ARGENTUS 12

2012 edition
$4, or, the usual

Warren Buff
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Jessica Guggenheim
Rich Horton
Evelyn Leeper
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Alex von Thorn
From the Mine

Y


ou hold in your hands, or probably read on your screen, an issue of *Argentus* which almost didn’t happen. With Chicon 7 taking up a good deal of my time in 2012, I wasn’t sure I had the time to solicit and edit the articles I wanted, and after the con, I needed a break. The post-Chicon area has already seen some major changes in my fannish activity, including stepping down from my role as editor and publisher for ISFiC Press, and I thought that *Argentus* might also be a casualty, but it isn’t to be. In fact, this is the second issue of *Argentus* this year, with an earlier issue, *From Argentus to Zenith*, paying tribute to the first issue of Harry Turner’s fanzine *Zenith* (1941-2, 1953), which his son graciously allowed me to reprint as part of my experiment.

Some time ago, I decided that I would love to read a memoir (or perhaps write one) entitled *I Always Cry When a Bookstore Dies*. Recently, one of the few antiquarian bookstores remaining near where I live announced they were going out of business following the death of their owner. This loss caused me to reach out to Evelyn Leeper and ask her to write about some of her favorite bookstores.

David Williams offers up his thoughts on splitting your fannish interests between two masters. For the last several years, I’ve worked with Jessica Guggenheim and finally convinced her to attend a convention, since I thought she would enjoy it. Turns out, I was right and Jessica has contributed her thoughts on a process we’ve all gone through—Discovering fandom.

And a few years ago, I suggested that Windycon bring in Chris Garcia to be a guest of honor. Although Chris came, his time actually in Chicago was limited to the time he spent at O’Hare. His trip to Chicago for Chicon 7 earlier this year constituted his first real trip to Chicago and he has some thoughts on the city.

Chicon 7 also saw Terrence Miltnner dipping his feet into the Worldcon Conrunners Pool when he agreed to head Publications for the convention. He provides some advice on what the successful publications head needs to know, not just at the Worldcon level, but for any conventions. I will most likely be publishing a follow-up to 2005’s *Argentus Presents the Art of the Con* sometime in 2013 and Terrence’s article should make a repeat appearance there, along with other articles on running conventions.

In fact, Brianna Wu has also chimed in on the convention running front with thoughts on the inclusion of video gaming at science fiction conventions. It is an interesting take on the subject and I know that some conventions have dropped video gaming, but the topic is one that conventions might want to revisit in light of Brianna’s comments.

When the names of science fiction artists of yore are bandied about, Freas, Emshwiller, Bonestell, all come to mind, but Fred Lerner wants us to take another look at the works of Charles Burchfield, who wasn’t exactly an sf artist, but whose works may well appear to those who enjoy speculative fiction. Brianna returns, along with husband Frank, for more discussion of art in the second of their critiques of cover art, this year focusing on several versions of covers for Robert A. Heinlein’s *The Puppet Masters*.

While reading the fiftieth anniversary reprint of Chicon III: *The Proceedings*, published by Merry Blacksmith Press, I came across a comment by Theodore Cogswell, who said, “Judy [Merril] mentioned *The Child Buyer*, which is a good story, but the only question is will it be around fifty years from now? I think that is the big test.” And I challenged Rich Horton to scry into a crystal ball, and see what we’ll be reading fifty years hence. His argument concerning how the overall oeuvre influences what lasts segues nicely into Warren Buff’s look at listening to one of the nineteenth century’s most controversial composers, Richard Wagner.

As I’ve mentioned before, the Mock Section is always the most difficult to fill and this year’s idea proved nigh impossible, with only one response, so, I’m going to try something a little bit different with the 2012 Mock Section.

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p. 15: Charles Burchfield
p. 20: Kurt Erichsen
p. 27: from “What’s Opera, Doc?”
I cannot list a single favorite bookstore because, having moved around a lot, I have had a different favorite bookstore for each location.

Before high school, my interactions with books were in libraries rather than bookstores. We had some books in the house, but libraries were our preferred mode.

In high school (1964-1968), I lived in western Massachusetts, near Springfield. So my first favorite bookstore has to be Johnson’s Books in Springfield. Used books there seemed to have prices ending in “9” (unless they were only ten cents or so), but even without that, I can still identify them by handwriting of the price. Johnson’s remained a favorite through college—I always went when I was at home. And the first summer Mark and I were dating, we would meet there once a week. (This was before bookstores had coffee shops, so if we wanted a soda, we had to go somewhere else afterwards.)

Johnson’s also had a new book section, and a large art supply section. Alas, it closed several years ago, after 113 years in business.

During college, when I was at college at UMass/Amherst, we liked The Old Book Store in Northampton, a great source of cheap science fiction (and other books as well). Other bookstores in Northampton came and went but the Old Book Store endured—and still endures, fifty years later, run by the children of the original owners (or at least was last time we were there), though it has moved from the first floor to the basement.

In California, we used to go to Chimera, a used bookstore in a Victorian house just off the main street in Palo Alto. A few years after we left, it moved to Redwood City, but it too has closed, as, alas, have all but three bookstores in Palo Alto: Bell’s Used Books, Books Inc., and Know Knew Books. The last was one of my favorites, but its stock seemed to have been much depleted when it was recently scheduled to close, and I have no idea whether its last-minute salvation has also replenished the stock.

Detroit’s big book dealer was (and is) John R. King, but when we lived there in the 1970s we preferred to go to Ann Arbor where our favorite was Wooden Spoon Books. Again, there was the appeal of a big, cheap science fiction section. We also went to an independent bookstore in the center of town that sold both new and used books and was called…What was it? Oh, yes, Borders. You may have heard of it.

And now in New Jersey our favorite is the Cranbury Bookworm (in Cranbury, not surprisingly). In part this is through lack of choice—almost every other used bookstore in the area has closed. But it is also because the Cranbury Bookworm has all the same characteristics as many of those other bookstores. It is in an old Victorian house, and is full of cheap books, with a huge, if disorganized, science fiction section. Most mass-market paperbacks are fifty cents or a dollar; most trade paperbacks are a dollar or two. The back porch books are a quarter each or six for a dollar and are whatever they think won’t sell at their normal “elevated” prices.

Back there I have found relatively recent travel guides, various foreign-language books, VHS tapes, and so on. (On our most recent visit, I noticed that a lot of Star Trek novels have been demoted to the porch.)

And as if the prices are not cheap enough already, they seem to have two or three charity half-price sales a year (you need to make a minimal donation of food, or coats, or whatever else they’re collecting).

(My favorite purchase from there would be a set of the early 1930s Encyclopedia Britannica for $35. This is from when it had long articles about obscure history.)

Other categories:
The oldest bookstore I have visited is the Moravian Bookstore (Bethlehem, PA), which claims to be the oldest continually operating (since 1745) bookstore in the world. However, Nagata Bunshoudo (Kyoto, Japan) was established in the Keichou Epoch, around 1600. Moravian is almost definitely the oldest bookstore in the United States, but it has stayed in business by keeping up with the times, meaning that it retains no aspect of its age to charm the customer.

The most historic bookstore I have visited is probably Shakespeare and Company in Paris. While not the same Shakespeare and Company that was a gathering place in the 1920s for writers, it has served the same function in the post-WWII period.

Libreria Acqua Alte (Venice, Italy) claims to be the “Most Beautiful Bookstore in the World,” but it is not clear what standard they are using. It is certainly one of the quirkiest: books are displayed in old gondolas and other boats as well as on shelves.

The most limited bookstore was the One-Book Bookstore (Bisbee, AZ), which in the 1990s sold only Walter Swan’s memoir, me ‘n’ Henry. On the flip side, and in spite of the claim of the World’s Biggest Bookstore in Toronto (yes, that’s its real name), the biggest bookstore in the world is Powell’s “City of Books” in Portland.

And of course I must mention my favorite bookstore that I never visited: Marks & Co., 84 Charing Cross Road, London. I have visited the location and seen the plaque, but it closed years before we ever got to London.
My Other Fandom
David B. Williams

I have a guilty secret. I have been unfaithful to SF fandom. All the time I have been reading SF and consorting with fandom, I have been engaged in an ardent affair with amateur astronomy. Indeed, there have been times when my attentions to astronomy caused me to neglect fandom.

I’m told that confession is good for the soul. So I will take this opportunity to describe my shameful indiscretion, because there are parallels and contrasts between SF fandom and amateur astronomy that fans may find interesting. From occasional remarks in fanzines, I believe that many fans are at least armchair astronomers, and quite a few are more actively involved.

My two affairs began almost simultaneously in the mid-1950s when I was 10-11 years old. I became enchanted with SF when I picked up a discarded copy of Arthur C. Clarke’s collection *Expedition to Earth*. I have already recounted how that led me into SF fandom in “That was Then, This is Now” (*Mimosa* 26, for a link go to www.dbwilyumz.net).

My other affair began around 1954, when I viewed a partial solar eclipse, my earliest astronomical memory. And in 1956, when Mars was especially close, the observatory at nearby Illinois Wesleyan University held a public open house. Like a boy examining his first copy of *Playboy*, I remember staring at the Red Planet in the 6-inch refracting telescope for many long minutes; my mother had to drag me away.

[Note: in astronomy, telescopes are referred to by the diameter of the primary optical component, a lens at the front end in the case of refractors and a curved mirror at the back end in reflecting telescopes. So the IWU refractor was 6 inches in diameter, not length.]

I had already learned how to find the North Star and Big Dipper in Scouting. That knowledge, plus a little guide to the constellations from the public library, allowed me to learn all the constellations. In those days, before extensive outdoor lighting, the night sky was dark and the stars were bright, so it was easy to trace the star patterns.

Learning the constellations was important, because the first challenge in amateur astronomy is to be able to find things. If you want to turn your binoculars or telescope to the Andromeda Galaxy, you need to be able to identify the constellation Andromeda and follow the star patterns to the correct location.

I can claim the distinction of having discovered the planet Saturn (unfortunately, I couldn’t establish priority). This happened when I assembled my first telescope from junk around the house. A desk drawer contained an old pair of eyeglasses. I taped one of these lenses to the end of a length of aluminum tubing about 18 inches long. I pulled the eyepiece off a little dime-store spyglass and stuck it into David’s Discovery
the tube’s other end. By some miracle of optics, this combination produced a focused image.

Out in the backyard that night, I rested this contraption on the back of an old wooden chair and examined several bright stars. Each star produced a round, pinpoint image with one exception, which displayed little prongs protruding from each side. It was, in fact, not a star but Saturn, and the prongs were Saturn’s rings, which I couldn’t quite resolve with my improvised telescope’s low magnification and shaky support.

In August 1957 I recorded my first formal observation when I went out on the night when the Perseid meteor shower was predicted to peak and plotted “shooting stars” for an hour. I still have the crude, pencil-drawn chart, and the arrows I drew to mark the meteors’ paths among the stars show that all the meteors radiated from a common point in the sky, just like the books said they would.

In 1959, Santa brought me a 3-inch reflecting telescope. This tripod-mounted instrument produced sharp images at a magnification of 120×, and the rings of Saturn really looked like rings. I could see the cloud bands on Jupiter and the famous Red Spot, which was unusually prominent at that time. I toured the moon and learned all the crater names, and I examined all the brightest star clusters, glowing gaseous nebulae, galaxies, and double stars.

That October, I discovered Sky & Telescope magazine at the same newsstand where I had begun buying SF prozines and Ace Doubles—one-stop shopping! In January 1960, a notice in the local newspaper informed me that a new astronomy club was being organized. I became a founding member, and I was soon pubbing the club’s monthly newsletter, the closest I have come to pubbing a fanzine.

Editing that newsletter had a profound influence on my life. I used the newsletter to conduct a club observing project on naked-eye variable stars (stars that change in brightness for astrophysical reasons). I used the results of this project to write a series of brief “how-to” articles for The Review of Popular Astronomy, a small, amateur-oriented magazine published in St. Louis.

A few years later, as a result of these contributions, I was hired to handle editorial and production duties for the magazine. When RP4 folded, this experience recommended me for an editorial position (unrelated to astronomy) in Chicago, and that shaped my whole later career. Amateur astronomy has been good to me.

Variable stars also shaped my career in amateur astronomy. I joined the American Association of Variable Star Observers as soon as I reached the minimum required age. While still in college, I initiated the AAVSO’s eclipsing variable star program, making a name for myself. As a result, I was elected to serve on the AAVSO Council and eventually rose to become president.

In fannish terms, my involvement in amateur astronomy would be called “sercon.” Amateur astronomy has what we might call fannish and sercon components, a division between the hobbyists and recreational sky-watchers (astronomy is just a ghod-damned hobby) and those who devote themselves to serious and constructive pursuits, making scientifically useful observations. Hugo Gernsback would have approved.

But, because amateur astronomy has not developed its own version of fanspeak, there is no short, handy term for it like our “fandom.” So I am forced to repeatedly type a seven-syllable, 18-character term every time I refer to it.

Organizationally, SF fandom and amateur astronomy have similar histories. In sensible Britain, the British Astronomical Association is a full-service society with an official journal and observing sections for every interest—the lunar section, the Jupiter section, the variable star section, etc. But in the less-developed United States, neither amateur astronomers nor SF fans ever succeeded in establishing an effective national organization.

Instead, we enjoy the confusion, and multiple dues payments, of the Association of Lunar and Planetary Observers, the American Association of Variable Star Observers, the American Meteor Society, etc., each with its own publications and meetings. Fandom did manage to create an annual national meeting for all, but there is no Worldcon for amateur astronomers.

SF art has its parallel in astrophotography. Just as many SF fans focus most of their fanac on drawing and painting, many amateur astronomers spend most of their time at the telescope trying to capture good images of astronomical objects. Like the art shows at SF cons, amateur astronomical meetings almost always have an astrophoto exhibit with prizes for the best work.

Amateur astronomy has one thing in common with no parallel in SF fandom, amateur telescope makers (ATMs). It was a natural development, because commercially made telescopes were very expensive, and even more unaffordable during the hard times of the 1930s. That’s when amateurs learned how to grind and polish their own mirrors for reflecting telescopes and fabricate mountings out of pipe fittings.

Today, amateur telescope making is almost a fandom of its own. It’s as if bird watchers, who all use binoculars, spun off a group of enthusiasts who devoted most of their time and energies to making their own binoculars and neglected watching birds.

Amateur astronomy also has collectors. There are those who collect rare old astronomy books, but the most avid collectors are those of antique astronomical instruments. Telescopes of the 19th century had a lot of gleaming brass, and a fully restored instrument is a work of art. These restorers have also performed good work rehabilitating neglected old telescopes in college observatories.

Amateur astronomy also has its completists. But rather than accumulating complete runs of old prozines or fanzines, or all the works of their favorite author, amateur astronomers try to complete observing lists—to view all the “Messier objects” (star clusters, nebulae, and galaxies first cataloged by 18th-century French astronomer Charles Messier), all the planetary nebulae, every globular cluster, and so forth.

There’s one difference between SF fandom and amateur astronomy. Fans can read books and fanzines or watch DVDs any time; the weather outside is of no concern. But amateur astronomers are constantly fretting about cloud cover and the phases of the moon. Will the sky be clear tonight? Will the full moon make the sky too bright?

These concerns are particularly important at amateur astronomy’s best invention, the star party. Almost unknown
in the 1960s, there are now dozens of annual star parties each year. Amateurs bring their telescopes and camping gear to remote, dark sites and commune with the stars. These events are always scheduled on the weekend nearest New Moon, and nothing spoils the good times like clouds and rain.

One feature of star parties suggests that there’s a broad overlap between fans of SF and fans of astronomy. Star parties held at camp grounds or parks with some kind of enclosed facility usually show movies at night in case of clouds and to entertain kids and other attendees who are not totally committed to observing—and these movies are always SF movies.

Star parties have proliferated in recent decades because urban light pollution has driven amateur astronomers out of metropolitan areas and into rural locales to pursue their hobby. SF fans have never cared about brightly illuminated skies; indeed, big cities were the first centers of fan activity.

It’s still possible for advanced amateurs to do good work in bright skies, but newbies are discouraged because they can’t learn the constellations from their backyards, as I did in the 1950s, or see much with small starter telescopes like my little 3-inch reflector. Big amateur telescopes are now designed to break down into conveniently portable parts. When you spend $2,000 on a big “light bucket,” you are desperate to find some place where you can use it, and star parties far from city lights are the perfect solution.

Star parties also have a social component. Just as fans develop a circle of friends they meet up with on the annual convention circuit, amateur astronomers look forward to seeing old friends they have met at star parties around the country. They pitch their tents or park their campers side by side and drive off together for dinner at the nearest restaurants (usually miles away).

Contemporary fandom has triumphed over amateur astronomy in one regard: women. Early fandom was very much a guy thing, and it created a sensation when faned Lee Hoffman revealed herself as a Hoffwoman at Nolacon in 1951. But the influx of media fans, filkers, costumers, and the boom in fantasy that began in the 1960s has also brought an influx of femmefans.

Nothing like this has happened in amateur astronomy. Virtually all women at club meetings and star parties are spouses who share their husbands’ interest. As in early fandom, a very few women have achieved some stature in amateur astronomy and even telescope making, but they have been extremely rare. Amateur astronomy remains 99 percent male.

But amateur astronomy has surpassed fandom in one regard—it has fulfilled Degler’s Dream. Back in the 1940s, notorious FIAWOL advocate Claude Degler proposed establishing a Cosmic Camp in the Ozarks, where fans could settle with their womenfolk and produce the next generation of Cosmic Man. This project never got off the ground, but today you can take up residence in Star Village, an Arizona community specifically designed for amateur astronomers.

