

# Fornax 4

*Fornax* is a fanzine devoted to history, science fiction & gaming as well as other areas where the editor's curiosity goes. It is created by Charles Rector. In the grand tradition of fanzines, it is mostly written by the editor. This is Issue #4 published in August 2015.

If you want to write for *Fornax*, please send email submissions to [crector@myway.com](mailto:crector@myway.com) with a maximum length of 1,000 words. No fiction, poetry or artwork please. Any text format is fine. There is no payment other than the exposure that you will get as a writer. Of course, Letters Of Comment are always welcome. If you want to read more by the editor, then point your browser to: <http://omgn.com/blog/cjrector>

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**From the Editor:**

## **New Electronics Recycling Law in Illinois**

Back in March 2014, Popular Science ran an article on a guy named Mike Biddle whose company MBA Polymers was doing yeoman work recycling electronic parts and plastics. One of Biddle's complaints was that the recycling laws in the USA were inadequate to the task. Well, IL Governor Bruce Rauner just signed a new law that addressed the problems with the old law and is a step towards the day when we will no longer have to manufacture new plastics.

Of course, the local newspaper the Northwest Herald had to run this important news story on page 3B in the form of a 4 paragraph "brief." After all, too much space is given up to mindless fluff like Hollywood celebrities and high school athletics to even bother the stuff that's really important.

And newspaper executives say that they can't understand why circulations deep going down. Perhaps they should try publishing substantial news and give it a try instead of treating their readers as idiots.

### **The Sad Sack Hugo Awards Discussion at File 770**

On July 7th, I posted the following to Mike Glycer's blog that pretends to be a fanzine on the basis of one paper copy a year, File 770:

If there really is a Sad Puppies 4 next year, let's hope that they will have the decency to actually nominate fanzines for Best Fanzine and fan writers for Best Fan Writer. Otherwise, perhaps we should just junk those two categories since they have turned into a joke.

I made that posting to try to start a discussion about the Best Fan Writer and Best Fanzine categories. Not a single person responded. All everyone else was interested was in hashing and rehashing the same old things that they had been posting about since the daily roundups of GamerGate slates related began. It would appear that interest by fandom in fanzines and fan writing is at a low point. One solution to this problem might be to create a new Hugo Award category for Best Blog. Only problem is that that would be no guarantee that blogs and bloggers would not continue to be nominated for Best Fanzine and Best Fan Writer since the WSFS has failed to make sure that only actual fanzines and fan writers be nominated for those two categories.

### **Who Was Leroy Tanner?**

I am a collector of, among other things, issues of both Amazing & Fantastic from the years that they were put out by the Ultimate Publishing Company, 1965-1982 as well as the classic reprint magazines also published by that outfit. Those magazines published many of the best pulp sci-fi stories ever written with the bonus being that they were sturdy digest-sized magazines as opposed to fragile pulp magazines.

In my opinion, the all-time low point came during the editorship of Harry Harrison who did a poor job of picking which stories to reprint and did even worse in acquiring

new material for the magazines. One example of Harrison's poor editing was hiring one Leroy Tanner as book reviewer. Basically, Tanner was what in Internet terminology is called a "troll." For instance, he accused Roger Zelazny of "inventing new clichés," even though a cliché is something that is used too often.

Tanner is a mystery in that apart from his reviews under Harrison, I cannot find anything either about him or by him. As future editor Ted White put it in a letter in the July 1968 issue of *Amazing*, "I don't know where you dug this creep up." One wonders, was Tanner a pseudonym for Harrison or was there really a guy named Leroy Tanner? Is there anyone out there who knows anything about who this guy was?

### **The Horror of *The Gallows***

I recently went to see *The Gallows* at my local movie theater. First the good news. The theater's recent renovations was a success at least as far as nice big, comfy seats are concerned. You no longer have the feeling of being crammed in a can of sardines. The bad news: For a movie in which 4 persons are murdered, *The Gallows* was excruciatingly predictable and boring. Given that it was made on a \$100,000 budget and grossed \$10 Mil. on its opening weekend, expect to see more horror flick travesties coming down the road.

### **House Forsaken is Dead**

In the early days of Solar Empre, June-October, 1999 House Forsaken was the mightiest clan in the game. At least that is until the likes of the Evil Empire, TalkHouse & the Trex Mercenaries showed up. Even then, HF's position was strong enough that in January 2000 SE creator/developer/operator Bryan Livingston awarded them their own SE game that was admind by HF members. HF was also a multi-game outfit that also had strong clans in other major online games such as at Battle.net and in Everquest.

