less advanced? Anyway, for me, downloading it was a cinch.

Enough of how zines are packaged; how about radio shows. How about "Coast to Coast AM." Originally, it was hosted by Art Bell. However, as far as I can tell, he went crazy and wandered off. Now, I hear it is hosted by George Noory, George Knapp, Dave Shrader and Richard Syrett. Mostly by George Noory. What about the \$64,000 question people ask about the show? Yes, it's supposed to be wacked out.

And my notorious relative's son appeared on it to talk about Atlantis.

I have never tuned in to "Coast to Coast AM" so I don't know much about George Noory, or the show's other hosts. I know a lot about Ned Brooks, properly known as Cuyler Warner Brooks. I had been carrying on an email round robin with him for about fourteen years before his untimely death. We discussed all sorts of subjects. Sometimes, we, as he used to like to say, were 'merely foolish.' Unfortunately, I can't say the same about his death. All I can say is I wish him luck wherever he is.

By contrast the next subject I will tackle

has to do with millions of people dying, not just one. Stalin is quoted as saying that one person dead is a tragedy; a million dead is a statistic. Not quite. In the '50s, people were terrified by the threat of atomic war. Now Harry Turtledove has decided to bring back the genre in his *Bombs Away*.

I doubt, however, there's enough bomb rattling to make fear of atomic war the fashion again. Various statesmen were doing their share to bring that about in the '50s.

Lesser wars were fought in years past. For instance, in Eric H. Cline's *1172 B.C.: The Year Civilization Collapsed*. Cline is inclined to believe that the events of the Biblical book Exodus took place, although maybe not the Ten Plagues. I have been led to believe that the problem with Exodus is the dating. Egypt's borders must have only extended to about those of the present day. That did not happen 1500-1100 BC. However, I doubt one scholar's opinion, that Exodus took place before 2000 BC.

Going from your reviews, Joe, to the letters, and from Exodus to economics, Jerry Kaufman believes in a decent minimum wage while he admits they hurt small businessmen.

I gather, according to economic theory, a minimum wage should discourage businessmen from hiring people, and thereby increase unemployment in an area. On the other hand, no one has been able to prove it. In fact, some say that the increase in wages increases spending in an area, and, that way, increases employment by small business as well.

I don't know about that. All I have been told is that economists have failed to prove a minimum increases unemployment. That is complimented by my memory of minimum wage past. When the national minimum wage took a bigger chunk out of GNP in the '50s and '60s, I don't remember unemployment being higher. In fact, I think it was lower.

We go from minimum wage and unemployment, collective and objective measures, to LOCs received by fanzines, an individual and subjective measure of respect. Rodney Leighton talks about trying to get letters of comment for his zine. He was wondering whether he should make a rule that someone gets the next zine if they contribute a LOC to it of half a page.

Personally, I really don't care if people LOC my zine. I write for my own enjoyment.

Despite either disparagement or praise, I will write it anyway. However, that's just me.

Going from the media of zines, we go to the media of the movies. I guess we take a drive from our homes to the local theater. Actually though, Milt Stevens' is talking about wouldbe moguls soliciting at cons to make films. He says that he won't contribute because too many bad films are playing in the cinema already.

What is he talking about? Some bad films are considered great examples everyone should watch – albeit of bad films. Recently, I saw "Queen Kong." It is a sandwich of incoherent scenes between two sequences of coherent loony tunes.

Now we return to great issues. From the silly, we go to the serious. At least, we hope the serious. Before, the issue was the minimum wage. In this case, it's the currency. George Price had said that rising prices are caused by debasing of the currency. That, he regards as thievery because people find their money worth less. Alexis Gilliland argues that stable currencies are supported by theft from poorer people and colonies.

Of course. Legally taking goods and services the law allows isn't considered theft. Unlike theft, it is considered normal and accepted.