Star Village is situated in the hinterlands of southeastern Arizona, far from light-polluting cities. There are no street lights, and all outdoor lighting is stringently regulated. Most of the houses sport rotating observatory domes on their roofs or backyard shelters from which elevated rails extend, revealing that the roofs roll off to expose telescopes to the sky. I don’t think the residents are actively pursuing a breeding program, but they have enlarged fandom’s modest concept of a Slan Shack into a full-blown Slan Village.

At least once, I have cheated on astronomy. In 2004, the AAVSO held its meeting in Berkeley, California, and I took advantage of the opportunity to visit Jack Vance in nearby Oakland. I called Vance just before a major afternoon paper session was scheduled, and he said “come on over.” So I ditched the paper session. Not, perhaps, the purest form of fanac since no other fans were involved, but I did manage to spin an article for Challenger out of it.

Well, that’s my story. Do I regret dividing my attentions between two loves? Sometimes, I think that if I had devoted myself to fanac, instead of investing so much time, money, and energy in astronomy, I might now be gloating over my own fan-writer or fanzine Hugo. Then I consider all the egoboo I have garnered in astronomy, hobnobbing with the pros, chairing meetings, serving in high office, and seeing my name on papers published in professional journals, and I think it was all worthwhile.

Oh well. As any bigamist will tell you, juggling two wives can be a challenge, but I’m going to keep trying.
My First Year in Fandom
Jessica Guggenheim

So, I won’t say that I am in love with “Fandom” but I really, really like it and definitely have found a place that I can see myself being very happy for a very long time. This is my look back at the experience I had while discovering conventions but it is also a look at the first year of what I am hoping is many more to come. I have made a lot of friends at each successive convention that I have attended, I had some preconceived notions that I discovered were completely inaccurate and I was able to do some things that I would not have done in my everyday life.

To say that it has always been difficult to make friends and come out of my shell socially would be an understatement. I started talking about conventions with Steven Silver about 3 or 4 years ago when we started working together and this year he told me about a convention in town. To be absolutely honest I thought that if I did not enjoy myself I could just leave. Steven, was being honored as Fan GoH and so I would know at least one person. Also, I wanted to find out for myself if conventions were nearly as fun as he made them sound. I don’t want this first part to come across like one of those long winded acceptance speeches on the Academy Awards where the music starts to queue and the person gets escorted off the stage but I have to mention that without Joel Phillips and Alissa McKersie I may not have felt as comfortable as I did (I met them both that first day at Capricon 32). That being said, I did meet a lot of other people and have become friends with them outside of conventions and stay in contact (thank you Facebook) but these two issued a challenge that I accepted and proven to be correct. Capricon 32, well at Chicon 7 I got a first had view how that actually happens. A lot of dedicated fans come together and attempt to put together an event that other fans will enjoy. I would not have believed how much work each committee puts into a convention if I had not personally experienced the Skypes, phone calls, messages, emails, meetings, and unseen chaos first hand. Other things that I enjoy doing at conventions that I don’t do on a daily basis include going to the parties, dancing, buying/wearing corsets or chokers or other items that my alter ego may enjoy, hanging out with men in kilts, and playing games until the wee hours in the morning. While I do enjoy a lot of the things that I experience at conventions it is not all my cup of tea. I have to admit that there were some clothing/costuming choices that made me uncomfortable and panels that I knew I would not enjoy, like anything that are completely inaccurate and I was able to do some things that I would not have done in my everyday life.

As I mentioned above I did have some preconceived notions about conventions that I brought with me to Capricon 32 but left there. I was under the impression that the place would be crawling with people in costumes milling around a space full of dealers and sales people, hoping to get a glimpse of writers/celebrities that they enjoy. Pretty much I expected something like the footage I have always seen from Comicon. What I actually experienced was a well organized event that had panels on all different subjects: Popular TV and movies, topics on space travel and the future, world building, language writing, topics for kids/young adults as well as art, gaming, and music. Attendees were free to choose what types of items to participate in. I loved the fact that I could approach a person from a panel and continue a discussion that was brought up earlier. Panelists were fans too and seemed happy to participate in any conversation. I also noticed that there were different demographics for the time of the day that I was wandering around. I was not aware that conventions were as family oriented as I have seen. I think it is awesome that there is a “kids track” of programming at conventions, too. A small part of me wanted to build a Lego TARDIS and/or a Star Wars light saber at Chicon 7. Later in the evening there are more mature panels and then the parties start. While most parties seem to be 21 and over some are not, but all are fun. I have not even covered the Dealer’s Room, the Art Show or the Masquerade. The long and the short of it is that I had no idea I could lose an entire weekend at a convention because I had no idea what was involved in just being an attendee: socializing, learning, shopping, partying, playing, and exploring. This is just the tip of the iceberg.

Since going to my first convention I have had some new experiences. The most memorable because it was so demanding is being able to say that I earned the Chair’s medallion for being on the staff for the consuite at Chicon 7. I mentioned above that I experienced a well organized event at Capricon 32, well at Chicon 7 I got a first had view how that actually happens. A lot of dedicated fans come together and attempt to put together an event that other fans will enjoy. I would not have believed how much work each committee puts into a convention if I had not personally experienced the idea I could lose an entire weekend at a convention because I had no idea what was involved in just being an attendee: socializing, learning, shopping, partying, playing, and exploring. This is just the tip of the iceberg.

Well, here it is the end of the year and unwittingly the challenge was accepted and proven to be correct. Capricon 32 was not my only convention and I have quite a few I am looking forward to in 2013. It turns out that finding fandom came at a very good time in my life. This year has been one of personal exploration. I have been discovering other aspects of fandom too like I really enjoy anime and video games as well as some “actual” SF (Time or space travel) v. Urban Fantasy (Vampires and Werewolves). There is not nearly enough time to write all that I want to about what I have experienced this year. I know that I will continue to attend and possibly volunteer or be on staff at future conventions. I look forward to meeting even more awesome people with similar convention interests and I look forward to seeing the people I have become friends with again.
My First Trip to Chicago
Christopher J Garcia

Funny thing, I’ve flown into Chicago’s O’Hare Airport, to visit friends in Evanston, as the starting point for roadtrips with my Chi-town-based friends, as an over-night stop-over between visits to Dallas and New York, and even as the Fan Guest of Honor at Windycon. I’m told that technically O’Hare is in the City of Chicago, but technically tomatoes are a fruit, but that doesn’t make them tasty in a smoothie. So, the Worldcon’s calling to Chicago was my first actual visit to the City of Wind & Ghosts!

The Lovely & Talented Linda and I took the train. Chicago, as far as I know, is the only city in America that is actually reachable via train. We spent the extra two days cramped into a tiny compartment, and when we arrived, a full half-hour ahead of schedule, we ran into fans from Kansas City.

Chicago, the third biggest city in the nation, had started out as a small world indeed.

There is a problem with four fans taking one taxi. Well, it’s not really the fans, it’s the fact that those four fans were carrying supplies for two parties, a teen lounge, and a Fanzine Lounge. It was comically cramped, and as always, I was nice and comfy in the front seat!

The taxi trip led us to our first stop, to drop our bags as we didn’t want to trek all our stuff across town to stay with the McCartys—Elizabeth and Dave, who would be chairing Chicon. As always happens when Linda and I step into a hotel where there’s even a single fan, we ran into a dozen or more folks who were setting up two days before the launch of the con. In fact, we ran into every single person we really wanted to see before Elizabeth McCarty swung by to pick up with the young Mia McCarty, who might be the most lovely time. We’d even eat a wonderful dinner on the steps of the Adler Planetarium during the convention, and have a secondary tank! And they were obviously annoyed to be in the new tank, but alas, I gots to see ‘em! Sweet!

Plus, Dave introduced us to Real Men, perhaps the greatest film to feature John Ritter.

The next morning, we were off to the hotel, which was comfortable, but there were spiders all up and down the outside of the window gutters. This freaked me out, not because I’m afraid of spiders, but because if they’re subjected to such winds and forces on the outside of a major high-rise hotel, they must be supper-powered, hyper-intelligent, survival-of-the-fittest spiders, obviously only waiting for the right moment to come into the building and take it by force! After that, Linda and I took to the streets. All my life, I’ve been a Silicon Valley dweller, so the idea of an urban park is pretty darn foreign to me, so our walk through Millennium Park was wonderful. There were flowers, there was grass, there were people, outside, hanging around, playing Frisbee, smoking copious amounts of weed (as evidenced by the creeping scented cloud from a group of lovely young co-eds) and into a quick pass around a Bean of some metallic planet. We then cut across so we could walk along the lake-side, which always makes me happy. There was even a fountain that looked a lot like the one from Married...With Children. We kept going on our way to the Shedd Aquarium, which is a place I’d been desperate to visit. I love aquariums (or is it Aquaria? Aquariums?) and was so glad to get to it. The place is designed to fully accentuate the water world it held. I spent nearly half-an-hour staring at the ornamentations and light fixtures which were octopi, seastars, sea horses and so forth. They made for lovely, Victorian era designs, reminding me quite a bit of the exterior of the Natural History Museum in Westminster, London. That alone would have made my visit worthwhile, but there were actual live water animals around!

The Shedd has a sort of mystical reputation in the world of Aquariums. I remember talking to a friend of mine who worked at the Steinhart who kept saying “We do a good job, but we’re not the Shedd” and that meant something. We also came after a Beluga whale, most likely a female, had given birth to a baby whale! Me, who loves nothing more than a cetacean with a moveable neck, made a beeline to the Beluga tank, only to be greeted with an “Area Closed” sign. I was bummed. We wandered through Amazonia, took in all the regions and the central tank, which must had been from the founding of the aquarium as it still have the beautiful designs on the supports and topper. Again, the designs made me delightfully giggly, much moreso than any of the animals, save for the Sea Turtle, the most dignified of all the moist animals.

Once we went downstairs, we found that while the main Beluga tank was closed, there were still three of them in a secondary tank! And they were obviously annoyed to be in the new tank, but alas, I gots to see ‘em! Sweet!

The entire Museum Complex was amazing. We’d go to the Adler Planetarium during the convention, and have a lovely time. We’d even eat a wonderful dinner on the steps by the planetarium and look out over the water, in as romantic a setting as I could imagine if the wind hadn’t been whipping us like a jockey pushing itsilly to the post. The setting for the museums reminded me of San Francisco’s deYoung and California Academy of Science along the Japanese Tea Garden, only less foggy and cold. Windier, maybe, but not quite as chilly.

We headed back to the hotel, where we ran into our good friend Chuck Serface, a newish fan who was at his first Worldcon. We figured dinner together would be lovely and chose the Indian restaurant in the basement of the neighboring building, Khyber Pass.

Sweet Baby Jesus, that place was amazing.

The food was spectacular, and like all restaurants where the food is affordable, wonderful and very filling, the service was less than optimal, but it gave us time to eat, chat, and eavesdrop on the table behind us full of New York fans who were discussing the latest fannish controversy. This was the kind of place that I loved, and while devouring lovely Paneer Pekora and samosas that were at least 75% manna, we talked about the world, about fandom, about
why it was taking so damn long to get us our biryanis, about appropriate theme songs for the weekend, and about how much we were loving Chicago.

We returned to the hotel, full and happy, and went to the party I was throwing that night. But before I started setting up, I took a few minutes to survey the land outside the windows, hundreds of feet up, and looked at the buildings. These were massive towers, some unreasonably tall. There were ones I recognized, and others that could have been in any other city. It was a skyline I was not used to, one that could have been the basis for a Dystopian Megalopolis story. I’ve spent time in New York, in London, in Los Angeles, but I’ve never been anywhere that felt more like it lived so far off the street, so high above the river, the lake. It was as if you’d have to descend to humanity to experience the regular world. Maybe I’ve felt that way at other conventions, but I’ve never realized it until I was staring out that window, across at a building that I swore was the Sears Tower until the moment that the chatty cabbie who drove us to the Super-8 at the airport told us otherwise.

This was a trip of remarkable food. We ate at Khyber Pass four times, mostly take-out. We brought BAreans and Brits together for pizza at Giordano’s, where the discussions of science fiction and ‘zines and “how can they fit so much cheese on a pizza!” and a book fell corner-first square into my left testicle, and we laughed and laughed and laughed. And I enjoyed so much wonderful conversation on the streets walking for a steak, or a burger, or something called a Chicago Dog which featured an unnatural green thing the natives call relish but I refer to as sin incarnate. It was a wonderful town, an amazing city, and though we did not see as much as we would have liked, it was incredible.

And then, the ending, having moved out to the airport Super-8 so we could get to the airport easily for our 6am flight. In the cab on the way, we passed the United Centre, where World Wrestling Entertainment was holding Monday Night Raw. I didn’t have tickets, so we proceeded to the Super-8, where we watched it on the television, less than a mile from the arena. While that was happening, I looked back on my first visit to Chicago proper and said “You know, I loved the convention, but I think I loved the city best.”

As usual, when I said it, Linda looked at me like I was crazy.

Millennium Park: Growing up in Chicago, the area north of Grant Park was an unsightly mess of railroad tracks and old freight cars sandwiched between the Standard Oil and Prudential buildings on the north and the greenery of Grant Park on the South. In 1997, Richard M. Daley brought in Frank Gehry to design a 24½ acre park over the railroad tracks, including a massive music pavilion, restaurants, a skating rink, sculpture, and a fountain. Originally scheduled to open in time for the turn of the Millennium, hence the name, cost, construction, and size overruns (it was originally supposed to be 16 acres) meant that it opened in 2004. During its long construction, many attacked the park as government waste, especially given the proximity of Grant Park, but once opened, the park became a magnet for Chicagoans and visitors from around the globe (like Chris), especially with the installation of the iconic Cloud Gate sculpture.

Cloud Gate: Most commonly referred to (as Chris does in his article) as The Bean because it looks like a giant silver bean. Cloud Gate was designed by Anish Kapoor and is made up of 168 steel plates which have been welded together and polished. When the sculpture was first revealed, the seams were intentionally visible, although the plan was always to make the sculpture the mirror it is today. Once the sculpture was officially unveiled in 2005, it rapidly became an iconic symbol of Chicago and one of the most photographed places in the city.

Buckingham Fountain: Buckingham Fountain is, as Chris suggested, the fountain used in Married...With Children. And, coincidentally, the house used for the exterior shots in the closing for the shows is located four houses down from the editor’s home. The fountain was dedicated in 1927 and is inspired by the Latona Fountain t Versailles. During the summer, the Fountain has free light and water shows open to the public and a jet of water that shoots 150 feet into the air.

John G. Shedd Aquarium: Originally opened in 1930, it contains more than 25,000 fish in 5 million gallons of water. It was the first inland aquarium to contain a permanent salt water exhibit and its 3 million gallon whale tank (where Chris should have been able to see the beluga whales, is designed to appear as an extension of Lake Michigan.)
The Year of the Wright Brothers

Steven H Silver

Over the past year, as luck would have it, my wife and I took our younger daughter, who is eleven, on an exploration of the earliest years of heavier than air flight.

We didn’t hit all the milestones, missing Kitty Hawk in North Carolina, but since the entire thing was happenstance, we wound up doing pretty well.

It began over Labor Day weekend 2011. My older daughter was visiting some of her friends from camp who live in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and with nothing holding us to the college town, my wife and I decided to drive over to Dearborn, Michigan, where Henry Ford had built Greenfield Village in the 1920s and it was dedicated by President Herbert Hoover on October 21, 1929, three days before the stock market crash heralded the Great Depression. Ford had gone around the country purchasing historic buildings to create one of the first living history museums. Among the edifices that were moved to Dearborn were Thomas Edison’s laboratory, Ford’s birthplace, a cabin used by George Washington Carver, and the home and cycle shops of Wilbur and Orville Wright.

Orville Wright was involved in moving his family home and the bike shop to Greenfield Village and assisted in the reconstruction and renovation of the building, making sure that it was furnished with pieces that belonged to the family. As a result of this, the home, which is one of the only buildings at Greenfield Village to contain original artifacts, was retrofitted with air conditioning. On the day we were there, the temperatures were in the high 90s and the coolth of the Wright home was a welcome respite, even as we enjoyed poking through the other, less comfortable buildings.

In April of 2012, we took both of our daughters on a road trip to Washington, D.C., where we spent all too short a time exploring the National Air and Space Museum. Although my own interest runs to the space portion of the museum, we made sure to point out the 1903 Wright Flyer, in which Orville Wright made the first heavier than air flight on December 17, 1903. The plane was flown three more times that day with the longest flight being the final flight of 260m, achieved by Wilbur, who damaged the plane beyond repair during his landing.

Finally, in August 2012, my brother-in-law was serving an extended training stint in Dayton, Ohio at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base. Since Dayton is a lot closer to Chicago than his home in Oregon, we decided to take our younger daughter down to visit. While there, we decided to visit the places around Dayton which were associated with the Wright Brothers.

One of our stops was at the Huffman Prairie, which was a field rented to the brothers outside of Dayton by Torrence Huffman, a Dayton banker. The brothers tested a variety of improvements to their flyer there in 1904 and 1905, eventually making a flight on October 5, 1905 that lasted nearly forty minutes and covered more than 20 miles, longer in duration and distance than all 150 of their previous flights combined. It was this flight that convinced the brothers that the not only achieved heavier than air flight, but also that they had created a functional and practical aircraft.

Overlooking Huffman Prairie is an interpretive center, which includes a Wright Flyer III simulator. My daughter and I climbed aboard and with her handling the controls, we managed to make a successful three minute flight (on our second attempt, I caused us to crash into a tree on our first try).

In Dayton proper, we visited the Wright-Dunbar Interpretive Center, which is located next to the third bicycle shop the brothers ran, and the only one which can still be visited on its original site. The center is also located between the site of their family home at the corner of 4th and Hawthorne and their final bike shop, which was located on 4rd street. Those two are the buildings which we had originally visited at the start of our year of the Wright Brothers in Greenfield Village.