However, HF succumbed to hubris and became too big for its britches. This happened in March, 2003 in the game of TDZK that was created/developed/operated by HF members Jerle & Hotaru. In that game 2 HF members, one of whom named Hyperion had played SE under the name of HY and who had originally been a HF recruit in SE (and if a certain

story is true played SE with HF back in late 1999 under the name of -=WindKull=-), were caught brazenly cheating. In a related incident in the same month, Hyperion committed treason by destroying a HF planet (Planet OMGN).

Since HF prided itself as being a clan that claimed to have honor at the very core of its being and repeatedly used the idea that it was a honorable outfit in its recruiting that was firmly opposed to cheating, one have thought that the HF leadership would have come down hard on the cheaters. Instead the opposite happened. The leadership acted as if nothing bad happened and that, if anything, the real culprits were those who brought the cheating to the attention of the clan. Additionally, the leadership failed to provide even the slightest discipline to Hyperion for his SE treason.

The end result of all this was the mass resignation of almost every member of the HF Browser-Based Gaming Realm and with that the single most active unit within HF ceased to exist. From that point on, HF went into a state of decline and fall and after years of being little more than a glorified "forum clan" has ceased to exist.

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**Essay: My Experience with Dungeons & Dragons:**

I have been a fan of science fiction and fantasy all of my life. During that time, the game of Dungeons & Dragons (D&D) has been a big thing among sci-fi/fantasy fans. I have also been interested in games and gaming for all of my life. You would think that I'd at least have played some D&D during my life. But such is not the case.

A big part of the reason is because I grew up in Platteville, WI where I went to high school during the years 1979-1983. Even though during the late 1970's/early 1980's, D&D attracted massive publicity and press coverage, Back then the news media was full of stuff about how D&D was a craze/fad that was hugely popular among young people. There were also well publicized incidents about D&D players going off the deep end and even committing suicide. There was also a best selling novel called "Mazes and Monsters" that was made into an excellent made for TV movie that featured a young Tom Hanks in one of his first starring roles.

However, despite the alleged popularity of D&D among the nation's youth, there was zero evidence as far as I could see of D&D being popular among the student

body at Platteville High School (PHS). Nobody even so much as admitted playing it, much less talked about it. I never saw any D&D materials around PHS. As far as I was aware, there was not a single store in Platteville that sold anything that was related to D&D.

On top of that, whenever any of my acquaintances spoke about D&D and the types of folks who they imagined played it, it was always in a disapproving way about "bizarre," "weird" or just plain "wacko." There was also a consensus that D&D itself was evil, perhaps even satanic. All of this further stoked my curiosity about the game and the sort of people who played it.

And yet, given the tremendous publicity given D&D, it seemed logical to assume that there were at least a few of my fellow students at PHS who were playing D&D. My interest was piqued when the PHS school newspaper, the Hillmen Highlights, ran two different articles about D&D that did not include the names of any PHS students were players or even identify D&D as a game that students at PHS played. Both of these articles were about D&D as a game that was popular nationally, but did not have anything about the impact of D&D on the local scene. When I asked the authors of the articles, they both claimed that they did not know of anyone who played D&D and on top of that, they did not play it themselves. Both writers also said that they found D&D to be bizarre and thought that anyone who played it were weirdos that they did not want to be associated with. All of this further piqued my interest in D&D and the kinds of folks who played it.

I thought did some thinking about just what type of person would play a game like D&D. I came to the conclusion that the most likely sort would be a big fan of fantasy fiction, particularly the sword & sorcery sub-genre. I asked everyone who fit that description if they played D&D or knew anybody who did. They all denied it, usually making derogatory statements about the kind of persons who would play a game like D&D. There was one guy in particular who went around thumbing Conan the Barbarian books. I figured that he was the perfect kind of person who would be attracted to a game like D&D. The result was one of the most memorable experiences of my time as a PHS student.

One day, I approached that student and asked him what he knew about D&D and if he was a player. He got very angry and started running off his mouth about how insulted he was that I would think he was the sort of person who would mess around with what he termed a "satanic" game. He said that anyone who played D&D were sick, demented losers of the sort who tortured cats and sacrificed them to Satan. He demanded that I apologize to him for so insulting his character by implying that he would have anything to do with such a sick and disgusting game such as D&D. Since he seemed to be genuinely aggrieved, I apologized to him.