From vast issues, macroeconomics, we get back to a less vast one, the Sad Puppies. In my letter, I have to admit to being wrong in what I gathered, Joe. I read too many blogs that were written by blind men trying to describe the elephant. Yes, according to Vox Day's blog, his slate differs with the Sad Puppies' In fact, as Taras told us, Vox Days calls his slate the Rabid Puppies.

On the other hand, the Rabid Puppies don't differ completely from Sad Puppies. We are not talking about a completely different kettle of fish. Vox also admits on his log that the two slates overlap.

Let's go down a notch, or maybe up a notch, to AL du Pisani. Down because it's a rather personal issue and up because it is trying to bring us together rather than tear us apart. AL claims that he has been shy; and, because of that, has only lurked on the science fiction fan news group. I have the same problem as AL, although I consider myself insecure rather than shy. Same difference, though.

However, I jump in anyway. Of course,

that only increases my insecurities. However, in old age, my insecurities have decreased. More and more I can tell them from actual contempt by the fan in question.

From real life, we go to fiction. However, not totally from the personal level. The question here is what type of fiction will we like? Conservative or Liberal? While my and AL's insecurities might make it harder to blurt, inside ourselves we know.

Also, the decision is totally personal. Even ideologists aren't totally ideological when it comes to appreciating fiction. Taras Wolansky, one of our more Conservative correspondents, likes a story with a left wing tinge, Kary English's "Totaled." On the other hand, a lot of left wingers, I notice, have liked Heinlein's novel *The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress*. This is the despite the fact it contains more than a tinge of Conservative ideology.

Liking novels, short stories, etc. despite ideology goes way back. Between Ancient times and the 18th Century, Lucretius' very long poem *The Nature of Things* was considered great literature even though it was devoted to advocating a school of philosophy everyone despised, Epicureanism.

With the *Nature of Things*, and the nature of ideology and literature, I end this letter. These are just two subjects from a mess, from A for Art Bell to V for Vox Day. In addition, sometimes these subjects concern our personal lives, sometimes the nation, and sometimes literature or the media

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I have truly fallen behind when it comes to letter-writing for *Alexiad*. I didn't see or pay attention to any notification for issue 81, and now, I've just gone beyond the deadline for responding to issue 82. So, no matter, off I go on loccing both these issues, and it will get there when it gets there. Here goes...

81...I hadn't seen the last couple of races in the Triple Crown, so congrats to American Pharoah on an amazing feat. I am hoping that you might get some justice through the courts. Literally a week and a half ago, I lost my job, and I was never given a reason why, which is quite illegal in this country, so I hope that by

reporting this illegality, I may have saved my employment insurance, and there might be some justice against my former employer. Good luck to both of us.

It drags on. I was turned down, by a judge who found the dismissal unfair but not arbitrary, so am appealing.

Taral's list of animated movies not to watch...done. I admit I have a little more faith in an animated movie, and those we have seen we've greatly enjoyed. Two of the three are sequels, I see. That might be part of the dislike of the movies. I really enjoyed *The Incredibles*, and I know *The Incredibles II* is coming up. Will I like the sequel as much as the original?

My loc...well, as I said above, my good job came to an end. I had been there 13 months, and suddenly, I had been brought into the board room, told things just weren't working out, and I was escorted to my desk to pack up, and then to the front door. I was never given any reason for my being dismissed, and I have reported this to the Ministry of Labour, and I may have some recompense coming.

82...I have not yet upgraded to Windows 10, but I am keeping an eye out...my computer consultant said I should wait until the end of October. I will probably make the transition, but not until Raymond has had a good look at W10 himself. Looks like still no changes as far as work goes for you, and I keep hoping for myself. I am dealing with, as I did before, the offices of a local community college, helping me to look for new work. I am upbeat on my chances.

I am intrigued to see that Worldcon will be going to Finland. I'd love to go, but I would have no funds to do so. We are still planning to go to London next August. Finland might actually be inexpensive, but the costs would be in the hotel and flight.