Several years after the Wright’s home was moved to Michigan, the city of Dayton realized that they had lost a piece of their history. A replica of the house was built across the street from the lot where the original house stood. On the original lot, the floorplan of the house has been laid out with wooden slats and a replica of the porch that ran around the house has been reconstructed. A metal sculpture of a bicycle is attached to the short fence that runs around the property.

And the site of the final bike shop is a vacant lot, marked with a sign proclaiming its significance long after the shop was dismantled and moved 200 miles north to the suburbs of Detroit.

Our year of teaching my daughter about the Wright Brothers was completely unplanned, circumstances just happened to bring us into contact with the early years of flight several times, but our daughter did show more interest than I had any cause to expect. As we added more sites to our tour, she not only demonstrated a memory of what she had seen before, but she showed that she was putting it all together, understanding how the pieces of history that she saw in Michigan and Washington fit into the setting she saw in Ohio.

While we may not have planned to take our daughter to all these places associated with the Wright Brothers, in retrospect, it provided a wonderful overarching theme for our travels in 2011-12.
Successful Publishing for Conventions

Terrence Miltner

A fter running publications for Chicon 7, I wanted to jot down a few tips for future convention runners. Hopefully, this article—which ran way longer than just a few tips—will help future publication heads to have an easier time with their printer, save a little money, and keep a little of their sanity.

I was originally brought on the staff of Chicon 7 as the Production Manager because I worked in publishing for 16 years, the last five years as the Print Production and Purchasing Manager for a national professional association.

The Division Head for Publications had a conflict and had to give up the job. I was asked to take on the job because of my familiarity with the publications and my background in publication management.

You may be asking yourself if you are qualified to run the Publications division for a World Con. I can’t answer that question for you. But I can offer a few questions that might point you in the direction of an answer:

Can you—or other members of the convention committee—find someone to do the graphic design and layout? These are two different jobs but often done by one person, this is covered in detail later.

Can you—or other members of the convention committee—find people to edit the publications? This may be the same person who will find people to write the various articles for the publications. Or that may be up to you as the head of the division.

Do you know how to meet a deadline and communicate deadlines to other people so they can meet them?

If you can answer “Yes” to these questions, or can find someone to help you answer “Yes” then you can probably get the job done.

What you will need to know at the outset is that you are probably not going to be doing all of this work. It is a lot of writing, editing, layout, and production for one person to do.

The most important task you face as the Division Head will be finding people to help you. If you are not that person, then you will need to find someone to help you.

Here is a list of things you need to plan for to be successful doing the publications for a large convention, some things you should know about printers, and some things to look for in your staff. These things are:

1. **Know what publications you are responsible for producing.**

2. **Not everything that gets printed is a publication.**

3. **Find out your deadlines for your convention, communicate those deadlines, and then meet them.**

4. **Pick a printer, and then stick with them.**

5. **Printing can be expensive.**

6. **Let your printer save you money when they can.**

7. **Know what jobs need doing, find the people who will do those jobs, and learn what their strengths are so you can find other people to fill in their weaknesses.**

1. **Know what publications you are responsible for producing.**

   For Chicon 7, we published six Progress Reports, PR0 and PR5 were an e-mail to the membership, PRs 1 through 4 were publications that needed to be printed and mailed to the membership. Then at the convention we published a Program Book, a Pocket Program, and an on-site newsletter. In order to have more flexibility, we added a series of Daily Program Grids that we printed after the Pocket Program went to press. We will talk about adding a publication later.

   One important thing to know early in the process is: Who will be making the decisions and who has the final say? As the Head of Publications, you should be making most of the decisions. But there will be things that will need to be decided by someone with more authority or experience. For Chicon 7, Dave McCarty was the Chair of the convention. But he had three Vice-Chairs, also known as Flying Monkees, who each had different areas of responsibility. My Flying Monkey for Publications was Steven H Silver.

   Since I didn’t know much about Worldcons, both Steven and Dave were my sounding board for what publications were needed and what information needed to be included in various publications to ensure the publications met the needs and expectations of the Membership within the budget set.

   While a lot of the publications staff had already been put in place when I was asked to take over Publications, Steven was critical in helping me recruit the remaining staff to get the publications done. Geri Sullivan, the Artistic Director for Chicon 7, was also a big help in helping with delivering files to the printer as well as helping me find staff.

   Dave, Steven, and Geri all have extensive networks in fandom to help me find people willing to help. So I didn’t need to worry about that part of the job as much as I might have. So if you don’t have such a network, it’s likely there are people on the convention committee who do and can help you find the help you will need.

2. **Not everything that gets printed is a publication.**

   Just because a department wants to put ink on paper it does not automatically become your project to complete. That doesn’t mean you can’t, or won’t, help other departments out. I was able to help Marketing out with getting some fliers and postcards printed. But when a mailing project got close to when the Program Book was going to the printer, I had to beg off.

   If you have to say no to a project, it’s important to say it as early as possible so the person asking can either find someone else to help them or figure out how to get it done themselves.

3. **Find out the deadlines for your convention, communicate those deadlines, and then meet them.**

   The most clearly written, perfectly edited, and gorgeously designed publications do your members
absolutely no good if they don’t arrive at the convention in time for the convention.

Zen Master Chuck Demonstrates His Blind Watch-Finding Skills:

(He's really not very good at it.)

You may think you know when the publications are needed. But it’s better to ask. My original thought was that the publications needed to arrive Wednesday ahead of the convention starting on Thursday. But at a Division Head meeting I asked when the publications needed to arrive. Registration needed the publications to arrive Tuesday morning so they could be stuffed into bags for members who would start arriving on Wednesday.

Once you know when you need the publications need to arrive, you need to let your printer know. And be sure and keep telling them. Printers are very good at hitting deadlines, but they need to know what the deadline is. They have hundreds, if not thousands, of projects in house and those projects are due now. But if your project needs to be delivered Tuesday, that will trump the other projects that need to be done “now.”

Once you tell the printer when and where the product they need to be delivered—delivered is a very different word than done, the publication will be done when the printer finishes with them, they are delivered when they arrive at the convention—they will tell you when they need your files.

Here is a place where things can go very wrong. Be sure and clarify that you want to know when they need approved proofs. It will be a day or two from when you submit your files to the printer and when the proofs are approved. This is even if there are NO changes. And in conventions there are good odds that things will need to be changed once you submit the files to the printer. You may have to include new information, or an ad may not be right, or—as in my case—you may need to update a registration deadline after the first proof was given to me from the printer.

How the publications will be delivered will also play a role in your scheduling. The printer for the program book should be able to deliver the book to the convention venue. If they want to ship it via FedEx or UPS it will be expensive—as books are heavy—and it will add at least a day to the schedule.

So you will have to build your schedules with some time built into it to account for things to go wrong. There will also need to be decisions made about which mistakes need to be corrected. For one local convention I did publications for, we had to make an expensive correction after we saw the proofs and the name of the convention was mis-capitalized in the footer on every page of the book. That had to get fixed. However, there will be other mistakes that are not critical and you may just have to live with them.

The proofing process should be decided ahead of time as well. Know who will be editing the materials, who will be proofreading the pages, and who needs to sign off on different things. For a Worldcon, there are several things—such as the Constitution and Standing rules of the World Science Fiction Society—that must appear in the program book.

Just deciding how many rounds of proofing can be important. If you don’t have enough eyes on the pages, important errors will slip through. If there are too many people reading pages that can delay the publications to the point you miss deadlines.

At a minimum, know when you will need buy-in from other staff. Discussing the Table of Contents for the Program Book with the other division heads allowed us to decide what information would be in the Program Book, what would go in the Pocket Program, and what could be posted on the website.

Something else you need to consider is your layout and how you will decide matters of style. For Chicon, the Chair and the Vice Chairs created an Artistic Director Division to create a style guide for the convention and ensure the convention put forward a consistent image across formats and publications. This can be of service to Publications as it can help you decide many matters of style and layout ahead of time.

Which style is selected is much less important that the consistent application of that style. This should be covered in a conversation between the editors of the various publications and the proofreaders.

4. Pick a printer, and then stick with them.

Your printer will be able to move mountains and make you look very good. Or they will mess up and make you look very bad. How good you look will depend a lot on your relationship with the printer. The process you use to pick a printer will start your relationship off on the right foot or will hobble you.

Once you have decided what publications you will be printing, you need to send out a Request for Quotes. Ask around for printers (you are probably looking for a sheet-fed commercial printer) who are familiar with conventions. It will also be important to ask the printers if they can do fulfillment as you will be mailing out thousands of
publications and it helps if the printer is familiar with mailing processes and USPS regulations.

Once you have a few printers in mind, write up a list of the publications you plan to produce. Include estimated page counts and general page sizes. You can specify what paper you want, but you are probably better off asking them to quote the jobs on their house stocks. Just be sure they include what stock they are quoting the different jobs on.

If one printer quotes the program book on 100# text and another printer quotes the job on 50# text the first will cost more but the second will not look as good. It will be up to you to decide where you want to spend the money. We’ll talk more about paper stocks later.

Printers speak a language of their own full of paper stocks, printing forms, and inks. If you have not worked with a lot of printers, it would be helpful to you to go online type “commercial printing jargon” in your preferred search engine and do a little reading. There are numerous resources online and many commercial printers offer glossaries to explain the more commonly used terms.

Pay special attention to paper stocks, different types of binding, and the difference between one color, process color, and spot color.

An important thing to note at this point in the process is to notice how much detail the printer includes in their estimate. If they just shoot you back a number in an email push back for more detail. If it isn’t forthcoming, find another printer. You need a printer who can handle a lot of details and get them all right. If they don’t send you a formal estimate, then they are not the printer you want for printing the publications for a Worldcon.

You should get bids from three to five printers. An important thing to be clear about with the printers at this point is that you are looking at bids from a number of printers. If the costs from one printer are much higher or much lower than the others, you need to ask why. They may have misquoted the job, or the job may just not be a very good fit for that printer.

The person you are working with at this point is likely a salesperson and they just want to get the job in their shop. So if you are talking to a printer that costs more than others they may ask you, “Where do we need to be to get this work?” You can ask them why they were more expensive, they may want to take another look at the estimate and talk to their estimating department. One printer may have quoted the job as a self-cover (using the same paper for the cover and the interior of the publication) or they quoted a different binding method than the other two printers.

And here is a quick bit of printing lingo: Perfect binding is how Graphic Novels that collect the issues of comic books are bound, with a square spine. Single issues of a comic book and most magazines are saddle-stitched with staples along the folded edge of the book.

Printing is all about the fit. Printers invest a lot of money on their equipment and they quote work that fits their equipment differently because they know the costs better. One book printer I worked with had one printing press and binder configured for 6” x 9” soft cover books. They had the best price for that particular size because they printed a lot of work on that press and passed the cost savings of that efficiency on to the client.

Once you find a printer you are comfortable with and can work within your budget, let them know what work they have earned. I worked with Consolidated Printing Company in Chicago. They could print and mail the Progress Reports as well as print and deliver the Program Books and the Pocket Program. Printers pay attention to every job, but when you are a bigger client with a larger body of work, they pay more attention. Printing and mailing one Progress Report will cost around $5,000. The Program Book will cost over $20,000. Bring all four Progress Reports and all the convention publications into the same printer, and they will certainly pay close attention to all of the work.

If you are going out to bid on all four Progress Reports and changing printers with every one, the printer won’t learn about your work process and you won’t learn about theirs. And there are volume discounts to be had. They may not be explicitly spelled out in an estimate, but when you are bringing in a large volume of work the printer will overlook things—like page corrections after the pages have been submitted—they might have charged you for if all you are doing is one smaller job.

No printer can do everything. But they all have partnerships with vendors or other printers to produce jobs that do not fit their equipment. They should tell you when they are shipping things out to other vendors, it will affect the schedule.

Even if you have done publications for local conventions, this will be different. Worldcons have much bigger budgets than local conventions. The print runs are bigger to go along with the higher attendance. While the cost is higher, the per-piece expense is lower. You will need to know your budgets and know when you have to really watch the costs and where there might be some wiggle room.

This goes back to what I was talking about earlier and knowing whose approval you need. For example, as we were getting close to the convention, the person doing our Program Book wanted to split out the daily schedule grid and print it separately. It was going to cost a few thousand dollars so I talked to Dave, the Chair, and Steven, the Vice-Chair responsible for Publications. We were way ahead of projections for attendance and there was money in the budget. So we went ahead with the Daily Program Grid.

5. Printing can be expensive.

There are a variety of costs that will come up in printing that if you didn’t ask about them early in the process will blow apart your budgets. For example, find out how much a corrected page will cost you if you need to change a page after you submit the files to the printer. Postage for mailing or local delivery will have a significant cost as well.

Not every cost is financial. A lot of printers will need you to prepay your postage before they will mail your Progress Reports. You may be able to get the printer to front the postage once and get them to invoice you for it. But you should plan on getting a postage cost from the printer and a check from the treasurer in time to make the mailing date.

6. Let your printer save you money when they can.

The printer knows their equipment way better than you ever will. A sheet fed press has a variety of paper sizes that can fit in the press. A half-inch here or a quarter-inch in the page size may make a big difference in the cost.
One of the magazines I worked on reduced the page size by less than a quarter of an inch but saved us a significant amount of money because they could fit two pages at a time on the press, instead of just one.

If you have an idea to do a 4” x 9” pocket program, you may be able to save money by doing a 3.75” x 9.25” book. It’s worth asking. But if you ask, ask early before any pages get laid out. The last thing you want to ask a volunteer is to redo pages at the last minute.

Also a specific page size prints differently if it bleeds beyond the trim of the page. You can fit fewer pages that bleed on a sheet, so the printer needs more paper and needs to run the press longer.

Your printer can also save you money on paper. Printers have house stocks they keep in inventory, if you let them quote jobs on their house stocks, they will cost less than if you want a particular stock they have to order from the mill and will only have on hand for your job. It will also delay your job badly if you suddenly need to increase your print run or page count. So let them use the paper they know.

But be sure you know what they are printing on. I had a miscommunication with the printer while working on Chicon and PR2 printed on a different stock than the other PRs.

One way to be sure you are getting the publications printed on the stock you want is to request paper samples from the printer. Every printer handles these differently. Some will send you sample from the floor. Some will send have samples sent from the paper mill. One printer I worked with even had a blank booklet made from the stocks we were considering so we could evaluate the paper stocks side by side.

7. **Know what jobs need doing, find the people who will do those jobs, and learn what their strengths are so you can find other people to fill in their weaknesses.**

The editor will need to find people to supply the articles. The designer will need to create a look and feel for the publications. There is another role that will need to be addressed. The production person will be the person who will do the layout for the publication, gather up all the pages and submit the files to the printer. Production is NOT design or layout. Design makes the pages pretty. Layout makes the content legible. Production gets the files done and delivered to the printer. One person could fill all three roles. It could be three separate people. Or it could be a combination of people filling those roles on different publications. There is a variety of software packages that people use to do graphic design. The most popular software for publication layout is currently InDesign from the Adobe Creative Suite. A comparison of the other options would be beyond the scope of this article. The important thing to do is let the printer know what programs—and version of the program—your people are using, that they can use the files you will be delivering, and that all of the people who are working on the pages are all using compatible software.

If someone is using a more recent version of a software product, they can usually save their work in a way that will be compatible with earlier versions of the software.

If no one on your staff has layout software, there are usually trial versions of software available for short term use, usually 30 to 60 days from when you start using it.

The most likely scenario is that the printer will ask you to supply press-ready or print-ready PDFs, so the choice of software is less important. But there are times when the printer could ask for the native layout files to make a correction or help you with outputting better PDF files. So talk to your printer about what you are using and that will help them to gauge your team’s expertise and offer help if you need it.

I once worked on a job where the designer had reduced the full sized book covers at print ready resolution to a thumbnail size on the page without resizing the image. Not a big deal if it was one or two images. But in this design, there were dozens of covers on the page. All the combined high resolution images made one file for an 8.5” x 11” page the same size as a full sized movie poster. So the production person had a difficult time even opening the pages to make corrections after the proofreaders did their job and all of those book cover images had to be opened, resized, and then replaced on the page or delivering the files to the printer would have been difficult.

This is in no way a comprehensive list of things that can go wrong in printing any number of publications. But if you have read this far, you have hopefully picked up enough tips and helpful suggestions to save you some time, money, and sanity.
SMOFs and Con Chairs: Ignore Videogames at Your Own Peril

Brianna Wu

I was a Guest of Honor at Westercon this weekend, and my friend Laura from college came out to see me. She’s in her late 20s, and goes to a lot of conventions—but she’d never been to a science fiction convention. She turned to me and whispered, “Wow, everyone here is so much older than usual!” She’s not wrong.

Science fiction con-goers are getting older. Younger fans are being drawn to conventions such as Comic-Con, DragonCon and Pax East. But why is this? I know plenty of people my age that read science fiction voraciously, that cosplay, that easily quote Star Trek and Star Wars. If anything, geek culture is much more mainstream than it used to be. So, why is there such a disconnect between our culture and your culture?

Here’s the blunt truth about the graying of fandom. The people that work so hard to run cons are older. And, you’ve created a science-fiction con culture in your own image. It’s great for people that are over 40, and not so great for anyone under 40.

This was a T-shirt design I recently submitted to a convention that will go unnamed where I was a Guest of Honor. It’s a nod to Capcom fighting games, which have been extremely popular for about 20 years now. In the discussion following, it was said the people voting on the T-shirt didn’t play videogames and didn’t understand the reference—though they guessed their kids would. This is exactly the disconnect I’m talking about between older fans and young.

It seems like every time my husband Frank and I are invited to be guests at a convention, I’ve had to fight to get videogame programming. It’s nothing malicious, of course. The people organizing the conventions just don’t have videogames on their radar. They don’t understand that Mass Effect is as important a universe as Star Trek. They don’t understand why Portal is such an popular game. They have no idea who any of the Final Fantasy characters are.