After graduating from high school, I entered college. At every college or university that I attended none of them had a student group devoted to D&D or even to war gaming.

The closest that I came was Chess Club and none of the chess players had any interest in D&D. For all of the publicity and controversies surrounding D&D, there did not appear to be anyone who was interested in playing that game. Nor could I find that game in any store.

During the summer of 1997, my mother and I moved to Little Rock. There, I joined the Little Rock Science Fiction Society (LRSFS). The LRSFS had a strong gaming orientation so much so that you had to wonder if its members were more interested in gaming than in sci-fi. There, I was introduced to a whole range of role-playing games (RPG's) that I had no idea even existed. However, D&D was not one of those games. While the LRSFS players recognized the fact that D&D was the game that got the RPG genre going, they felt that D&D itself was pretty lame and was left in the dust by the games that came after it. That being the case, they did not play D&D. The same went for all but a very few games made by the makers of D&D. The LRSFS carried this bias against D&D in their RocKon convention that excluded D&D from its gaming programming.

It was not until after I moved to Northern Illinois in late 2000 that I ever played D&D. This was not by playing the actual D&D game in the company of other folks in the same room since I had the same luck finding folks who played that sort of game in Illinois that I had everywhere else but in Little Rock. Instead, it was in the form of online games that claimed to be derived from D&D or to be more accurate, used the d20 gaming system that came from D&D. Of these, the most notable was Dungeons & Dragons Online. I did not care for any of these games. Frankly, I've always found RPG's played in the company of other gamers to be far more interesting and fun than online RPG's. I have always wondered if I would have liked playing D&D in the company of others, but it appears that I will never have that experience.

I originally wrote the above for a website that has since gone out of business. However, there is something that I learned just a short while ago that adds a new dimension to all this.

Recently, while I was looking up RPG related stuff on the Internet, I came across a RPG gamer's blog. The blogger was a guy who was using old notebooks to write about games of D&D and other RPG's that he had played with his friends while growing up. The blogger not only identified the games played and chronicled the

characters created by the players, as well as in-game events, but he also gave the names of the players of those games.

As I read through this blog, I realized that the names given were those of kids who I went to PHS with. Eventually, what I did was to go through all the blog posts and write down all of the names of the identified players. I came up with a grand total of 26 players. These ranged from kids who I barely knew to kids who I had thought that I had been on good terms with.

Among these players were the two guys who wrote those articles in the student newspaper. Likewise, the guy who got me to apologize him for thinking that he might be the kind of person who would play something like D&D, he was a player too. Actually, he was more than that. He was the game master aka dungeon master as well as the blogger in question. Additionally, among the kids on that list there were several others who I was sure that I had asked if they played D&D and they all denied it.

On reading through this blog, it struck me that had been excluded from the D&D scene such as it existed at Platteville. That realization really hurt especially given all the lying that I subjected to. It was especially hurtful given that I thought that several of these people were friends, in some cases very good friends.

All of this leads to the question of why? Why all the lying? Why didn't the kids who played D&D do so openly and proudly? To understand the situation as it related to Platteville, WI, and the kids who lived there, you have to understand both the personal and the political.

First, the political. Back when I was in high school, 1979-1983, there was what some writers have called a "satanic panic" in the United States. Everyone was talking about Satanism so much so that you would think that Satan worshipers were everywhere, engaging in vandalism and putting satanic graffiti wherever they could. Satan worshipers also were supposed to engage in sadistic cruelty to such creatures as dogs, cats, chipmunks and squirrels. They were allegedly engaged in animal sacrifice to Satan. These satanic types were also supposed to be engaged in all sorts of criminal behavior.

There were a number of kids, teachers and administrators at Platteville High School who seemed obsessed with Satanism. They were constantly on the lookout for any sign of Satanism and any proof against anyone who might conceivably be Satan worshipers. These people were quite literally witch hunters.

This obsession with witch hunting the Satan worshipers also included D&D. It seemed like every time D&D came up in a conversation, it was in the context of Satan worship.

The kids who seemed obsessed with finding out who the Satan worshipers were, also had this same fixation on D&D players. As far as they were concerned, anyone who would lay D&D were so weird that must also be satanic fiends.