Rodney's letter...I do try to respond to all fanzines I receive, or can download. I write these days anywhere between half a page and a full page. I know what he means when he says I was a little snarky, and I still stand by it. Sheryl Birkhead, you know the bad news now...I will try my best to get back to work again. Maybe one day I will learn why I was let go.

Time to go. I am fairly tired, and I tried my best to write a loc on both issues. I hope what I sent was suitable. As before, good luck to both of us re employment. Hope this arrived in time for issue 83.

I have taken other steps, too. I hope you have better fortune than I did.

— JTM

From: **Alexis A. Gilliland** October 26, 2015  
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Thank you for *Alexiad* #14.4, a ray of sunshine in the mailbox on a dreary, rainy October day. In his Reviewer's Notes Joe says: "Ask your grandfather what CP/M was." How can I resist? In its day CP/M was the top of the line disc operating system whose originators refused IBM's request to do a version tailored for installation in the forthcoming IBM PC. At which point Bill Gates volunteered his services and Microsoft was off and running. He also notes that the Fan Artist Hugo has recently been going to people who have not been doing fanzines, and expresses his dismay that there has been neither shame on the one side nor outrage on the other. Alas, fanzines are neither central nor very important to contemporary fannish activity, and the awards reflect that reality. Therefore shame and outrage are equally unfelt. Fanzine fandom has become a backwater, and paper fanzines (when duly collected) an archival resource for future PhD candidates. To the extent that they are focused on a subgenre of literature they lack the passion that whips the blood, a passion necessary to make the world take notice. In the rare event when such passion does appear in an article or two it can be ignored (if it is even noticed) as being from a small if not infinitesimally small press. Speaking of Hugo awards, the influence of the Sad Puppies lobbying may be seen in the current winners list where. No Award took 5 out of 16 places. Getting sub-mediocre crap nominated does not improve its quality but only brings it to the attention of people who would otherwise ignore it.

Richard Dengrove touches on the belief that the Universe was created on October 21, 4004 BC, complete with misleading evidence

that it was 13.4 billion years old. Science cannot disprove this claim, but the theological explanation for why God was lying in the archaeological record—call it the Book of the World, namely to test the faith of people who believe in the Bible—call it the Book of the Word does have other theological explanations, one of which is that those two books were not written by the same author. Therefore if the Book of the World is full of lies, we may assume its author was Satan, the Father of Lies. Which assumption leads to Manicheism on steroids. Personally, I go with the Book of the World, observing that the Bible was written, rewritten and edited by humans, all claiming Divine inspiration in the support their various political agendas. Some of it may indeed have been Divinely inspired, but there are plenty of human mistakes and contradictions.

George Price notes that California has passed a law making it harder for people to get their children exempted from vaccinations. Besides California the private sector, namely Disney — after an outbreak of measles at Disneyland, now requires evidence of vaccination before children will be admitted to their parks and other amusement parks have followed suit. The belief that vaccination causes autism sprang from one case, in which a child was vaccinated, developed a fever, and became autistic. That case was investigated in great detail and the ultimate finding was that the child involved was genetically predisposed to autism, so that any infection would have triggered its onset. Other such children might be exempted from vaccination, but one bad cold and autism will get them anyway. The mother, who posted the initial report appeared on TV recanting her error, but the baseless fear remains.

There was also a "study" done by a British physician claiming that vaccines caused autism. His co-writers have disavowed the paper, *Nature* withdrew it, and in antivaxxer circles he's a martyr on a level with Wilhelm Reich and Immanuel Velikovsky.

— JTM

What else? I have been taking Nyquil for a cold, and Sue Burke deserves congratulations on the excellence of her

translation.

From: **AL du Pisani** November 3, 2015  
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I recently celebrated my fiftieth birthday. About the first time in thirty years that I actually had a celebration, not just a family member over.

Unfortunately age is catching up with me, and I am currently awaiting an eye specialist's attention, as one of my eyes is acting up.