To the SMOFs and Con Chairs, my message is very clear. You ignore videogame guests and programming at your own peril. You’re got to take steps to be more inclusive of people younger than you, or this generation of science fiction con attendees will be the last.

If science fiction would start inviting some of the stars of videogames to be GOHs, it would be an excellent step towards being more inclusive. You might not get a Casey Hudson, the genius writer behind Mass Effect—but maybe you could get a Kim Swift, designer of Portal. Maybe you could get Ryan Clements, an editor at IGN. Maybe you could get a Major Nelson of XBLA. Try to get a Jeff Gersmann, Peter Molyneux, Jeff Rubenstein, Alex Hutchinson, David Cage, Jessica Chobot, Phil Spencer, Warren Spector, Audrey Drake, Seth Killian, or a million other names that spring to mind.

I can promise you, this step alone would get your attendance up, and invite people that would simply not come to your convention otherwise. Word travels fast in the videogame community—in podcasts, on Twitter and on Facebook. People that would otherwise be unaware of your convention would be buzzing, excited to meet celebrities they emotionally connect with.

I was really encouraged by Westercon. I got zero resistance to videogame programming. And, in return, my videogame panels were delightfully well attended. Our panel on the ending of Mass Effect 3 was standing room only. Our panel on “Women and Videogames” was one of the best panel discussions I’ve ever had—about 30 women with strong opinions about the lack of diversity in games. To the people that helped me get this programing, you have my strong thanks.

I realize SMOFs and Con chairs are aware of this problem. But, in my experience—it’s easier to minimize the importance of videogame programming. It’s easier to put your culture on a higher pedestal, and ours on a lower pedestal.

In the T-shirt example I explained above, this was the response I got from the Con Chair. I’ve reworded it slightly for clarity.

“While it’s got many themes my teenage sons might like, we are primarily a literary convention. We want younger fans, but I’d say our primary crowd runs 30-60 and might not be interested in a T-shirt with gaming art on it. We do tend to be a bit older as a con, and we’re trying to get younger in our membership average age. I have teenage boys myself, and they might think I’m nuts for not printing this t-shirt.”

No disrespect to this particular Con Chair, who gave Frank and I one of the best Guest of Honor experiences we’ve ever had. He’s a great person, and ran an amazing con. But, to me, this illustrates the problem exactly. You’re aware of the problem, yet you’re unwilling to do anything to change it.
The Nature of Charles Burchfield
Fred Lerner

Back in 1970, when I was working at Hamilton College in Clinton, New York, I was introduced to an artist previously unknown to me. The Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute in Utica had mounted the first-ever retrospective of the paintings of Charles Burchfield (1893-1967). I was so taken by his work that I bought the catalog of the show, and for more than forty years I’ve taken every opportunity to extend my acquaintance with his work.

There are many twentieth-century American watercolorists whose landscapes I find pleasing, but I know of none whose style is as distinctive as Charles Burchfield’s. More than twenty years ago the Currier Gallery of Art organized a show of his work, and my wife, daughter, and I drove to Manchester, New Hampshire, to see it. A week later we drove to visit my in-laws in Connecticut, and visited the Yale University Art Gallery in New Haven. They had a Burchfield hanging in their American section, and I asked Elizabeth if she could pick it out. She looked round the room briefly and then walked right over to it. Not bad for a preschooler—but not as much of a challenge as one might think. There is no mistaking a Burchfield nature painting for anyone else’s work.

What makes Burchfield’s work so distinctive and, to me at least, so appealing?

Charles Burchfield approaches landscape painting as an exercise in metaphor. Ever since the invention of color photography rendered pointless the painter’s literal rendition of a landscape, artists have sought to interpret rather than portray the scenes that lay in front of their easels. Learning from the impressionists and fauvists, who deliberately exaggerated selected aspects of what they saw, they tried to find some essential aspect of the landscape. For Matisse it was the interplay of color and shape, for the Group of Seven it was the rugged grandeur of the Canadian northland—and for Burchfield it was the natural and human ecology of the towns and woodlands of western New York.

Burchfield country is a land of tentative boundaries. Edges are soft, and even on a downtown street the straight edges of urban life are blurred. The few people he depicts have indeterminate faces, as if they are meant for generic humans rather than individuals. He reserves his detailed attention for the plants and animals that populate his landscapes.

It is the nature of these creatures that catches the eye of the science fiction fan. There is an other-worldliness to them, even though they are plainly drawn from the flora and fauna of a familiar patch of earth. The wavy lines that he employs to depict trees and birds and flowers give the impression of something that one might see on a planet whose thick atmosphere is warmed by the light of an alien star.

There is often a note of dark fantasy in his landscapes. Burchfield populates his woodlands with moths where other painters would offer butterflies, and he is fonder of fungi than most. I have long thought that one of his best-known pictures, “The Sphinx and the Milky Way,” would make a splendid cover illustration for a collection of H.P. Lovecraft stories.

Burchfield’s literary tastes ran to midwestern realism—he cites Sherwood Anderson, Willa Cather, and Sinclair Lewis as early influences—so there’s no reason to suppose that he was acquainted with Lovecraft’s work, or that of any of the *Weird Tales* writers. But he was himself a conscious fantasist, as can be seen from the titles he gave some of his paintings. Names like “Dream of a Fantasy Flower” and “Golden Dream” make explicit the imaginary origins of some of his most striking landscapes.

Like many fantasists Burchfield had a lifelong fascination with the idea of the North. He read Norwegian and Finnish novels and studied biographies of his favorite composer, Jan Sibelius. “Pictures and ideas pour in on me,” Burchfield wrote in his journal upon listening to Sibelius’s Second Symphony. “My joy is almost too much to be borne.” J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, and E.R. Eddison would have recognized in Charles Burchfield a kindred spirit.

I suspect that anyone who has travelled vicariously through Mirkwood or Narnia or Zimiamvia would find echoes of those landscapes in Burchfield’s art. But one need not be devoted to literary Northernness to appreciate his work. All that is required to enjoy the paintings of Charles Burchfield is a love of beauty and a sense of wonder.

Information on Charles Burchfield and reproductions of many of his paintings may be found at the Burchfield Penney Art Center’s website (http://www.burchfieldpenney.org/)
The Puppet Masters has frequently been cited as one of Heinlein’s best novels. Gelatinous creatures called Titans invade Earth and take over human hosts. It is a psychological horror story, deeply infused with realism and Cold War paranoia. And while the story and themes hold up incredibly well today, it has proven to be an incredible challenge to illustrate.

The Puppet Masters lacks the iconic power armor of Starship Troopers, the skyward set pieces of L5 where Friday is betrayed, or Mannie’s instantly identifiable robotic arm from The Moon is a Harsh Mistress.

Sam, Mary and the Old Man are some of the most generic of all Heinlein’s characters—all but indistinguishable from other Heinlein characters physically or emotionally. We know Mary is quite beautiful, but we have no idea how she dresses or what she looks like, beyond her red hair. Sam is somehow described in even less detail, his main character trait being his competence as an agent.

When Frank and I approached this article, we were truly astonished by the range of covers from the book. Many great science fiction artists have tried, including Stanley Meltzoff, Barclay Shaw, Bob Eggleton, Richard Powers, Gene Szafran, and Don Sibley. They have managed wildly varying levels of success.

Thus, for the artist painting the cover: How do you convey Red Scare paranoia? Do you show the Titans or their flying saucers, or the fake ship our heroes find at the beginning of the novel? Or do you depict one or the racier scenes, as when everyone walks around naked to show that they don’t have aliens attached?

Here is the Don Sibley cover of the September 1951 Galaxy (the first of three issues to serialize the novel).

Here we see Sam, Mary, and the Old Man investigating the fake flying saucer. Interestingly, this is one of the very few Puppet Masters covers to actually show Mary, the book’s female protagonist.

Brianna Spacekat Wu (BSW): I was shocked when I saw this cover. It has little to do with the main events of the book, and it’s not at all how I imagine Sam or Mary. They look so incredibly conservative, when their characters are written to be so counter to that.

Frank Wu (FW): True. Robert Wilfred Franson points out that this artwork “textually missed the mark” by a wide margin. Indeed, the flying saucer our trio investigate at the beginning of the novel is a fake roadside attraction made with a thousand feet of lumber, not a real saucer the aliens arrived in. And it’s in a clearing in the woods, near a pasture and a farm, not atop of rocky outcropping. But at least Sibley got some textual detail right (like Mary’s red hair) and actually paints an event in the novel.

BSW: It’s like he read the first 10 pages, and called it a day.

FW: If you were doing a modern version of this book, how would you paint the girl?

BSW: It’s hard to not project modern sensibilities onto her, but I imagine her as much more alluring and athletic. She looks like she’s on her way to church.

FW: As opposed to the 1951 Doubleday edition cover (artist not credited but possibly Ley Kenyon):
from normal ones. In fact, a husband is able to fool his wife. They learn to mimic normal human emotions, down to sexual reaction.

**FW:** I don’t have a problem with the artist taking a bit of creative interpretation here. It makes the cover far better at conveying the story. The colors are great too—they are so pale and joyless, really communicating the emotionless internal distress of the possessed. My favorite part of the novel was when we saw what being possessed was like from Sam’s perspective.

**BSW:** Let’s move on. The Signet cover featured one of the greatest SF images ever created, this by Stanley Meltzoff.

**BSW:** It’s a great, great cover. I’m just not sure what novel it’s supposed to be about. It’s not “The Puppet Masters.”

**FW:** I guess we missed the scene where people with shovels and spears stand triumphantly over the Titan’s ship during a hurricane.

**BSW:** Whatever book this cover is about, though, I want to read.

**FW:** Irene Gallo once asked Vincent Di Fate what painting did he wish he had done. He said this one. There’s so much to admire, the enormous shapes, the figures of the massed soldiers lost in shadow. I see echoes of it in later pieces by Paul Lehr and the Dune paintings by Schoenherr.

**BSW:** Artistic license is going to be a common theme here. Just like the 1977 Gino D’Achille cover:

**FW:** Gino is an unusual choice for a thoughtful novel like Heinlein’s. Up to this point, Gino had built his career painting covers for Edgar Rice Burroughs and John Norman novels. And thus his work for Heinlein is typically muscular and action-filled: a gorilla, a komodo dragon and two giant snakes attack a flying saucer.

A fun, dramatic cover. Too bad it also has almost nothing to do with the story. It’s as if Gino thought that *The Puppet Masters* took place on Gor.

**BSW:** I have to be honest. I really don’t know what this is about. And as long as he’s saying, “To hell with the story!” the best he can come up with is a snake? That should be two dueling giant monsters. Wearing power armor.

**FW:** Let’s get to some other pieces. Here is the 1986 Barclay Shaw cover:
BSW: Easily the best of any of these. This is artistic license done right.

FW: Yup. This is a dramatic, colorful cover. The pink strings definitely convey the idea of human puppets. It does seem like the humans are being pulled by one giant alien, rather than individual slugs. But, we give it points for conveying the idea of the story more than accuracy.

BSW: The Titans are described as having some elasticity, but nothing like this. At best, they can connect from a girl’s purse to her body. Still, it’s a great metaphor for the novel.

FW: Let’s see another one of the best.

The most recent cover, at least in English, is the 2009 Baen edition by Bob Eggleton.

FW: I asked Bob directly his thought process while doing this, so I will let Bob speak for himself: “It's kind of a strange book. Nothing always ‘visual’. So I went with this idea that was suggested to me by Toni Weisskopf, about some kind of ‘city’ that was kind of misty and mysterious. I went with the earth in the sky as the idea being these parasite things are invading it, with their feelers and tentacles kind of attaching to it, the way they attach to people. It's purely symbolic and a ‘bigger book’ look I wanted to go for.”

BSW: *The Puppet Masters* is about how we, as a human race, would react to an unpleasant truth. Would we cover our eyes? Would we see what we didn’t wish to see? So making the cover a metaphor for the grand view is a fine approach.

FW: From a sheer technique perspective, this is one of the very best. I love the glow that Bob gets out of the buildings and the flying cars (which are in the novel, of course). The blown-out whites on the buildings vaporizes details like windows but gives them a dreamlike quality.

BSW: Just two more. I have to say, this is one of the very worst covers, but it’s also the best.

BSW: What would a RAH novel be without a little gratuitous sexuality? In the book, people are forced to walk around naked to show they don’t wear Titans. This is actually very close to what’s described in the book. See how her back is exposed? The main problem here is is really betrays what the novel is about.

FW: Yes. From this cover, you’d think it was a breezy, cheery tale about naked girls in the future.

BSW: And not a dark, paranoid tale about the human tendency to deny reality. Want to hit this last one? I bet it’s your favorite.

FW: Strange creatures and detailed xenobiology? You know it.

FW: This cover is by Danny Flynn, who wrote that he “got the idea of these creatures after watching some bubble-gum melting on a pavement one hot sunny day.”


This work is unique in its detailed anatomical depiction of the aliens, which pleases me, as a biologist. In the novel the alien is nicknamed a “slug” and described as “Grayish, faintly translucent, and shot through with darker structure, shapeless – it reminded me of a giant clot of frogs’ eggs. It was clearly alive, for it pulsed and quivered and moved by flowing.” Imprecise language, as slugs are not shapeless—nor do they move by flowing.

Heinlein was many awesome things, but a biologist was not one of them. Truth is, most authors have a hard time describing aliens which aren’t “cat-like” or “squid-like”. Most invertebrates look the same to most humans. But few, if any, creatures on this planet are truly shapeless. Even an amoeba has internal and exterior structures – nucleus, nucleolus, vacuoles (contractile, food and accessory), pseudopods, mitochondria, and protoplasm—both granular and agranular. Macroscopic and multicellular critters are also not formless. Here we see creatures with three types of antennae – topped with a horn or either of two types of sensory organs. Plus bulbs of various sizes, and pseudopods. Flynn was careful to repeat the structures in the different individuals. Bravo. It’s a shell-less, soft-bodied invertebrate! Beautiful!

BSW: It’s a slug. Gross.

FW and BSW thank Jane Frank, Bob Eggleton, Bill Higgins, and Lex Berman for their input and thoughts in writing this piece.
What We’ll Remember in Fifty Years

Rich Horton

Well, the first thing I’ll say is, I hope I’m here in 2062 to write an article for Steven telling us all how wrong I was in 2012! And, really, it’s probably a mug’s game to decide what SF (or anything) from 2012 will still be remembered in fifty years. One could cop out and just pick what I think is this year’s best…but something tells me that won’t work out.

First, let’s briefly consider 1962. The Hugo Nominations for Best Novel were The Man in the High Castle, by Philip K. Dick (which won); Sylva, by Vercors (the first and I believe still the only translated novel to appear on the Hugo shortlist); A Fall of Moondust, by Arthur C. Clarke; Little Fuzzy, by H. Beam Piper; and The Sword of Aldones, by Marion Zimmer Bradley. Oddly enough, all of those novels are remembered (except perhaps Sylva), but mostly because the authors are otherwise famous. I suppose Little Fuzzy is the exception—it is Piper’s most famous novel. Still, except for The Man in the High Castle, nothing is what you would call a major work. And there’s not much from off the nomination list either, unless you go outside the genre, for a work like A Clockwork Orange, by Anthony Burgess; or to the edges of the genre for a work like Ray Bradbury’s Something Wicked This Way Comes.

What are the best novels of 2012, then? A quick list for starters might include Empty Space, by M. John Harrison; 2312, by Kim Stanley Robinson; Captain Vorpatril’s Alliance, by Lois McMaster Bujold; The Eternal Flame, by Greg Egan; The Hydrogen Sonata, by Iain M. Banks; and Hide Me Among the Graves, by Tim Powers. I’ve probably missed some outstanding novels, mind you—I plead the difficulty of a short fiction reviewer in keeping up with the field at longer lengths. (I’ll get to short fiction in a bit.) But the first thing I notice about this list is that all have a chance to survive based on the reason many of the books I mentioned from 1962 do—the writers are established writers who may well be remembered for their body of work. So, 2312 may be remembered as another book by the writer of the Mars Trilogy (especially as 2312 sort of resembles those books); while surely The Hydrogen Sonata and Captain Vorpatril’s Alliance will best be remembered as parts of their long series: one as another Culture novel, the other as another Miles novel (even if Miles barely appears in it).

I’ll go out on a limb and suggest that Empty Space is the 2012 SF novel with the best chance of surviving on its own. (Though even then, not really—it’s the conclusion to a looseish trilogy.) I say that partly because it seems the one novel this year that might truly be a masterpiece; and partly because I think its literary quality may give it some legs.

Which suggests one reason books survive—better writing! (To be sure that’s a subjective evaluation.) At any rate, there is an argument to be made that bestsellers aren’t always going to be the writers who last, in whatever genre. I don’t think, to name one example, that Dan Brown will be much read in 20 years, let alone 50. On the other hand, looking up obscure bestselling writers is surprisingly rewarding—I am very fond myself of the novels of Jeffery Farnol, for one, or Margery Sharp, for another. (Sharp, I would suggest, is a writer perhaps overdue for a rediscovery—a fine writer indeed who somehow seems to have slipped from public consciousness.) I wouldn’t be shocked to find, in 50 years, that a writer like Bujold might be somewhat forgotten—but I am sure that readers who made the effort to rediscover her work would be rewarded with considerable entertainment. (I wouldn’t be surprised either to find that her popularity is maintained over time—as I said above, these predictions are a mug’s game.)