This brings us to the personal. I was born with what doctors call "mild cerebral palsy." This might not sound so bad, but at least in those days there was a strong prejudice against the very idea of handicapped kids attending public school. Up until 1965, the law in Wisconsin was that all handicapped students were institutionalized. As a result, most of both the administrators and of my teachers came up through the educational system believing that excluding handicapped kids from the public schools was the right way to do things. When public policy changed to allow kids like me to attend public school, these people did not accept it and as a result, both myself and others like me were treated at best like second class students.

Starting in the 1976-1977 school year when I was in 6th grade at Platteville Middle School, I was placed in Special Education (SE) and I remained in SE for the next 3 1/2 years. Once you have the SE label stuck on you, its like an albatross and even after you get out of SE, the people in the school system who have power and authority over you still treat you just like you are still in SE. Even worse, the other kids treat you like you are dirt. The label that all too many people including students, teachers and even some administrators stuck on me was "retard."

Why was retard the name that I was so often called? Cerebral Palsy is a condition that affects your facial muscles which in turn affects your voice. My voice is such that it makes me sound a lot dumber than what I really am. When I was in the public schools there was a speech therapist named Mr. Herzog who was assigned to me for several years until when I was in 7th grade he said that he was stopping with me since we had reached a point where we could not make any further progress. Even so, my voice was at a point where even my mother told me that if she did not know me and had encountered me someplace, she would have thought that from the way that I talked, that I was not terribly bright. If my mother thought that, you can imagine how others who were not so inclined to think well of me thought.

When I was at Platteville High School (PHS), the only school activity that I was allowed to join was the student newspaper. That was only because there were so few students who were willing to write for it. The other extracurricular activities that I wanted to join included AFS & Model United Nations, however I was excluded from

them. On top of that, I have never ever been invited to my class's reunions. On Facebook, there are only two other students I knew from PHS who have accepted my friends requests. Neither of them were from my graduating class.

Before closing, you might be thinking that nothing like what I went through could possibly happen because public schools today treat handicapped students right. If so, you are probably being influenced by all of the pleasing rhetoric being issued by educational bureaucrats about how handicapped students are being treated. Don't believe it. Back when I was in the public schools, the bureaucrats engaged in that exact same kind of pleasing rhetoric and yet handicapped students such as myself were still treated like dirt.

As a final note, for over the past decade at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville, there is a student club called the Platteville Gaming Association at operates an annual gaming convention called "Plattecon." There, they mainly play role-playing games such as D&D. In other words, the youth of today's Platteville can openly partake in gaming, something that was unthinkable back when I was in high school.

Additionally, local public libraries here in McHenry County, IL, are sponsoring special D&D days. However, they will only allow teenagers to partake in the gaming. When I asked why older folks could not join in, the librarians acted as if D&D was something boys do before they discover girls. When I persisted in inquiring in why could gamers like myself who were not teenagers engage in some D&D, they acted as if I were some weird person with ulterior motives, just like I was the kind of person who wants to become a priest in today's sick and twisted Roman Catholic Church.

In other words, the prejudice against D&D lingers on even among those allow it to be played in their buildings.

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## **Book Reviews:**

**Past, Present and Future Perfect: A Text Anthology of Speculative and Science Fiction** edited by Jack C. Wolf and Gregory Fitz Gerald.

This was a 544 page book that was edited for an audience of captive college students who were forced by their instructors to buy and read it. It is composed of

excerpts from the works of authors most of whose works were even then in the public domain. These authors include Ambrose Bierce, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Mary Shelley, Mark Twain, and Jules Verne & H.G. Wells. It also had excerpts from the works of more current writers including Isaac Asimov, Ray Bradbury, Graham Greene, and B.F. Skinner & Kurt Vonnegut. The book's introduction tells how it should be used in the classroom, but the teachers should have been able to figure that out for themselves.

This was a volume that was good for introducing students to science fiction and was useful even to those with some familiarity with the genre.

### **H.G. Wells, Critic of Progress** by Jack Williamson

This was an attempt at academic scholarship in a study of H.G. Wells as social critic. Specifically, this book focused on Wells's attitude towards human freedom and whether or not it was compatible with a technology oriented society. Williamson seemed to think that Wells believed that freedom and advanced technology were incompatible. He did not present his case well and the reader is left unsatisfied.