I have recently been reading up a bit about the First World War, specifically the South West Africa campaign. I'm starting to get more interested in Louis Botha, who was Prime Minister at the time, and also commanded the army during the Rebellion, and for the invasion of German South West Africa.

I have been attending some meetings at the Military History Society. I was talking to one of the more knowledgeable people there, mentioning my pet theory that it takes an army about three years to learn to fight a war, as they are usually prepared for the previous war, and have not yet found out what has changed in the meantime. He mentioned as a great exception the South West Africa campaign, calling it the only instance where a South African army ever got it right, and did not go through a learning experience first. That the campaign was fought by veterans of the Boer War, with the tactics and equipment of the Boer War. Most of the new stuff that came in, like armored cars, aeroplanes and motorcycles, was just used as extensions to the main forces.

The entire campaign took about 90 days to wrap up, after about six months of preparations and small skirmishes, with time out for the South African forces to suppress the Rebellion, and for the Germans to quash an invasion by the Portuguese from Angola.

And then you learn about the people involved: Louis Botha himself. Early in life he had served as a mercenary under the Zulu king. After some of the unpleasantness of the Anglo-Zulu wars, the king was exiled. Once Louis Botha became Prime Minister, he released the king from exile. Could speak fluent Zulu – Before the eventual German surrender in South West Africa, the Germans

allowed Louis Botha the use of their telephone lines for the commanders of the three South African forces to talk to each other and find out what had happened to the forces. (They had split up and ended up encircling the Germans – totally outrunning any form of communication.) The commanders knew the Germans could understand Afrikaans, so spoke to each other in Zulu.

During the first Burma Campaign, General Slim issued orders to his division commanders over the wireless, without ciphering. They all spoke Gurmukhi, a language left out of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere linguistics curriculum.

Louis Botha's wife Annie had some Irish ancestry, and was at the time the honorary Colonel of the Irish Regiment. And when her husband took ill, early in the campaign, she visited, complete with chickens and cows to supply the milk and eggs prescribed by the doctors.

General Jaap van Deventer, who ended up commanding the British forces in East Africa. A man who could not speak above a whisper, since he was shot in the throat during the Boer War. And who had to use an interpreter, since he could speak very little English. Became aide de camp to King George V after the War, still using an interpreter, and was eventually knighted. Died shortly after the First World War as General Sir Jaap van Deventer. Most of his military achievements are not very well known.

It looks as if Louis Botha's early death, shortly after the First World War, and a bunch of politics caused him to be mostly forgotten these days. One of the more interesting things I found out about him is that South Africa had a civilian academy training ship's officers, called the *Generaal Botha* in his honour, from about 1920 to 1970. Apparently a very large number of the ship's officers trained before the Second World War had prominent careers, both military and civilian, during the war.

I am reading a bit more SF, among them the Destroyermen series. I have been interested in that since I saw the summaries in *Alexiad*. Been different than I expected and was prepared for. Mostly in good ways, but I

am at a point where it is getting a bit tedious. I may stop reading and just never bother coming back and finishing.

Which is how a lot of authors I have dropped over the years affected me. Although there have been some authors and books where there was just a small (or sometimes large) incident which destroyed my trust in the author, mostly I just drift away and realise some time later that I have no interest in anything by this author ever again.

Yet I am always looking for something new, yet old, with the touch of magic which caused me to read SF in the first place.

I hope that you keep on finding the magic.

#### WAHF:

Lloyd Daub, with various items of interest.

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 FIFTY CATS OF GREY
 

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The night was dark, with a wintry tang of coldness and dampness. This did not bother criminals and he had to follow them. Or . . .

"I have to talk to you."

He turned. She was smiling at him, having snuck up on him on the rooftop. "I have some good news for you. I'm doing my part to reduce crime in Gotham."

His eyes narrowed in the mask. He said nothing. She reacted. "I've got to go out west. Someone I once helped has . . . disappeared."