Let’s continue with short fiction. And I’ll begin by cheating a bit. There is one book—rather, there are two books this year that I am quite confident will be remembered in fifty years. These books are Ursula K. LeGuin’s two-volume collection of selected stories: The Unreal and the Real. (Volume One is Where on Earth, Volume Two is Outer Space, Inner Lands.) The books are being praised widely in the general press, and it seems to me that Le Guin’s reputation has finally been firmly established among the literati, without diminishment in the SF field. And it’s a neat coincidence that Le Guin’s first fantasy story appeared in Fantastic just 50 years ago!

That said, the stories in The Unreal and the Real did not appear first in 2012. What of 2012’s short fiction? Here I feel the need to engage with Paul Kincaid’s review of Gardner Dozois’ and my Best of the Year books, in which he suggested that short science fiction reflected a field in a state of “exhaustion.” Kincaid wrote: “the genre has become a set of tropes to be repeated and repeated until all meaning has been drained from them,” and also complained that too many stories were Fantasy for no particular reason. I can’t say I agree completely with Kincaid, particularly as to his evaluations of certain stories (obviously enough—he didn’t much like some of those I liked enough to include among my “best” of the year), but I do think he has a point when he suggests that to an extent much current SF, even very good SF, is reworking old tropes. At times I wonder, “have all the ideas been had?” That can’t be right, but to an extent Golden Age SF writers had an advantage in that there stories had a better chance of being first on the ground.

The question, then, is it the stories that present original ideas that will be remembered? Or at least the earliest best workings out of those ideas? Or will the latest most up to date version win out? I think on the whole earlyish expositions of new ideas do have an advantage.

Another sort of SF that definitely speaks to a feeling of exhaustion is what I call “Where’s my flying car?” stories—stories that, in essence, lament the failed dreams of SF. Stories that moan over the future we used to think we’d have. Kincaid has also called for a greater engagement with plausible futures—something often missing from this sort of story, as well as from Steampunk, or Alternate History, both very popular categories. The thing is, the best stories of all these sorts are still magnificent—Ian MacLeod’s “New Light on the Drake Equation” may be the best novella of the 21st Century, but it is also the very essence of “Where’s my flying car?” (See Niall Harrison’s excellent appreciation of
the story here: http://edsfproject.blogspot.com/2005/12/new-light-on-drake-equation-by-ian-r.html) And one disadvantage of truly timely near future stories is that they risk becoming dated when the date of their action has passed.

Which is all a tiresome way of saying “I don’t know.” I do know which stories I liked best this year—so these are stories that are at least in with a chance at being remembered in 2062, though doubtless many of them will be obscurities by then. So, anyway, here’s my top ten: “In the House of Aryaman, a Lonely Signal Burns,” by Elizabeth Bear; “The Weight of History, the Lightness of the Future,” by Jay Lake; “Under the Eaves,” by Lavie Tidhar; “Swift, Brutal Retaliation,” by Meghan McCarron; “Arbeitskraft,” by Nick Mamatas; “Nahiku West,” by Linda Nagata; “Scattered Along the River of Heaven,” by Aliette de Bodard; “Twenty-Two and You,” by Michael Blumlein; “The Bernoulli War,” by Gord Sellar; and “Give Her Honey When You Hear Her Scream,” by Maria Dahvana Headley.
Listening to Wagner

Warren Buff

Wagner is a complicated composer to like or dislike. Personally, he’s reprehensible, the kind of guy who only wasn’t a Nazi because he was born too early. Musically, though, he’s fascinating. His opera work is among the best there is. And it would be a serious mistake to ignore his Ring Cycle, especially as a fan of SF/Fantasy. He draws from the same German myths and legends that Tolkien used for The Lord of the Rings, and many of them reappear in Star Wars. Even more importantly to Star Wars, Wagner developed the concept of leitmotifs, which John Williams used brilliantly throughout the films (even the prequels, where Williams was clearly the best part). And it’s not inappropriate to talk about the Ring Cycle in relation to such epic fantasies: Wagner intended for the four operas to be attended on subsequent nights, with a continuity of presentation and the parts being sung by the same singers from night to night.

More than that, Wagner wanted the presentation to be grand. The sets, costumes, and instrumentation were meant to be mythological in aspect, and the sketches of his original designs convey this well. Thanks to a substantial royal patronage, Wagner was able to have a special theater built at Bayreuth for the performance of his works, and due to his influence on its construction, he could accommodate such oddities as the chorus of 18 tuned anvils needed to perform Das Rheingold and acoustics to handle parts meant to be sung offstage. Wagner’s works are nearly inseparable from his grand vision, which has led both to them being hard to produce and difficult to come to terms with.

Wagner the man comes through in the visions of Wagner the artiste, and the man is far less admirable than his art. This presents a challenge to someone who wants to listen to and enjoy Wagner’s operas, but rejects Wagner’s politics, and sees much of them in the grand style he wanted Wagner the man to have a hand in Karajan’s production, and the connection is more than I would have chosen for this project, though it was really only after I bought the second that I came to the decision to construct a Ring Cycle in this manner. Fortunately, none of the casting is the same. Like the Karajan, this is a live festival recording, and the crowd and random pit noises make it into the final audio.

For the performance of Die Walküre, I have the Deutsche Grammophon recording of James Levine conducting the Metropolitan Opera in 1987. The cover of this recording is almost perfect 1980s fantasy cheese, save for the fact that no one is bothering to look sexy. It has a distinct advantage in being an American studio production, which should muddle the correspondences that much more.

Some of the voices in this recording appear in other roles on the other pieces of my jigsaw cycle. For my Götterdämmerung, I have another studio recording, this one the first stereo studio recording by Georg Solti with the Wiener (Vienna) Staatsopernchor (state opera chorus) and Philharmoniker (philharmonic) in 1964. Of the set, this is the piece with the most deliberate attention given to Wagner—down to using studio sound-effects to add to the drama (as the director saw this as part of Wagner’s intent, and something often ignored in stage productions) and commissioning the construction of steerhorns because none were available to be borrowed (in spite of the score calling for them, by that point, everyone was using trombones, and the originals had been carried off from Bayreuth by American soldiers). In spite of being a studio recording, a great deal of incidental noise made it into the final cut, which was left in during the remastering.

Wagner can’t be removed entirely from the Ring Cycle, but by deliberately selecting disparate recordings, I hope to have removed the unity of his vision, even when the directors seek to honor it. The complication of using so many creative and interpretive voices prevents any one, even the largest, from defining the entire process. With this in mind, I begin my journey through the music.

Das Rheingold begins with a slow build into a sweeping prelude meant to invoke the flow of the river Rhine. Its subject is the gods, the dwarves, and the spirits of the river, and the pieces evoking the harmonious existence of the river spirits carry the initial scene. There is a grandeur to them, but it is the grandeur of nature. The initial tension comes from Alberich the dwarf, who lusts after the Rhine maidens, is spurned by them, learns of the Rhine gold, and upon hearing that it can be made into a magic ring whose bearer can rule the world, but only by one who has renounced love, curses love and steals the gold. The gods, meanwhile, enter into the matter when they decide to try to obtain the Nibelung’s gold and the ring to pay off the giants who have built Valhalla instead of losing Freia.
The arguments of the gods, and in particular the crashing voice of Wotan, give direction to the second act. Most of the parts are for bass and baritone voices, with only a few important roles written for tenors, and all of the female voices being relatively minor. The rhythms of the Nibelungen’s leitmotif make frequent appearances in the second and third acts, whether it’s in the sound of the tuned anvils being beaten during the journeys to and from Nibelheim or in a more melodic instrument. The whole second half of the opera is dominated by dissonance, tension, and a sense of fear. There are times when it sounds like a chorus is screaming in terror. There are also moments of grandeur surrounding the gods’ new home at Valhalla. Throughout, Wotan is an imposing figure, and the contrast between the world of the gods and the initial harmony we heard in the song of the Rhine maidens is severe. Perhaps most obviously, the opera opens with soothing music evocative of nature in female voices, and proceeds to spend most of its time in tense dialog between male voices. The most substantial female voice once the gods come into the picture is the contralto of Erda, the earth goddess. The opera closes, however, with Loge turning his back on the newly built Valhalla and the falsehoods of its gods while the Rhine maidens can be heard in the distance. I don’t have the Libretto and translation for reference with this opera as I do for some of the others, so I have to guess at the meaning of this and use a synopsis to get the general plot. The leitmotif of the Rhine maidens is distinctly woven into the conclusion of the opera, which seems to set up hope that nature can survive the coming downfall of the gods. I have to say that it’s a moving ending, even without an understanding of the words spoken. To aid in things, the recording includes the ovation, which serves as a palate cleanser between this and the next opera.

I hadn’t expected to find Wagner’s meaning to be so clear. The romantic rebellion against the modern world is evident all over, starting with the overture, notably in the choruses of tuned anvils, and finally with the clash between the booming voices of the gods and the distant remnants of the Rhine maidens’ song. My understanding is that he poured a lot of his anti-Semitism into the character of Alberich, but that doesn’t come through in the audio. I’m not sure how I’m supposed to feel about the coming twilight of the gods, but I find myself ambivalent. I doubt Wagner intended them to symbolize the patriarchy, but their constant sonic assault throughout this opera has left that taste in my mouth. Oddly, Loge, who I find to be one of the more compelling figures in Das Rheingold, makes no further appearance in the Ring Cycle (at least not vocally). I find him all the more compelling now that I know that.

Die Walküre begins with an overture of staccato sounds in the low strings, gradually fading to longer notes across all the strings. The tension mounts throughout this overture, which the synopsis leads me to see as Siegmund fleeing from pursuit. A great deal of the first act is consumed by conversation between Siegmund, Sieglinde, and Hunding. There’s a lot of subtlety here, and I’ll have to come back to it at some point, but the distinction is eased by their parts being tenor, soprano, and bass respectively. There’s no confusion as to who’s speaking. The simple synopsis is that Hunding is one of Siegmund’s pursuers, but due to his wife, Sieglinde, sharing mead with Siegmund he is forced to extend the right of hospitality. Sieglinde, unbeknownst to any of them, is Siegmund’s twin sister, abducted as an infant and forced into marriage with Hunding. She yearns for the hero who can draw forth a sword thrust into a tree at her wedding, and fears Hunding. Siegmund is hiding his identity due to his flight, and his kinship to Sieglinde is discovered only after they have developed a romantic longing for each other, which they go ahead and consummate in spite of the blood ties. The parallel with Star Wars is noteworthy—we see secret twins thrust together during a flight from danger who develop unfortunate romantic longings. Lucas, unlike Wagner, kept it PG. Honestly, I’m glad I’ve got this on in the background while I work for these long spells of conversation, as without the visuals of opera these stretches are a bit boring. German fluency or the visuals would go a long way to making this more interesting. The music definitely becomes more interesting as the tense conversation between enemies forced to set aside arms for the time being moves into the love theme. The ending of the act, when Siegmund accepts and proclaims his identity, is suitably stirring. (Note that Das Rheingold didn’t have acts—it’s a rather short opera by comparison to the other three.)

The second act begins with a prelude on the same leitmotifs that ended the first, then adds in the famous Valkyrie leitmotif. This is our first glimpse of the titular Valkyrie, Brünnhilde. She and her father, Wotan, discuss Siegmund’s upcoming confrontation with Hunding. Wotan wants Brünnhilde to protect Siegmund, but his wife, Fricka, appears and insists that Siegmund must be punished for his adultery and incest. Wotan tries to get around this by insisting that he needs a hero who he doesn’t control to slay Fafner (the giant who has the ring, having killed his brother for it), as Wotan is barred by his contract from attacking Fafner. Fricka is having none of this, and points out that since he fathered Siegmund, he still counts for the contract. Wotan relents, and orders Brünnhilde to ensure the death of Siegmund, as Fricka commands. This section is somewhat harder to follow, as Brünnhilde and Fricka are soprano and mezzo-soprano, respectively, and my ear isn’t quite good enough to know the difference on an average line. I know that my sister is a mezzo-soprano, and the girl she did her junior recital with is a soprano, and could hear the difference there, but I had visual cues to help. In any case,
the music is quite tense for the argument between the gods, and while I can’t follow the voices well, I can follow the tone they use.

This was where I stopped for the evening, most of the way through the fourth disc of the day. I’ll need to keep up that pace or better to finish by the end of work on Thursday, with the knowledge that the discs of Götterdämmerung will be nearly full-length CDs, while some of these break simply to put only one act on a disc, or because the act won’t quite fit on just one. Definitely need to pick up the pace.

Following Fricka’s departure, Wotan recap's the plot for Brünnhilde, then lays out the conflict and his needs in the coming battles. During his recounting of how he fathered the Valkyries with Erda, we hear their leitmotif so clearly as to not need to know German to know they’re the subject of his conversation. Wotan’s angst at the realization that he must let Siegmund die to preserve the power he has built through treaties makes for some stirring music, as does Brünnhilde’s defense of Siegmund to her father. Following her resignation of the point, the Valkyrie theme can be heard from the orchestra in a minor key from a lonesome horn, though her defiance is signaled through the addition of further instruments and the shift to a major key. The end of the scene is marked by tempestuous instrumental cues, which flow into the beginning of the next so seamlessly that a single track on the CD contains both the end of the one scene and the beginning of the next, which features Siegmund and Sieglinde desperately trying to flee from Hunding, anxious about the battle to come. The cognates are kind to us that, with the proper musical cues, “Das ist HUndings Horn” should be entirely clear in its meaning, and signals the approach of the battle.

While Sieglinde has fainted, Brünnhilde arrives and discusses the coming battle with Siegmund. We have no interest in going to Valhalla if it means leaving behind Sieglinde, and his passion in challenging Brünnhilde convinces her to defy her father’s wishes and grant him victory. The music for this passage is slower, and grand, but still manages to evoke the tension of an argument. The fight between Siegmund and Hunding is a mess of leitmotifs, blasting into each other. Siegmund nearly overpowers Hunding, then Wotan arrives to force the situation. He shatters Nothung (remember this for later!) and Hunding easily overpowers Siegmund. Brünnhilde spirits Sieglinde away to the sound of the Valkyrie leitmotif, then Wotan turns on Hunding and smites him with a gesture. He turns to pursue Brünnhilde, and the scene ends with a flourish. This ends the middle act, and leaves us set for Wotan’s conflict with Brünnhilde.

Now, finally, we begin the final disc with the most famous piece from Die Walküre: “The Ride of the Valkyries.” I’ve been anticipating this, as Wagner keeps bringing in bits of the Valkyrie leitmotif, and here will give it full expression. I’ve taken a bit of an intermission, as this lined up well with my morning break at work, and now can resume my listening. In contrast to the typical orchestral presentations we’ve all heard, the Valkyries sing! They sing of the great heroes they have collected for their father’s hall, and great each other with cries of victory. The end of the piece sees them trying to greet Brünnhilde, questioning why she is carrying a woman and doesn’t respond to them.

Their distress builds in both rhythmic and harmonic tension, setting the tone for Brünnhilde’s request for their aid in her flight from their father. The other Valkyries refuse to stand with her, and her requests grow increasingly desperate. Eventually, Sieglinde herself speaks up, asking to join her beloved in death. Brünnhilde reveals to her that she is carrying his child, at which point, she changes her mind pretty damn quick. Still, none of the other Valkyries will help Brünnhilde protect Sieglinde, so she tells her to flee on her own while Brünnhilde stays to face Wotan’s wrath. This passage, of the Valkyries arguing amongst themselves and with Sieglinde, is by far the most beautiful thus far.

Wotan’s appearance is marked by incredible tension in from the orchestra, fearful strains from the Valkyries, and his own bass-baritone booming into the conflict. From here, the Valkyries intercede to slow down Wotan’s wrath, though he still pronounces a doom upon Brünnhilde: she will become mortal, and sleep beside the road until such time as a man comes along and wakes her, and takes her as his wife. She argues with him to reduce her punishment, pointing out that she did what he really wished he could—protected the Volsungs. He acknowledges this, and declares that she will be surrounded by a wall of fire that no man may pass through who fears his spear, ensuring that only a truly great hero can win her. Musically, the initial full sweep of Wotan’s wrath is softened into a melodic conversation, though not without considerable bombast. The Valkyrie leitmotif returns briefly in its full orchestration, but trails away into a meditation on oboe and strings. The confrontation between Wotan and Brünnhilde lasts for over fifty minutes, passing through several sections where each of them dominate vocally, and the orchestra reflects upon their themes. At the conclusion of the conversation, Wotan summons Loge to create the magic fire surrounding Brünnhilde. Loge gets no lines, however, and we must take his appearance to be a visual one, though his leitmotif does occur. The “Magic Fire Music” is one of the few passages that gets a proper name outside of its lyrical content, and provides a soothing ending to a tumultuous opera.

It was a good time for a lunch break. Wotan laying down the law to his daughter was a little wearisome, and the liner notes’ bit about how Wotan has to realize that his power is all based upon law, but that law must yield to love didn’t help much. There was something about a grand double-tragedy with Wotan and Siegfried as parallel central figures. The big Feuerbachian beat-stick of a point gets hammered home by Brünnhilde, and while Das Rheingold begins with Alberich renouncing love for power, Götterdämmerung will end with Wotan and the gods realizing that they must give up their power and its laws in order for the world to see a new order based on love come into being. Very 1960s, for something from the 1860s.

Siegfried starts out, as ever, with a badass overture. Mime, who came in during Das Rheingold when Wotan visited Nibelheim, is forging a sword. Since this recording is live, we get the sounds of Mime beating on the metal as he sings. Mime is the younger brother of Alberich, and has raised Siegfried. His plan is to have Siegfried slay Fafner, who has used the Tarnhelm to turn himself into a dragon, so that he can obtain the ring and rule the world. Siegfried is
frustrating this desire by breaking every sword he gets his hands on. He comes home from hunting, demanding a new sword, which he promptly breaks, and throws a tantrum. Mime scolds him for his ingratitude, then Siegfried demands to know of his parentage. Mime tells of how Sigmund died giving birth to him, and shows him the shards of Nothung. It’s a tremendously hard scene to follow, as both characters are handled by tenors. It ends with Siegfried ordering Mime to reforge Nothung and leaving.