### **Science Fiction Today and Tomorrow** edited by Reginald Bretnor

Reginald Bretnor aka Grendel Briarton was best known as the author of short short stories about Ferdinand Feghoot. Bretnor was a decent author, however, this book of essays does not have much going for it. The best essays in this book were "Science Fiction as the Imaginary Experiment," by Thomas N. Scortia & "Science Fiction and Man's Adaptation to Change," by Alan E. Nourse. The essays by the better known writers, such as Alexei and Cory Panshin as well as James Gunn, were surprisingly flat.

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### **Fanzine Reviews:**

<http://efanzines.com/Alexiad/Alexiad080L.pdf>

**Alexiad #80**

Alexiad is a fanzine that looked like it was down for the count. Thankfully, it has returned. This is a fanzine that is notable for the amount of interest that it has shown in the area of alternative history. Every issue has new reviews of alternative history novels and this one is no exception.

This particular issue includes a long convention report on Aggiecon #46 by longtime Texas fan John Purcell. The chief attraction to this issue is the lengthy letter column by the legions of Alexiad fans.

<http://efanzines.com/Detritus/index.htm>

**Enter At Your Own Risk #1-#3**

**Enter At Your Own Risk** is a pretty unusual fanzine in that I received its first 3 issues via E-Mail instead of at E-Fanzines.com. Even more unusual is that only its first issue has been put up at E-Fanzines.com. This is in keeping with its editor's attitude that E-Fanzines.com should be an archive instead of the main distribution point. That's why I'm experimenting with sending this issue via E-Mail to some lucky (?) folks.

As for the fanzine itself, it would have been a lot better if the editor did not have such mindless hatred for the innocent creatures that he libels as being "bloody thieving squirrels." Less about hating squirrels and more about sci-fi would have made this a much better fanzine. As it happens, the best part of this particular zine is its Letters section.

<http://efanzines.com/Opuntia/Opuntia-314.pdf>

**Opuntia #314 (Stampede Parade)**

Yet another issue of **Opuntia**, sci-fi fandom's photography zine. The focus on this issue is Calgary's annual Stampede Parade. This is billed by the editor Dale Speirs as the "world's largest costume con." The remainder of this issue is devoted to geology, especially volcanoes. There are no Letters Of Comment in this issue. Ditto for anything else written by anybody but the editor. All in all, a decent read.

<http://efanzines.com/SFL/SFLST-53.pdf>

**Side Trekked** June, 2015 #53

**Side Trekked** is the clubzine of Science Fiction London (Ontario). This is a club that has its regular meetings at the "Library and Archives Canada" at the national capital of Ottawa. One wonders how good its holdings of science fiction books and magazines, since I have yet to find a library where the sci-fi holdings are even half as good as its mystery holdings. Likewise, what sort of sci-fi related stuff are in the archives?

In any event, **Side Trekked's** 53rd issue is not much of a fanzine. Much of its space is taken up by photographs. The articles are done with quite a bit of space

between the lines. They are not all that interesting since they are reviews of stuff that are heavily reviewed elsewhere. About the only really interesting part for this fanzine was a review of an "online convention" called SofaCon.

However, this part is only 5 sentences long. Hopefully, a future issue will have a longer review of what sounds like an interesting concept for a sci-fi convention.

<http://efanzines.com/Challenger/Spartacus-09.pdf>

### **Spartacus #9**

In the past, Guy H. Lillian III has put photos of himself with the the bottle that he just lost the battle to. And he often writes as if in a drunken rage. All too often, his pieces come across as drunken rants full of anger and condescension towards all those who disagree with him.

This time around, Lillian has laid off the bottle at least long enough to write what may be his finest piece yet. The subject of this issue of his personal zine **Spartacus**, written with his usual non-indented paragraphs, is the insane overreaction towards the atrocities in South Carolina and the resulting desecration of the Confederate flag and talk about tearing down statues of fallen heroes. He asks some pointed questions about where all this is going to lead to? For instance, are we going to ban reading all copies of Huckleberry Finn that use the word nigger (Unlike Lillian I refuse to engage in Political Correctness by using the term "n-word.")?

Oddly, Lillian does not point out what should be blindingly obvious. Everyone says that diversity is good, yet the Confederate flag and statues of fallen Confederate soldiers and leaders is part of that diversity. We are heading in the general direction becoming the state of the "Big, Slick & Homogenized" that Elinor Mavor warned against in her final issue as editor of Amazing back in 1982.

Another thing that Lillian did not point out was in his discussion of Robert E. Lee as a man of honor. Lee's family plantation was in Arlington right by Washington, D.C. By choosing to go with his native state of Virginia, he ensured that his family's plantation would be occupied by Union troops. The plantation was turned into Arlington National Cemetery and after the war, Lee never even attempted to have the place returned to his family.