Now he spoke. "Let the law do that."

"This man's beyond the law."

In one feline move she jumped forward, kissed him on the mouth, then fell back and her whip snapped out and she swung away. He watched her go with concern.

"Ms. Dubrovna, Mr. Grey will see you now."

Irena Dubrovna shifted her long slender legs, got to her feet and stretched, then entered the office of the founder and CEO of Grey Enterprises. She scanned the room with a peculiar attention, as if sizing up the value of the art therein.

Grey came around his desk. "Ms. Dubrovna? Christian Grey. I'm pleased to meet you, though I am a little curious about your proposals."

"You have quite a reputation as a master . . . of your fate. I have been looking for a man like that."

He did not smile, but his eyes brightened in anticipation. "Are you free tonight for a meal? I know a splendid place . . ."

. . . He swam back to consciousness, dizzy. Things had been going so well! She had looked to be his sort of woman. It had been almost too easy, he had enticed her into the Red Room and then, he had passed out.

Then she threatened him. "I have your book. I also have friends. You met one of them. You won't want to meet the others, believe me. I'm going to make you an offer that, as they say, you can't refuse. You'll donate to a list of charities I have. There'll be enough left that you can flee the country. If you come back, you may live long enough to regret it."

She was hefting the whip, with a look in her eyes like a pantheress about to strike. He said, "All right. All right . . ."

He typed up the money transfers while she looked over his shoulder, her tight suit with the cat-eared cowl tantalizing him with its revelation of what lay beneath, and the whip a reminder of what kept it from him. He finished the last order, and then the world went black again . . .

The take over of Grey Enterprises was so difficult. Grey had plundered the company and abruptly departed, vanished.

Still, it had been profitable and could be so again, and his breakfast table had turned into a computer stand as he worked at his public role. Then there was an interruption.

"A *most* unsuitable woman is in your bedroom." His butler knew that "*most* unsuitable woman", too, almost as long as he had. He jumped up and ran to his room.

She was sitting on the bed, wearing his bathrobe, drying her hair. When he came in she said, "Lucky I know all the ways in here." "What are you doing! What have you been doing!?"

She told him, everything, including the disposal of the woman who had not been up to his standards. "I let him run. Don't tell me I should have told the police. You have money, you know these things. He could have bought enough lawyers to make them never have been. And that woman he was stalking . . . an innocent kitten, unaware of the world."

"Instead, he made some quite generous donations to charity on the way out."

He stiffened, scowled. "And how much of them are you?"

"Enough. I stopped a killer. No guns. Isn't that how you like to put it?"

He relaxed, and began to laugh. After a moment she said, "I understand Cancun is very nice this time of year."

"I can't leave the country just now. I think you know there is a very important takeover bid I'm making. How about the Florida Keys?"

— Not by Bill Finger, Bob Kane, or E. L. James

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**Art:** What we are mainly looking for is small fillos. Your fillo will probably be scanned in and may be reused, unless you object to its reuse.

**Contributions:** This is not a fictionzine. It is intended to be our fanzine, so be interesting.

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I ASKED MY STEPDAUGHTER WHAT SHE'D LIKE FOR HER BIRTHDAY AND SHE ASKED FOR A CARTOON OF BILBO AND THE DWARVES AT THE UNEXPECTED PARTY

I CAN'T BELIEVE I'M FIRST TO THE INTERNET WITH THIS GAG BUT I'VE NEVER SEEN IT BEFORE

INITIALLY I MISREMEMBERED THAT THORINS COMPANY WAS TWELVE INCLUDING HIM, WHEN I REALIZED MY MISTAKE I DIDN'T KNOW HOW I WOULD MAKE IT WORK. HOW DO YOU ADD A FIGURE TO A DA VINCI COMPOSITION WITHOUT THROWING IT OFF?? I'M NOT SURE WHETHER MY SOLUTION WAS VERY CLEVER OR JUST THE ONLY THING THAT COULD BE DONE.