As Mime despairs of reforging Nothung, which is beyond his ability, a Wanderer appears. If a passing familiarity with Norse/Germanic mythology doesn’t tell you that this must be Wotan, his bass-baritone should, and the leitmotifs will. Perhaps this is the most useful thing about leitmotifs—information need not be conveyed with words or visuals in unrealistic manners to still be obvious to an audience. We don’t need to see Wotan don a clever disguise—his theme music gives him away to us, while leaving the other characters in the dark. Wotan gets pushy with the guest-right rules, forcing Mime to play a riddle game with him where the wagers are their heads. Mime gets tripped up by Wotan’s question of who can reforge Nothung, and rather than taking his prize, Wotan explains that the sword can be remade by someone without fear, and leaves Mime’s head as forfeit to that person. I note here the similarity between Siegfried with Nothung and Aragorn with Narsil. There’s a lot of common ground between Tolkien and Wagner due to both of them drawing from common Germanic legends. Tolkien, for his part, claimed that, “Both rings were round, and there the resemblance ends.” I leave the reader to decide how much connection there is between the two, though some of the common elements, particularly as regard the ring itself, are original to Wagner.

Having realized that Siegfried is the figure Wotan has referenced, Mime decides he must teach him fear. Siegfried returns to find that Mime has made no progress on Nothung, but is distracted by Mime’s insistence that fear is an essential skill, and one which he will teach him. Siegfried is excited to learn, and Mime promises that they will venture forth on the morrow. Siegfried decides that since Mime has made no progress on the sword, he will handle it himself. While Siegfried reforges Nothung, Mime concocts a poison drink to give to Siegfried after he is done killing Fafner. Their conversations are lively, and Siegfried at the forge moreso, with chimes and strings from the orchestra pit accompanying banging sounds of Siegfried at the anvil. Siegfried’s joyful song continues as he examines the sword, and to close the first act, he cuts the anvil in half with it. At this point, both Mime and Siegfried are singing triumphantly, and the orchestra brings it all together.

The second act has an ominous beginning, with a whole lot of timpani. What follows is a confrontation between Wotan and Alberich at the entrance to Fafner’s cave. Wotan pledges to stay back and merely observe, while Alberich enters the cave to attempt to negotiate with Fafner for the ring. Alberich warns of the impending attack, and offers to prevent it in exchange for the ring. Fafner is having none of this, and goes back to sleep. Alberich exits the cave and goes into hiding, watching Mime and Siegfried arrive. Honestly, this whole section is slow, and probably requires a good understanding of German to truly enjoy. Mime holds back, and Siegfried, waiting outside the cave, befriends a songbird, which he then tries to mimic on his pipes. Failing, he switches to horn, which wakes Fafner.

Fafner’s resounding bass comes into immediate conflict with Siegfried’s tenor. After all the extended conversations that started the act, Fafner and Siegfried manage to get on with it relatively quickly, and Siegfried stabs Fafner in the heart. Their fight is considerably less tense than some of the other conflicts so far, which makes a certain amount of artistic sense—Siegfried, after all, doesn’t know fear, and experiences none in this battle. Artistically, this is a sound call, but aesthetically not the most interesting choice. As Fafner is dying, he learns Siegfried’s name, and warns him to beware of treachery. The leitmotif for treachery is heard. No shit, there’s a leitmotif for treachery. It certainly isn’t dwelt upon for long, though, as Fafner dies, Siegfried pulls Nothung from his belly, and finds that the blood burns his hands. He brings them to his mouth as an instinctive response, and suddenly discovers that he can understand the songbird, who instructs him to take the ring and the Tarnhelm from amongst the treasure. The pleasant music of the songbird is actually more tense than the battle music. And we’ve still taken less time than Wotan and Alberich’s conversation at the opening.

Mime and Alberich get into a fight over the treasure, then Alberich hides when Siegfried exits the cave. Their brothers’ quarrel is also more tense than the fight with the dragon. I fear this observation is becoming the “Still a better love story than Twilight” of my essay. Siegfried actually complains that he hasn’t learned the meaning of fear. Mime offers him the poisoned drink, but the lingering effects of the dragon’s blood allow Siegfried to hear his treacherous thoughts (as performed by the songbird), and Siegfried stabs Mime. Alberich thinks this is the funniest thing he’s ever seen. Siegfried throws the body in the cave, and uses Fafner’s corpse to close up the entrance.

Finally, the songbird clues Siegfried in about Brünnhilde. Siegfried, wondering if he can learn fear from this woman sleeping in a ring of fire on a mountaintop, decides to go find her. The music gets triumphant, and a little bit tense. I’m glad to have read ahead and learned that Siegfried learns fear, because the total lack of tension in his scenes is really musically dull.

Interestingly, I managed to work my day such that the end of the second act lined up with the end of my shift. This is fairly significant, as Wagner took a break between composing the material I’ve listened to so far and the conclusion of the cycle (including the final act of Siegfried). He didn’t feel he had the chops, musically, to do what he wanted. In fact, he took a twelve year break, only returning to work on the Ring Cycle briefly to revise the orchestration of the second act of Siegfried. Once he picked it back up, he would spend a further five years completing the project, during which time his patron forced him to premier the first two operas. During this time, he composed his Tristan und Isolde and Die Meistersinger von Nuernburg, which is a hell of a trip to the woodshed. I’m not so hardcore as to take a break myself to listen to these operas, though I’ve heard Tristan und Isolde, and it represents quite an
undertaking, especially as something to do as practice for another work.

The final act of Siegfried begins with Wotan and Erda discussing the impending end of the gods, which Wotan has come to accept. He is content to leave his heritage to Siegfried, and knows that Brünnhilde will “work the deed that redeems the world.” There is tension to begin this scene, but it gets relieved, and several of the more hopeful leitmotifs prevail out of the brass. Erda is dismissed, and Siegfried meets Wotan along the path. Wotan tries to question him, but Siegfried doesn’t give a damn about the questions from the stranger, and tries to brush past him. Wotan blocks the way with his spear, which Siegfried breaks with Nothung. Wotan steps aside and gathers up the pieces and disappears. The music becomes triumphant, and the leitmotifs from the Magic Fire Music (such as the Loge leitmotif) return, signaling that Siegfried is passing through the flames.

The music turns softer, sweeter, and we know that Siegfried has reached Brünnhilde. He first mistakes her for a man, due to her armor, which he then, for some reason, removes, only to find that she’s a woman. “Das ist kein Mann!” Apparently, Mime’s parenting skills are so awesome that Siegfried has never seen a woman before, and he freaks out. He’s finally afraid, which means we finally get musical tension in his scenes! So, in his panic, he decides to kiss her. Because that’s what I do to someone when I’m scared of them and they’re unconscious. I have a couple of problems with this plot point—first, that he’s afraid of a woman without having any social pressure placed on his interaction with them during his upbringing, and second that his reaction is to kiss her, which wakes her up. I mean, yes, he wanted to learn fear and all, but why would the woman he’s had no prompting to fear inspire it when the dragon he was told might teach him fear didn’t? In any case, the music is sweeping, grand, and tense. Gloriously tense. Siegfried is finally an interesting character to listen to, even if his motivations are poorly written!

Brünnhilde is skeptical, but Siegfried, who’s apparently gotten over his fear and moved on to professing love, wins her over. I don’t quite understand how this happens in the course of five minutes, but her acceptance triggers some rather glorious music. The whole thing is awash with leitmotifs in both their standard forms and variations, reflecting Wagner’s heightened skill from his sabbatical. The newly minted couple renounce the old ways of the gods and hail “light-bringing love and laughing death.” (Thanks, Wikipedia—my used copy didn’t come with a libretto on this one.) We get a finale, but it’s not particularly robust—after all, this is only a beginning, and the true story is in the next opera.

Which brings us to Götterdämmerung. This thing is a monster, taking up almost every minute of space on four CDs. The libretto, in its CD booklet-shaped volume, is 180 pages long, compared with 120 for Die Walküre, in the same format. It’s long enough that it needs a prologue before its three acts. Just because I’m starting this after lunch with a whole day left afterwards doesn’t mean I’ll finish it, but I think the odds look good. The first bits of the prologue are sweeping soundscapes, and we meet the Norns, basically the Fates, who foretell most of the previous action, and foresee that Wotan will set fire to Valhalla to signal the end of the gods. Then, the rope they weave breaks, and they lament their loss of wisdom and fade into the ground. The Norns are rather musically convenient to listen to, as they each sing in a different vocal range—contralto, mezzo-soprano, and soprano. I find it a little odd that Wagner seems to write for four different male vocal ranges, but only three female ones. I’ll have to see if this is a matter of convention in opera.

Now, it’s Siegfried and Brünnhilde’s turn. The horn section is much more active in this bit, and we hear both the Siegfried and Valkyrie leitmotifs. They make lots of lovey noises at each other and exchange gifts (Siegfried gets a horse, Brünnhilde the ring) before Siegfried sets off in search of more adventure. He rides for a while, then takes a raft down the Rhine.

I have to say, listening to these horns in the bit where Siegfried is traveling the Rhine after their conversation, that this recording is one of the best-engineered I’ve ever listened to, up there with things like Abbey Road and Jurassic 5’s Quality Control. The Deutsche Grammophon recording of Die Walküre was clearly done on great equipment with smart engineers and top-notch performers. This, however, is a cut above, featuring studio recording engineers who are actually making an art-form out of recording. The director’s notes in the liner describe in considerable detail how they manipulated the sound quality to reflect the mood of the passage, even going so far as to change the mix levels on Siegfried’s vocals for a section where he is in disguise. Wagner’s notes in the score call for the tenor (and a high tenor, at that) to sing low, which is really just an impossible request of a vocalist (with the possible exception of rare talents like Freddie Mercury, and even then….), and the recording accomplishes it without transposing, which they felt would be cheating!

The scene moves to the Gibichungs, who live along the Rhine. Basically, the chief minister, Hagen, advises his half-brother and lord, Gunther, to pursue a plot whereby he would wed Siegfried to his sister, Gutrune, and marry Brünnhilde for himself. Gunther agrees to this. Gutrune will use a magic potion to make Siegfried forget Brünnhilde and fall in love with her, instead, then they will have him win Brünnhilde for Gunther. Hagen’s bass is suitably menacing for the part and Gunther’s baritone should keep him distinct from Siegfried, though Gutrune and Brünnhilde are both sopranos.

When Siegfried arrives, Gunther tricks him into drinking the love potion by extending hospitality to him. Siegfried toasts Brünnhilde, drinks, and forgets all about her, falling in love with Gutrune. In this state, he offers to win a wife for Gunther, and they swear blood-brotherhood. Hagen is particularly tense. Concluding with a long bit of Hagen is a particularly
nice touch, as I really enjoy listening to a good bass. The timpani and cello underneath him are particularly chilling, and after he’s done singing, turn into dark takes on the Siegfried leitmotif.

The following scene is back on Brünnhilde’s mountaintop, where her sister is visiting to report on their father’s strange behavior of late, and beg her for the ring. Brünnhilde refuses, as the ring was a love-gift from Siegfried. The orchestra tends to support them only with small noises while they make careful points, then joins in full for their main thrusts. Pairing soprano with mezzo-soprano, it’s relatively easy to keep track of who’s singing. After Waltraute leaves, Siegfried arrives, disguised as Gunther. This is the passage which the liner notes discussed as being heavily adjusted for level. It’s actually really interesting to hear a voice that I know is tenor sound so low. Siegfried has used the Tarnhelm to change shape into Gunther, and announces himself as such, with the intention of taking Brünnhilde as his bride. She reacts with revulsion, and her objections at the top of her vocal range are contrasted with blasts from the Wagner tuben (plural of tuba, and a special, higher version of such commissioned by Wagner specifically for the Ring Cycle). Some of the dialog is almost unbelievably bad—standing outside a cave, Siegfried, having subdued Brünnhilde as Gunther, commands her, “now grant me your cave!” Forcing her into the cave, he then resumes his natural voice, swearing by his sword to keep faith with his brother and resist Brünnhilde’s beauty. This is the end of an act which is about as long as the entirety of Das Rheingold, and at this point, traditionally, rather than an intermission, the audience has a dinner break.

The second act begins with Alberich, who is Hagen’s father, visiting him in some sort of dream state. Hagen is motionless, open-eyed, and upright. Hagen swears to acquire the ring, and his father departs at dawn. This is a notably dark scene in tone, being a conversation between a bass and a baritone taking place in darkness. Siegfried’s arrival provides a marked contrast, beginning with a horn bass and a baritone taking place in darkness. Siegfried’s notably dark scene in tone, being a conversation between a bass and a baritone taking place in darkness. Siegfried has used the Tarnhelm to change shape into Gunther, and announces himself as such, with the intention of taking Brünnhilde as his bride. She reacts with revulsion, and her objections at the top of her vocal range are contrasted with blasts from the Wagner tuben (plural of tuba, and a special, higher version of such commissioned by Wagner specifically for the Ring Cycle). Some of the dialog is almost unbelievably bad—standing outside a cave, Siegfried, having subdued Brünnhilde as Gunther, commands her, “now grant me your cave!” Forcing her into the cave, he then resumes his natural voice, swearing by his sword to keep faith with his brother and resist Brünnhilde’s beauty. This is the end of an act which is about as long as the entirety of Das Rheingold, and at this point, traditionally, rather than an intermission, the audience has a dinner break.

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This wasn’t an ideal place to take a break, but it’s where the end of my workday fell. Coming back, I was greeted by the chorus of vassals and triumphant horns and drums. At this point, Brünnhilde first sees Siegfried with Gutrune, and a series of shocked dialog follows. Several claims are made that someone has foresworn an oath, and the ring is discussed—Siegfried knows he won it from Fafner, but denies receiving it from Gunther, who Brünnhilde saw take it from her. There is general confusion, and the still-enchanted Siegfried swears an oath on Hagen’s spear that he has not dishonored his blood brother. Brünnhilde seizes the spear-point, and swears that it will pierce Siegfried, for he has foresworn himself. There is much shouting, and Siegfried leads Gutrune and the vassals and assembled women off to the wedding feast. It’s a tumultuous stretch of the opera, and there are enough things going on out of the orchestra that I’m certain there are a mess of leitmotifs in play. Definitely one of the more exciting passages of Götterdämmerung.

Following this, Gunther feels he has been shamed, and agrees to Hagen’s suggestion that he should kill Siegfried to regain his standing, while Brünnhilde wants revenge for his apparent betrayal. The three decide that Gunter and Hagen will lure Siegfried on a hunting trip, where, as Brünnhilde suggests, they can murder him by stabbing him in the back. The scene is slower and softer, but by no means sweet, and every time a hopeful swell comes up, something in the minor creeps into it. Brünnhilde and Gunther swear to have their revenge upon Siegfried, while Hagen swears to gain the ring. This passage is appropriately dark, even when snatches of the Siegfried leitmotif creep in. There’s also a leitmotif I can’t seem to find in the handy catalog of them I found on YouTube. I don’t have perfect pitch, so I don’t know the notes, but I know their relation to each other—5-1-2-3-5-5 (Major) in the rhythm of quarter-half-quarter-dotted quarter-eighth-half. Almost makes me wish I had a handy Wagner scholar who could tell me which one this is, as it occurs pretty frequently. It’s certainly a heroic bit of music. The scene ends with the wedding procession leaving the hall, and the three principles of this scene joining it (though Brünnhilde is reluctant).

So it comes down to this: the final act, opening with the Rhine Maidens lamenting the loss of their gold. They sing sweetly, going through the Rhine leitmotifs with strings, until a horn blasts in the distance. Their song turns less sweet, with the horns joining in a bit, mostly playing the Siegfried leitmotif. Siegfried drops by, separated from the hunting party. The Rhine Maidens ask him for the ring back, warning that it will be the death of him. He states that he prefers death to bargaining for his life. We hear the high strings and woodwinds accompanying the Rhine Maidens, and the low strings and horns take up Siegfried’s cause. Ultimately, the Rhine Maidens predict that Siegfried will die, and that his heir, a woman, will be more kind to them. The orchestra gets more blurred, and minor chords dominate.

Siegfried reunites with the rest of the hunting party, beginning with horns blaring and Hagen calling from offstage. Siegfried, Hagen, and Gunther stop for a meal, and discuss their hunting. Siegfried, much to the others’ distress, recounts hearing from “three birds” that he would
die this day. He believes the warning to refer to some beast they hunt, and Hagen encourages this belief. Siegfried sings of his youth, telling his story up through when he found Brünnhilde, to the distress of his companions, when two ravens are spotted. The treachery of the ring is indicated by the appropriate leitmotif when it comes up in the story, and when Siegfried stands to look at the ravens, Hagen stabs him in the back. Wagner telegraphs it musically—a run up the strings, horn blasts, Siegfried cries out, and the Siegfried leitmotif is played in a minor key on the horns. After the clamor of the death-stroke, the music fades to a low, simple line out of the timpani. This is the sort of scoring that you see in the best film scores, where the music tells you almost exactly what is happening (or, to come right out and say it: this is how John Williams put the opera into space opera in Star Wars).

Siegfried recalls, as he dies, the sweetness of awakening Brünnhilde, and has a vision of her coming for him. Their love leitmotif melts into that for crisis and for death. Gunther silently commands his vassals to carry the body away, and follows after. Night has fallen, mists rise from the Rhine. Siegfried’s funeral music is heartbreakingly beautiful, carried entirely by the orchestra. John Williams cribbed heavily from this passage, and it still manages to be moving. And by cribbed extensively, I mean he borrowed much of what he used as the theme for the Force from this passage.