In any event, **Spartacus #9** is a must-read.

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**Game Review:**

In A.D. 1978, a small gaming company called The Chaosium sprung upon an unsuspecting world a game called RuneQuest (RQ). This was a game that, in its initial release, was rudimentary at best. Further work needed to be done to make an enjoyable gaming experience. Few suspected at the time that RQ would one day become one of the biggest Role-Playing Game (RPG) of all time.

In its initial release, RQ only covered a few of the basic elements of a RPG including combat, magic and monsters. Later on, additional elements such as further advancement of players, social systems and world design were added to RQ in the form of expansion packs called GodQuest and HeroQuest. What RQ showed was that even in the late 1970's after all sorts of RPG's had been issued, there was still room for a game with a well done set of rules.

The artwork for the RQ packaging ranked about the best for any RPG. However, the graphics for the game itself were pretty poor although subsequent editions would show a marked improvement. One unusual thing about RQ was that it did away with separating characters into different "classes" and the increments of ability by "levels." Instead in RQ, each character was assigned a number that represented his or her abilities at various skills. Most of these skills were military related such as swordsmanship and horsemanship although there were some civilian skills such as swimming ability and the ability to speak a foreign language. Additionally, a character could specialize in one skill. They could also try to gain expertise in as many different skills as they wanted.

RQ was a game that was centered around magic and martial skills. Every character was capable of wielding magic. However, the most powerful magic was restricted to the highest priests who stood atop of the magical hierarchy.

RQ was based around the legendary Norse culture. This was a culture that included magic as well as the worship of a number of different gods. This was the religion of Loki, Odin, Thor and other characters whose names have become familiar in movies. RQ's rules were written for a Bronze Age culture. The magic in RQ was Norse Runic sorcery from which the game derived its name.

Back in 1978, RQ's rules were among the very best written and developed of all the RPG's out there. That is still the case compared to all the RPG's that have come out since then. That is one reason why most hard core RPG players believe that after 1980, the quality of newly created RPG's took a nose dive that the RPG genre still has not recovered from. However, there was a problem in that the original RQ rules were too limited in scope. Fortunately for the game and its future popularity, the GodQuest & HeroQuest expansions solved this problem.

Basically, the rules for RQ as a model example of what rules for a simple imaginary world should be. RQ is a game that is quick to play and is well suited for players who want to create their own worlds with original societies and cultures. RQ is a game that is superior to D&D in every way and as such is one of the very best RPG's ever created.

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Movie Reviews:

### **Evil Alien Conquerors (2002)**

Ever since the death of the Hollywood studio system, movies have been made more and more for strictly mercenary reasons. Because of over utilized product placement, movies often seem like glorified commercials. Other movies are made strictly for the purpose of losing money so that its investors can write it off their taxes. Worse of all, are the movies that are made for both of the 2 above reasons. One such dreadful flick is 2002's **Evil Alien Conquerors**.

One product that was obviously displayed for commercial purposes was a certain pornographic magazine that won't be named here. Another one was much more frequently featured. This was a certain alcoholic beverage that the evil alien conquerors loved so much that they dropped their evil agenda of conquering the Earth so they could get themselves drunk with it as much as possible.

The alleged plot of **Evil Alien Conquerors** was that these 2 losers were sent to Earth by this loser ruler of this loser planet far off in the Milky Way to conquer planet Earth in 2 days. They are equipped with only swords for the task of beheading everyone on the planet. If they fail, then this 100 foot tall loser giant will be sent to Earth to both kill all the humans and the 2 losers who were sent out in the first place.

Upon their being sent via defective transport device, they arrive at Earth only to find that their swords have shrunk to the size of toothpicks. However, they fail to factor this development in their plans, so they go around telling the earthlings that they encounter that they are "evil alien conquerors" and that they will behead everyone in the next 2 days. When anyone laughs at them or tells them that they're insane, the aliens say in unison, "you will die without mercy!" There is nothing funny

in any of this. Finally, some loser befriends them and takes them in his apartment for the night even though they keep on threatening him and his roommate with beheading.