Returning to the hall of the Gibichungs, which emerges from the mists, we find Gutrune worried for Siegfried, trying to puzzle out what horn she has heard, and where Brünnhilde has gone. Hagen returns, telling her to prepare herself for Siegfried, and that a boar has killed him. Gunther names Hagen as the boar, and Hagen tries to claim the ring as reparation for Siegfried having sword falsely on his spear. Gunther denies him this right, calling him a “shameless son of a gnome,” a phrase I’ll have to remember next time I run D&D. Hagen attacks Gunther, killing him, then makes for the ring. Siegfried’s hand raises menacingly, and in the shocked stillness, Brünnhilde comes forward. And damned if her lines here aren’t among the most beautiful in the cycle—she really is the defining voice. Gutrune confronts her, finally realizing that Brünnhilde was Siegfried’s true love, and curses Hagen for ever suggesting she use the potion. She collapses in grief on Gunther’s corpse, while Hagen leans defiantly on his spear. From this point on, no one but Brünnhilde gets any meaningful lines, though Hagen gets one throw-away after she’s done, trying to seize the ring as the Rhine Maidens reclaim it (and pulling a Gollum)—but we’re not there yet. This is where the proverbial fat lady sings. The original Brünnhilde, Amalie Materna, wasn’t all that big by modern American standards, but when decked out in the armor she had to wear for the role, she looked it. The phrase entered into popular culture thanks to a sports broadcaster referencing the Ring Cycle. The soprano taking Brünnhilde duty on this recording, Birgit Nilsson, is actually considerably smaller, though I don’t have a photograph of her in the armor get-up. First, she gives instructions to the vassals to build Siegfried’s funeral pyre, then she praises her dead lover. Turning her gaze upwards, she mournfully recognizes what she needed to learn, and sees how this suffering was necessary to be ready to return the ring to the Rhine, that it might never grant anyone power over the world. She takes the ring from Siegfried’s finger as it is lifted onto the pyre, then, speaking to the Rhine Maidens, she promises that they may take it from her ashes, cleansed of its curse. She lights the fire and commands Wotan’s ravens to return to Valhalla and recount what they have seen, for the end of the gods is at hand. She lights the pyre, and two ravens fly up. Mounting her horse, she rides into the pyre, then embraces Siegfried. This is where some of the most insane stage direction ever occurs.

The flames rise up, die down most of the way, then the Rhine overflows its banks, engulfing the area of the pyre. The Rhine Maidens ride in on the waves, and Hagen casts aside his arms and armor and dives after the ring. Two of the Rhine Maidens drag him under, while the third takes the ring. On the horizon, there is an increasingly red glow through the clouds. The Rhine Maidens play in the waves. The Rhine begins to recede. The hall of the Gibichungs collapses, and above it, the fire in the sky comes into clearer view to reveal the hall of Valhalla, where the gods and heroes sit assembled. The Valhalla is engulfed in flames, and when the figures are no longer visible within, the curtain falls.

Got all that? The final action has a considerable bit of orchestral music, recounting most of the major leitmotifs, particularly those around Valhalla and the Rhine. It’s absolutely glorious. You can actually hear how much better a composer Wagner is in this conclusion than in the first two of the cycle. It’s remarkable that Wagner can actually manage to make you feel good at the end of a story where he kills off nearly every major character (the only ones I’m sure are left alive are Gutrune and the Rhine Maidens). I mean, I know he had a symbolic idea behind all of this, but to actually make a TPK moment feel uplifting is impressive. I had to go back and listen to the conclusion a second time just to take it all in. This was seriously more music than I had listened to at work in a while, and I made it through about three hours before the end of my work week. I may at some point try to take it in at the rate of one opera per day, mimicking its traditional presentation more closely. For now, I’m pretty blown away, and I can step away from opera for a while with some better perspective. I’m sure the itch to listen will be back in its time, though I may ease back into it with something Italian.
Letters of Comment

Greetings Steven ~

Got your notice of Argentus #11 up on efanzines a week or so back, and using the holiday weekend to catch up on things fannish. Argentus is next on that list!

“Super-Villain Sentencing” was fun. Always enjoyed the thought games of trying to figure out what it would be like if super-folks actually existed in the real world. all kinds of examples, though the one I remember most is an analysis of what would really happen if Superman had ex with Lois Lane. Don’t recall it all, save for something about how he might end up killing her in a lot of different ways while trying to make love, including “shooting” her with the power of his ejaculation! Ugh, yuck! This article, at least, didn’t have quite that level of ickiness.

[You’re thinking of Larry Niven’s seminal work “Man of Steel, Woman of Kleenex.” —ed.]

Frank and Brianna’s analysis of a piece of cover art was a fascinating read, two artists who know what they are talking about. I hope you might get more from them like this.

And the mock section just proved what I already knew—I really need to be wider read (or maybe “viewed” in the case of things relating to movies) to be able to get the humor in much of these. Just goes to show, education gives you a better sense of humor. I think…

stay happy—
Brad Foster

Dear Steven,

Congratulations on the tenth anniversary of Argentus! Also on your twenty-fifth anniversary in fandom!! Intriguing cover. I get Professor Challenger, though I’m not sure about his companion. And Sherriford is from a Sherlock Holmes pastiche, I think. But who are Violet and Toby. (I’m always curious about the stories behind the cover art.) I also enjoyed the illo inside the issue with Nero Wolfe, Archie, Doc Savage (though he’s much more impressive on the book covers), and Monk.

I enjoyed the super villain article. Good background research. Great article on opening credits as I appreciate the imagination and fun in a good credit sequence. I saw a movie recently in which the credits were in especially small print. Even on the big screen, they would have been pathetic. I also love scenes interspersed among the closing credits. Bolt switching to cartoon characters at the end was especially good. Re: James Bond, I never cared much for the Three Blind Mice scene, though I hadn’t thought of it in relation to the opening credits until now.

Interesting background on cover art; I’m glad there were illustrations to go with it. I enjoyed the Tao of Happiness also, including the line—“People love you because you have to leave it behind.” I never thought of that. Excellent article on libraries selling books, though, of course, book stores wouldn’t be happy. It makes a lot of sense though.

Exciting article about Rich Lynch’s nuclear adventure! Thanks for sharing. Good articles on fandom too, and I enjoyed the tribute to John W. Campbell. I have a collection of his editorials (book) somewhere in my library. Christopher Garcia’s look back at early issues of Argentus was great! Some articles, columns, and fanzine issues need to be collected and reprinted…Some of those mock sections sound like a lot of fun!

And finally, I enjoyed the LOCs and Mock Section obituaries. Thank you so much for sending me this issue.

Appreciatively,
Joy V. Smith

Dear Steven,

It’s always fun to play with the super-duper universe as James Daily and Ryan Davidson do in Argentus #11. You have to sort of ignore that a universe with super powers isn’t very reasonable, but what the heck. Years ago I thought about writing an article on some of the legal ramifications of super powers. Obviously, I never got around to it. The article I was thinking of would have been titled “Subpoena Control at the Justice League of America.” You may have noticed that super heroes never go to court. You can’t usually convict super villains without the testimony of super heroes, so the eighth amendment never comes into it. Aside from criminal cases, super heroes would be constantly involved in civil cases. Super heroes would probably have their stretch underwear sued off for incidental property damage.

Maybe you would have to deal with super powers as forces of nature, and forces of nature aren’t dealt with by the criminal justice system. Possibly there are economic solutions to the super power problem. While looking over my annual property tax bill, I noticed I was paying $10 a year to the mosquito abatement district. Super villains are much larger than mosquitos, so you might end up paying $1000 a year for a super villain abatement district. How would the money be divided between the super villains? Let them figure it out.

Since super heroes wouldn’t have to fight super villains anymore, super heroes would be selling their powers on the open market. This might have a devastating economic effect. Think of the unemployment that might be generated. You might have to abate the super heroes too. I wonder how much it would cost to pay all the folks with super powers to move to another solar system if not another universe.

On reading Richard Gilliam’s article on the beginning of movies, I immediately thought of the James Bond films. With Bond films, the scene before the credits is always worth the price of admission. After that, I thought of the film Walk on the Wild Side. Sol Bass did many excellent credits in his career, but I think this was his best job ever. Using the theme music to apparently score a black cat walking along was a brilliant idea.

Deb Geisler talks about surviving a traumatic experience like running a worldcon. The year I co-chaired a worldcon, I also had a killer job and was working my way towards a divorce. How did I survive? I have no idea. Maybe I didn’t and this is purgatory.

Mark Olsen talked to me about Fancy 3 at Renovation. He gave me a
card with the relevant address on it. I’ve been meaning to do something about it. Really! Honest! For shure, for shure! It’s just that other things I have to deal with keep happening. Like writing this letter to *Argentus*.

Yours truly,

Milt Stevens
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Simi Valley, CA 93063
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Dear Steven:

Many thanks for the 11th regular edition of *Argentus*...it’s a couple of months after it came out, but it’s never too late for an annual zine. I am thinking of launching my own zine, just to see what I can do. All the decades of being told to Pub Your Ish must be getting to me. Comments will follow…

Congratulations on 25 years! For me, it will be 35 years this coming December. I helped to found a Trek club in Victoria, British Columbia in December of 1977, and I still know some of the people who I first met there.

I did not know that Thomas Edison tried to put Georges Méliès out of business. There certainly wasn’t any mention on that in the movie Hugo. It didn’t go into details of why Papa Georges was running a toy store in Montparnasse station in Paris; we have a clue now.

You’ve got quite the fannish history in 25 years. I’ve chaired my share of conventions, attended many more, guested here and there (we’re FanGos and Frogs at Loscon this year), and done a lot of fannish writing here and there, especially in the local. We are realizing that we’re not as young as we used to be, and our retirement is far from being assured, so while we do not intend to gafiate, we are cutting back. We retired from conrunning after 30 years, we are not traveling to out-of-town cons the way we used to, and more hard decisions will have to be made if I can’t find work soon.

*Fancyclopedia* 3 is a great site. I sent a little information about a Quebec-French fannish term, corri-costume, meaning hall costume; I am sure it’s in there somewhere. Previous Fancies were a true fannish education.

A great essay on John W. Campbell, Jr. As I read this essay, there was a lot I know, but some I didn’t know about him, and I also realized that the photograph provided was one of the few pictures I’d ever seen of Campbell. He was quite the name to me, and now I have a face to go with it. The number of years between now and Campbell’s heyday continue to increase; I hope we don’t forget what he did for SF magazines, and how he has influences how SF is written today.

A great local, and an apaish RAE,BNC goes its way. This may be the only drawback to an annual zine, the locol gets a little dated. Overall, a great zine, and I wish I could say more about it. Hope to see you soon…doesn’t look like we will be going to Chicon 7, due to lack of funds, and saving for a bigger trip.

Yours, Lloyd Penney.

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This was a nice, meaty issue.

Fred Lerner presents a very good idea for having libraries sell books. I hope he has the ears of libraries and book distributors.

Mark Olson’s “Fancy 3” was very enlightening. I had heard of the project but wasn’t aware of how it worked.

I have to second Chris Garcia’s observation that illus that break up text that must be read across them make things difficult to read. I recently ran into this in another zine and did a double take.

Nice article, by the way, on “Argentus through the Ages”.

I also enjoyed Richard Gilliam’s article on title sequences.

Frank and Brianna Spacekat Wu’s article about why digital art sometimes works and sometimes not was also interesting. I haven’t managed any digital art, really, because I become impatient and just resort to paper. Not that I’ve done much art in a long time.

Alexis Gilliland had some interesting observations in “The Tao of Happiness”. I actually participated in a survey on happiness for my psychology degree in college. It’s not something that can be pinned down.

I enjoyed Rich Lynch’s anecdote about his days at the TVA.

There were other interesting bits, but I don’t really have anything to say about them.

R-Laurraine Tutihasi
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http://www.weasner.com/

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Hello there, fellow fanneditor!

I would ask you how the latest issue of *Askance* is coming, but then I already know that since I just began it this past week. The March 2012 issue is the fifth anniversary of the zine, and sports a wonderful Dan Rieves cover. A preview of it was posted on my Facebook page last week.

Speaking of wonderful covers, I really liked Stu Shifman’s artwork for the latest *Argentus*. Very Steampunkish, I must say. It would be a coup for me to get something from him for *Askance*. Only one way to find out: ask the guy.

[Stu, of course, has suffered a horrible stroke and Andi is dealing with it better than I think can be imagined, especially as Stu yoyos in his recovery. With luck, he’ll continue to make progress and be able to resume his activities in 2013.—ed.]

As for the contents of this issue, they are quite varied, I must say. James Daily and Ryan Davidson answer a question that I have never really thought of, namely “how in the hell should supervillains be handled by the law?” Never crossed my mind. Now, what I always think of is, “Who’s gonna clean up after these guys duke it out with the superheroes?” I mean, whole cities, if not planets and/or solar systems, get destroyed in the process of bringing them to justice, and somebody has to clean that mess up and pay for it! Did these clowns ever think of that? No? Well, then, there you go. Here’s a topic for your next issue. You have plenty of lead time for it—about nine months or so—so get James and Ryan on that one, alright? Alright.

I have to agree with Richard Gilliam about movie openings and how they set the mood, introduce the subject, etcetera. Some of those opening scenes are iconic, such as the *Star Wars* scrolling text and *Rocky Horror Picture Show*’s lips. Not many movie-goers think about this sort of thing, but it is such a very important part of the movie,
if not the most important. Think of how different the first Indiana Jones movie would be if that whole scene in the South American jungle was bypassed and the movie started in Dr. Jones’s classroom. Spielberg and Lucas would have had to rewrite the whole damn movie, I’m afraid. Nope, that opener was perfect for establishing the character and explained a lot without characters having to explain it. The action sequence did it all perfectly. A classic movie opening.

Alexis Gilliland proves he can write fun material besides drawing it. I can actually hear a conversation like this happening. Since I teach in a community college, sometimes I really do catch some rather snippets of dialogue between philosophy, history and sociology professors. They seem to cover intriguing topics. Me, I am an English professor who teaches freshman composition classes besides literature, so I really don’t get into topics that delve into human nature or something metaphysical in nature. Oh, well, I guess I better just focus on finishing my dissertation this year—yep, 2012 is crunch time for me—and relax afterwards. *sigh* No rest for the wicked. Or fannish, for that matter.

Ah, after reading Rich Lynch’s—almost wrote Dick Lynch there; he doesn’t go by that name anymore—brief article, that explains why *Mimosa* always arrived in my mailbox surrounded by a faint glow. And here I’ve thought all these years that it was the quality of that fanzine’s contents that gave it such an aura. The truth is out.

So you’ve been in fandom now for 25 years? Well, happy silver anniversary, Mr. Silver. My 25th year in fandom was 1998. Now I’m pushing close to 40 years (in 2013) of being in science fiction fandom. Whow! Time really does go fast when you’re having a good time.

I really must thank Deb Geisler for the insights into running cons. At the moment I have “plans” for hosting a small relaxacon in September 2013 the weekend after LoneStarCon 3. The way I figure it, since College Station is a mere three hour’s drive from San Antonio, Texas, if anybody is interested and would like to truck on over for a chance to unwind, hosting a relaxacon at a local hotel (with a nice pool, I might add) sounds like a splendid idea. Minimal programming, of course, but I’d like to have a fund fund auction besides a barbecue on Sunday afternoon at my house (approximately 2 miles west of the hotel). We shall see how this plays out. The name for my relaxacon is ConDamnation. It seemed appropriate, considering how dammably hot Texas can be in the summer.

Haven’t looked at the Fancyclopedia 3 in a looonng time, sad to say. Am I in it? Doubt that. At any rate, it is definitely worth a look-see.

Finally, I really liked Christopher McKitterick’s article about John W. Campbell, even though I have known most of this information for many a moon. No question about Campbell’s importance and influence on the field. A good overview of the man’s career.

Then there’s that other Chris, your half-brother Chris Garcia and his appraisals of *Argentus*’ run thus far. If I recall correctly, the first one I received was the fifth issue. My fanzine files are in my office at school—if you can believe that—so I can’t double check that fact very easily right now as it is 12:30 in the morning. Oh, well, I definitely like *Argentus*, and look forward to editing an issue when we finally get around to that zine-editing swap.(If that comment confuses people, they can thank Guy H. Lillian III for their confusion.) Probably after Chicon 7, I am sure.

Ah, me. That’s about all I can say at this time of the night/morning. Take your pick. It’s late, and I need to get some sleep. Take care, and thank you so much for the fanzine.

All the best,

John Purcell

“I ask you, my fellow Americans, this election year’s most pressing question: Should we be spending billions of dollars subsidizing tyrannical dictatorships around the world, or should we be taking better care of the one here at home?”

-- Pat Paulson (1968)

Steven:

Thanks for the latest issue of *Argentus*.

I had expected Richard Gilliam to mention the opening title sequence to Monty Python and the Holy Grail in his article. This was certainly an atypical approach to opening credits.

I think it is an interesting idea to consider the libraries as the book stores of the future. I wonder what Barnes and Noble thinks of that?

Until next issue…

Henry L. Welch
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http://tkk.welchcastle.com/

Mr. Silver

I received two copies of *Argentus 11* on different dates; as the same three boxes are checked in the reason for receiving column, I reason that either those reasons are absolutely sincere, or else you intentionally sent me two copies, perhaps as a verification that I was receiving the issue.

Two copies should receive some sort of LOC. Hm, Jophan Kenobi looks like Mickey Finn and seems to have dropped some variant of Meerschaum.

I liked the article on John Campbell, but there is one conspicuous misstatement of fact in it, which I do not attribute to the writer, as it is found in the quotation of Barry Malzberg. Campbell was not the best science fiction editor ever, but the second best. The best was H.L. Gold. Gold’s enthusiasm put true primal drive in the progress of science fiction. But I think both editors may be said to be responsible for the way science fiction now is.