The very next day, they acquire chainsaws and take their new friend out to a farm where they will demonstrate their prowess in beheading on a cow. They give a lecture to the cow about what great warriors they are. The cow gets bored and walks away from them. They give chase and wind up getting kicked around by the cow. Ultimately, they retreat from the farm shouting threats at the cow that they will return to kill it without mercy. The cow scene is the only part of the movie that is even mildly amusing. Unfortunately, this scene lasted only 5 minutes out of a 89 minute motion picture.

This film was one of the most disgusting, boring, badly acted, awfully directed, poorly written, insulting to the intelligence movies made thus far in the 21st Century.

**Evil Alien Conquerors** is not a movie that was made to entertain anyone other than its cast, crew and above everyone else, its investors. The producer of this film obviously had no intention of turning out anything even resembling a legitimate movie. This film was one of the the most disgusting, boring, badly acted, awfully directed, poorly written, insulting to the intelligence movies made thus far in the 21st Century. It's not even in the category of so bad its good. It's just plain bad. To give you an idea of just how bad this movie was, Tori Spelling successfully demanded that her name not be in the credits. Since Tori Spelling, one of the worst so-called actresses of our time, has proudly associated herself with all sorts of dreck, it's really saying something about just how bad **Evil Alien Conquerors** is.

This is a movie to avoid like the plague.

### **Falling Fire (1998 TV)**

Way back when plans for the creation of the Sci-Fi Channel were announced, science fiction fans were in a state of ecstasy. Now, their favorite genre would have its own cable TV channel! It would have all the best shows and movies and would also feature brand new series and made for TV movies. In short, it would be everything that SF fans had always wanted from American TV.

In the years since, that gleeful anticipation has turned to feelings of dread and horror. The Sci-Fi Channel has proved an artistic bust. Its highly profitable, but aside from reruns of a few shows such as the original *Battlestar Galactica*, little if anything of any merit is run on it. This is especially true of its original productions. One such

made for TV movie that was produced for the Sci-Fi Channel was the 1998 effort **Falling Fire** starring Michael Pare.

Pare is one of those rarities in American cinema who has both good looks and good acting talent. However, this combination has not really worked out for him career-wise, despite having starring roles in such movies as Eddie and the Cruisers. As a result, he has increasingly tended to show up in made for TV movies and low budget flicks that typically have limited theatre runs before showing up in video and DVD.

And just how low is a step down from the likes of Eddie and the Cruisers is **Falling Fire**? Well, for one thing, Falling Fire is terminally boring. It is as interesting as watching paint dry.

The thing that makes **Falling Fire** worthy of review on this website is that it is dull despite the fact that it not only has Michael Pare serving up his usual good performance, it also has several plot elements that normally would make for a really interesting production. These include:

- \*A cult that is hell-bent on orchestrating the simultaneous suicide of millions of folks.
- \*A giant asteroid is headed towards Earth that has the potential to wipe out humanity.
- \*Many of the characters hate each other and engage in frequent acts of violence against each other.
- \*The 2 main characters have a passionately romantic marriage.
- \*A terrorist group is hatching a plot to spread fear and havoc as the asteroid approaches.

There are other developments as well. However, except for Pare, the cast is made up of hacks who were undoubtedly making the union minimum. The script and direction is awful. The CGI special effects are poor. This is an abortion of a movie.

This movie was the work of hack low budget filmmaker Roger Corman. Originally, Corman was a good producer of such movies as the Vincent Price movies The Raven and The Tomb of Ligeia. However, after the success of an ultra-low budget flick called Dementia 13 that was filmed in 2 weeks and reaped fantastic profit margins, Corman abandoned quality works in favor of low budget quickies aimed at achieving the highest profit margins possible. **Falling Fire** has all the earmarks of one of Corman's quickies and the low quality of the production shows. Too bad. This

movie had a lot of stuff that in the hands of capable filmmakers interested in making a quality show, could have resulted in an entertaining flick.

### **The Gallows (2015)**

**The Gallows** (2015) is basically The Blair Witch Project set not in a forest, but instead in a high school at night with the lights out. This is every bit as bad as it sounds. This movie takes the found footage cliché to an all-time low.

At the start of **The Gallows**, we are told that all of the footage we are going to be seeing is "taken from police files." Ostensibly everything that we see in this movie is the work of high school kids messing around with video cameras. That would seem to explain why all of the camera work is so herky-jerky and why the movie fails to have a coherent story. However, the movie's claim about the origin of the footage is contradicted by a scene towards the end when a police officer enters the high school late at night and gets killed by an unknown assailant. That footage was clearly shot by a professional cameraman, not by some amateur.