—John Thiel
30 N. 19th Street
Lafayette, IN 47904

Dear Steven

Thank you for the copy of *Argentus 11*. I have enclosed several of my ‘zines as well as one by Tim Corrigan that includes a script which I worked on in collaboration with Tim. The fine art work was done by Larry Blake. Anyone interested in Tim’s publications can contact him at POB 25, Houghton, NY 14744. As for my ‘zines, I still have some copies of each on hand and will be happy to send them at no charge to
Joe Shea

And comments on 2012’s From Argentus to Zenith

Greetings, Steven!

Thanks for the link, I have downloaded the mag and I shall peruse it in detail in due course. A quick skip through it confirms my suspicion that only the first article had any chance of being within spitting distance of the original. Mark Plummer did an excellent job of the obituary from the perspective of one of the perpetrators of Banana Wings.

It looks like your weird idea has created an engaging new fanzine.

Regards, Philip Turner.

Dear Steven:

Many thanks for Argentus Special Edition 4. I’ve had this zine sitting on the desktop for a while now…Now to see the premise of the zine, and see if I can figure it out. Take the article titles from a 1941 fanzine, and see how they read 71 years later, all written by modern authors without knowing what the premise was. Hmmm, might be of interest, let’s look further…

I think your readers will definitely learn how different fanzines have become over the intervening 71 years. We honour our past, but those faneds from the past, if they were to see your modern fanzines, might say they aren’t real fanzines at all, and I am not referring to the paper versus .pdf argument. (The modern equivalent of mimeo versus xero, I guess.)

Steampunk readers seem to like in novels the transposition of people like H.G. Wells, Edgar Allan Poe, Edison, Darwin, Tesla, Huxley and other people from the era to see what they might think of one another. Mike Resnick’s been having some fun putting Edison in the Wild West with Doc Holliday and Wyatt Earp. And, I daresay Edison’s had more adventures in print over the past few years than he ever did in his lifetime.

Chris Garcia seems to think that fandom is a little gassy. Maybe he’s thinking of the same folks I am, very possible. John Purcell’s article contains so many familiar names from NHL games I watched in my youth, around the time of the first expansion from 6 to 12 teams. Minnesota seems to be supporting its second NHL franchise…Atlanta has lost two franchises, and the Flames and Thrashers because the Calgary Flames and new Winnipeg Jets respectively.

Many people might think that a Zamboni is as Canadian as Don Cherry, but not true, Frank Zamboni created and patented an ice-cleaning and resurfacing machine in the late 40s, he was from Utah, and he was first cleaning ice rinks in California.

The Septuagenarian and Octogenarian Fans Associations have a much simpler name these days. It’s called Worldcon. Or so it seemed in Reno at the Worldcon.

A quick look at this issue of Zenith…I did find it hard to read, but based on the graphics, I do get the impression that our forebears took fanzine writing, production and creation a lot more seriously than we do now. I won’t say that’s good or bad, but it does seem to be the way it was done. Seeing the rusty staple holes, I hope this issue was reassembled easily.

I think I am done here, Steven…sorry it’s not more than it is. It’s an interesting experiment, and I will be interested to see what you and other readers think the next time you put a zine together. Wish we were going to Chicon 7, it’s just down the highway literally, but it’s not to be. We have our sights set on London, and starting to save now may be the only way we get there, and even that’s no guarantee. I am hoping for a call today about a job I’ve had two interviews for, and fingers are crossed. Many thanks, take care, have a great Chicon when the time comes, and I look forward to more Argenti.

Yours, Lloyd Penney.

WAHF: Richard Gilliam
**Mock Section**

Capricon, one of Chicago’s annual conventions, has had a long tradition of including a track of mock programming, called variously the Phineas T. track or the Lake Wobegon track. The tradition began in the early days of Capricon, when Phil Foglio got upset that the programming staff didn’t accept any of his recommendations for items. But Phil was (and is) a resourceful fellow and realized that since he was in charge of Publications, he could insert his ideas into the program book and nobody would be the wiser. I’ve culled some of the ideas used by Capricons past, along with the similar track created for Chicon 7 (which received mixed reviews), as well as added some new items to create a track of programming for ArgentusCon II. Contributions to this section came from Priscilla Olson, Pat Sayre McCoy, Bill Thomasson, Phil Foglio, Alex von Thorn, and myself. And yes, with different descriptions or participants, some of these could make for quite good programming.

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**FRIDAY**

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<th>Lake Wobegon Room</th>
<th>Stagg Field</th>
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<tr>
<td>4:00</td>
<td>The Late 1970s Epic Fantasy</td>
<td>The Sartorial Uses For Smoked</td>
<td>Opening Ceremonies</td>
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<td>Renaissance’s Influence on J.R.R. Tolkien</td>
<td>Meats</td>
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<td>5:00</td>
<td>Great Literary Soundtracks</td>
<td>HGTV: The Next Season</td>
<td>John Galt: The Musical (to 7:30)</td>
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**SATURDAY**

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<td>10:00</td>
<td>Interplanetary Hotels</td>
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**SUNDAY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Phineas T. Room</th>
<th>Lake Wobegon Room</th>
<th>Stagg Field</th>
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<td>Closing Ceremonies</td>
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1 ArgentusCon I appeared in Argentus 7 and featured a real discussion between Matthew Appleton, James Nicoll, Peter Sands, and Allen Steele. In that issue, ArgentusCon replaced the mock section, which is still the most difficult to pull together. This year, my invitations for the mock section were met mostly with a resounding silence.
Friday

4:00

The Late 1970s Epic Fantasy Renaissance’s Influence on J.R.R. Tolkien
How did the epic fantasies published by Terry Brooks and Dennis McKiernan, as well as Gygax & Arnstein’s Dungeons and Dragons influence J.R.R. Tolkien’s formulation of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*?
T. Brooks, D. Arnstein, B. Baggines

The Sartorial Uses For Smoked Meats
You've made your costumes out of every possible material and are looking for something to give it a little extra flavor. Come and learn how to merge one of the latest culinary trends with traditional masquerade.
S. Germanotta, J. Stopa, Ghlaghee

Opening Ceremonies
Yeah, we know you aren’t going to go. And we don’t want to do ‘em, but they are sort of traditional.

5:00

Great Literary Soundtracks
Who can forget the thrilling downbeat at the beginning of Childhood’s End or the love theme from King Kelson’s Bride. What makes a book’s soundtrack memorable? How does the composer create a unique aural experience for each individual work of fiction?
J. Williams, H. Mancini, M. Robinton

HGTV: The Next Season
Find out what the Home and Gardening network has to offer, from the thrilling drama Triffids, based on the novel by John Wyndham, to the romantic comedy Greene Thumbs, about Joe and Evelyn Greene, who use magic to supply fruits and vegetables to the local villagers.
D. Krauskopf, J. Wyndham, P. Sprout

John Galt: The Musical
The works of Ayn Rand have long inspired science fiction authors, now, Chicon 7 is proud to present a premiere musical based on Rand’s futuristic libertarian magnum opus. Come to hear Francisco d’Anconia sing the show stopping Anthem “The Root of All Evil.” Following the performance, the cast will host a discussion about the musical’s themes.
R. Paul, A. Rand, D. Taggart

Saturday

10:00

Interplanetary Hotels
Which hotels on the moon boast artificial gravity? Are there any ADA accessible hotels on Alpha Centauri 4? Do the tree hotels on Endor require safety ropes at all time? These questions and more will be answered by our panel of hotel experts.
J. Pritzker, W. Tucker, B. Butterbur

Roast Your GoH
Have you ever wanted to roast your GoH? We will be sharing some delicious recipes for Roast GoH. Baked GoH, Fried GoH, Grilled GoH and even Stewed GoH. Recipes for marinades and dips will also be available.
J. Dahmer, A. Kanamit, M. Sappington

Do Robots Make Better Lovers?
Most of us think of robots simply as the entities doing the drudge-work that keeps civilization going. Or as the smart devices that keep our homes clean and tidy (sometimes a bit tidier than we really want). But it's hardly a secret that you can order them with sex organs. Is a robot really your ideal sex partner: always willing, always responsive, insatiable until you tell it no? Or are human lovers, with all their foibles but true human emotions, really better? Our panelists will debate the topic.
R. D. Olivaw, B. Gates, G. Casanova

11:00

Americanime
With the announcement that Disney is going to release new versions of Naruto and Space Battleship Yamato designed for the American public, anime fans are up in arms. Come hear about the plans to Americanize this Japanese art form for the broadest audience and see concept drawings.
P. Shore, I. Umino, L. Matsumoto

The Mechanics of World Building
All too often when authors talk about building a world, they talk about fiddly bits, like civilization and religion and politics. This panels looks at the really important things like how to sculpt the perfect fjord and who decides which point their ain't no mountain higher than.
Slartibartfast, H. Clement, K.S. Robinson

The Fanzine Way to Becoming a Millionaire
Is your fanzine available for “The Usual?” Do you know how quickly that can add up in the right circumstances? Come and learn how to make this hobby pay off and turn your hours cranking a Gestetner into black gold.
G. Sullivan, R. Palmer, J.J. Jameson

12:00

Designer Dragons
Now that Dragons and dragonlets are common, everyday animals, the AKCDV (American Kennel Club, Dragon Division) is beginning to develop breed standards for common dragon breeds. The developers of the newest breeds discuss their aims and ambitions with their new creations.
K. Ping, N. Novak, S. Pääbo

Tactics of the Martian Interplanetary Defense League
Getting to Mars is more than just a question of pointing a
rocket up, figuring out the best launch time, and pushing the
button. Once you arrive near the red planet, you must avoid
the Martian Interplanetary Defense League, which has
destroyed dozens of terrestrial satellites and probes in an
effort to maintain their planet's secrets.
M. Martian, P. Lowell, G. Landis

**Tesla Coil Weaponry**

Steve has built a hand-held Tesla coil. How will it change
the face of fighting crime? What affect will it have on the
electricity in homes. Or passing airplanes?
S. Ward, N. Tesla, B. Allen

**Genetics of Superheroes**

With superheroes now stretching two or more generations,
geneticists are beginning to unlock the genes that create
their powers. Although genetic sequencing is in its infancy
stage for some alien superheroes, they are getting closer to
discovering their secrets.
Prof. X, C. Claremont, R. Franklin

**Random Mathematical Fluctuation in the Understanding of the Higgs Boson**

Physics breakthroughs can be a matter of a misplaced
decimal or a simple mathematical error. This panel
examines the importance of proofing your proofs in
scientific papers.
S. Cooper, S. Hawking, A. Einstein

**Sexual Proclivities of Captain Jack**

There seems to be something about Captain Jack that lends
itself to ambiguity and broad sexual proclivities. Come here
Captain Jack explain if it is the name or something else
J. Harkness, B. Joel, J. Sparrow

**The Spaceport on the Lake**

Chicago's Richard J. Daley Spaceport is the planet's busiest.
Does this reflect its favorable location or is it entirely due to
political clout.
R. Emanuel, D. D. Harriman, W. von Braun

**The Flight of the Delta 7**

Deke Slayton was the seventh and final member of the
Mercury 7 to fly in space. Come hear stories about his
legendary flight aboard the Delta 7, which set records for
endurance and distance traveled, and made Slayton a
household name and a hero of the astronaut era.
D. Slayton, M. Minnifield, S. Carpenter

**Novels We Wish We'd Never Written**

It isn't just readers who discover that their favorite authors
have jumped the shark, but what happens when you are the
author and realize, when you see your books on the shelf,
that you've jumped the shark? Panelists apologize for
books they should never have written.
T. Freiser, J. Theis, K. Trout

3:00

**Hugo Artist Fingerpainting Challenge**

Come and watch four Hugo Award-winning artists as they
revert back to kindergarten and, using only their fingers,
thus paints, and butcher block paper, they create fantastic
masterpieces.
H. Bok, E. Emshwiller, J. Gaughan, R. Krenkel

**Synchronized SF Writing**

If an infinite number of monkeys can write Shakespeare,
can four trained authors write the same book at the same
time? Watch as our participants sit down at their computers
and type simultaneously.
E. Bear, G. Bear, K.S. Robinson, S. Robinson

**Botany for Fun and Profit**

Marijuana has five leaves, Poison Ivy has three. In botany,
this is known as “a very important distinction.” Learn how
to tell the difference and why you care.
T. Chong, C. Marin, ET

4:00

**Genetically Engineering the Next Generation of Fan**

You Will Be Tested And Matched With Your Perfect
Genetic Partner For Producing The Perfect Future Fan
C. Darwin (M), V. Frankenstein, G. Mendel

**Commuter Marriages in SF**

With humans expanding into the galaxy, more and more
spouses are spending part of their lives together apart. Far
apart. What effect does this have on the marriage and
society? How do you raise children that see a parent only
once every ten planetary years?
D. Weber, E.R. Burroughs, T. Bartlett

**Feeding Your Inner Fan**

Everyone knows that books are an excellent source of fiber,
but what books should you consume when. Does the
nutritional value of that Extruded Fantasy Product make up
for the bloated feeling after you’ve finished. And sure,
novelettes are nice and light, but if you eat three of them,
are you really saving on the calories?
N. Fisher, R. Atkins,

5:00

**News from Oleg Cassini**

The costuming world sat up and took notice when a top
fashion designer announced a line based on Worldcon
Masquerade entries. Capricon presents a fashion show with
commentary on this stunning and revolutionary line.
O. Cassini, S. Pettinger, M. Priestley

**A Tour of Chicago Convention Hotels**

Chicago is home to a vibrant convention scene. Is your
convention looking for a new hotel? Please pack a lunch as
this is a 5-hour tour. Bus leaves from the Lake Wobegon Room.
Gilligan, Robin Leach

Prix Victor Hugo
La présentation du prix annuel pour la meilleure science-fiction, votée par les membres de la World Science Fiction Society.
K. Newman, P. McAuley, C. Frollo

Sunday

10:00

Why Isn’t There More World War II Alternate History
One would think that World War II was ripe for the attentions of alternate history authors, yet it appears that those four years of bloody conflict are mostly overlooked in this subgenre. What is it about the World War II that causes authors to shy away from it? Is it too recent?
H. Turtledove, P. Anderson, H. Abendsen

A Docent’s Tour of the Dealers’ Room
This guided tour of the Dealers’ Room leaves from the Lake Wobegon Room. Our specially trained docents will point out the best places to spend money, suggests things you never knew you needed, and explain why this merchandise will make the perfect gift for even your most mundane friends and relations.
D. Spelman, G. Ketter, Aahz

Early Morning Filk
For you, it might be early morning filk, but the performers themselves are still going strong from the night before. Come to the final hours of last night’s filk and see who really has fingers of steel as they pluck, strum, and beat to be the last filker playing.

11:00

Matching Text to Cover Art
Artists and art directors discuss their frustrations when authors absolutely refuse to match their descriptions to the cover art which inspired their novels.
I. Gallo, F. Freas, Lalo

Sex and Magic
Sex…magic…both potent forces. But what happens when you put them together? This panel will examine the synergistic effects of this dynamic pairing in literature and in society.
T. Lee, A. Bierce, G. Ogg

The Role of Faith in Planetary Exploration
For religious people, their faith helps them understand the way the universe works. How do their beliefs inform their activities on alien worlds when they discover more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in their philosophy?
Br. G. Consolmagno, Ezekiel, Fr. R. Ruiz-Sanchez

12:00

Oversized Personalities in Fiction and Fandom
When reading our favorite novels or watching movies, we often come across characters who have too large a personality to be real, but we’re drawn to them. In fandom, there are individuals who enter a room and everyone knows who they are, even those who have never met them before. How are these real life fans similar to the fictional constructs and in which cases is their gregariousness just as fictional as a character’s?
C. Garcia, R. Pavlac, H. Washburne

Lost SF of the Third World
While John Campbell and Horace Gold were battling in the pulps of New York, the science fiction magazines of the Third World were publishing their own classic science fiction and building a parallel genre. Hear about the rise of such magazines as Anga, Sitaara, and Bintang and how African and Asian science fiction influenced the path of Anglophonic SF.
S. Suchartikul, Koriba,

Rocket Construction in Your Own Barn
While NASA, ESA, and even Virgin want you to think that building rockets is rocket science, the truth is that you can easily build a rocket to take you to the Moon in your own barn. This hands-on workshop will prepare you for your first step beyond Earth’s atmosphere.
R. Goddard, E. Musk, M. Abrams

A Guide to Urban Faerie
Many urban areas are is honeycombed with entrances to faerie, and more and more magic is seeping through. This slide show shows some of the major influxes of faerie into urban settings for those who don’t live near a faerie-infested city.
D. Callahan, J. Rardin, L. Hamilton

Raiders of the Lost Orc
As Peter Jackson takes over the franchise, Indiana Jones wonders why new companion Gimli reminds him of old friend Sallah

Reading Group: Robots of Transylvania
A discussion of the Lost Isaac Asimov novel Robots of Transylvania, in which a robot begins sucking the oil out of other robots and the team at US Robots and Mechanical Men must figure out what happened as the positronic plague starts to spread.
S. Calvin, R.D. Olivaw, P. Collard

2:00

Closing Ceremonies
Helpfully scheduled opposite the hotel’s checkout time, because we know you want to come to these even more than you wanted to be at opening ceremonies.
You know you received this for a reason…

___ Your prose graces the pages within.

___ You’ve already written the LOC, now you just need to read the ‘zine (and send it in).

___ Have a fanzine, give a fanzine, Need a fanzine, take a fanzine.

___ Because you put the ram in the *ram a lama ding dong*.

___ inspiration to submit for the next ish.

___ You’re name was randomly chosen to receive this gift

___ At some time in the past you may have expressed interest, or I might be mistaken

___ Callisto is in the seventh house and Trantor aligns with Arrakis.