None of the characters in **The Gallows** have any depth. This matched by the fact that none of the actors or actresses have any talent. All of the players in this movie are good looking, which is probably why they got their parts in the first place. When you see just how bereft of talent that Cassidy Gifford is, you have to assume that she got her role just because she is the real life offspring of Kathie Lee and Frank Gifford.

Right from the start, **The Gallows** makes no sense. For instance, the dumb jock narrator goes around antagonizing people for no apparent reason. This leads to two questions. First, why do the people running this high school theatrical production put up with him? This leads to an even bigger question: What is this guy doing in the production in the first place?

The production itself is also problematical. 20 years earlier the high school tried staging a play called "The Gallows," but cancelled it after an actor was accidentally hanged during the play. Now, 20 years later, the same high school is bound and determined to once again stage the same play. The rehearsals go poorly and it appears that the production work is also shoddy. That being the case, three of the actors decide that the play is going to be such a disaster, it would be best if they break in their high school late at night and destroy the set.

All this is in direct contrast to my experience with the kids putting on shows when I was in high school. These students were a bunch of egomaniacs. The whole idea of

destroying the set just simply would not even occur to them no matter how poor the rehearsals were and how bad the production work was.

In any event, the kids broke into the high school with ridiculous ease. Then they proceeded to go through the motions of vandalizing the set. All they did really was knock a few things over, causing so little damage to the props and stuff that its difficult to see how that would have prevented the show from going on. Talk about violating the suspension of disbelief.

Once finished with their minuscule efforts at vandalism, the trio decide to leave the school. However, all of the school's doors are locked and they are stuck inside. When they try to use phone to contact someone outside the school, it does not work. When they try to set off the fire alarm, it does not work either. On top of that, they find another member of the cast is also in the school. There is never any sort of explanation as to what this girl was doing there. Apparently she is in the habit of breaking in the high school late at night for no real reason.

As anyone who has watched horror movies since 1978's Halloween knows, this 4th student is going to turn out to be the "final girl." That is, the lone survivor of the slaughter that is going to take place. There is never any sort of explanation as to who or what is killing the students or why this massacre is taking place. This movie sticks to the formula to the point of being completely predictable. The movie does not provide its audience with any suspense or any really scary moments. It also does not provide any unintentional humor. The end result is that **The Gallows** is a movie in which four persons are murdered and yet the film itself is about as interesting paint dry.

The real horror of **The Gallows** is that it apparently the start of a new series of alleged fright flicks. It was made in 2012 on a budget of \$100,000. When it was finally released just a couple weeks ago, it grossed over \$10 Mil. on its opening weekend.

As they say, you reap what you sow. Be prepared for lots more alleged horrors to come with great trailers, good ad campaigns and poorly made movies.

If there is a book that needs to be written, it is The Decline and Fall of Horror Movies. Back in the day, horror movies were every bit as well made as movies in other genres. The acting talent that was associated with horror movies was every bit as good as that in other kinds of movies. Even today, the names of Jamie Lee Curtis, Peter Cushing , Boris Karloff, Christopher Lee, Peter Lorre, Bela Lugosi, Vincent Price and Barbara Steele are revered by movie fans of all stripes.

That was in the past. Nowadays, things are much different. Horror movies appear to be the exclusive domain of cheap untalented hacks. The acting talent is no-name and no-talent. The scripts are nothing but rip-offs of previous quality movies. Horror movies today seem to be pale, languid imitations of the horror movies of the past. There has not been a memorable horror film made since 1999's Blair Witch Project.

### **Megaforce** (1982)

There are a great many movies that are made without any artistic pretensions whatsoever. These are generally referred to as being Popcorn Movies since they are meant to be enjoyed while eating lots of popcorn. One such flick is Hal Needham's 1982 film **Megaforce**.

Needham is a former stuntman who is best known for creating and directing both the "Smokey and the Bandit" movies as well as the "Cannonball Run" flicks. He was also responsible for the great escapist fun flick "The Villain" starring Kirk Douglas as the bad guy. Needham is practically a specialist in the popcorn movie brand of filmmaking.

**Megaforce** was Needham's most ambitious creation. It was about an international task force of good guys completely devoted to doing well around the world. **Megaforce** was based in, of course, Southern California. At the secret base, the troopers are trained to perfection and the inventions perfected to provide maximum firepower. This duty consisted of defeating evil all around the world and, of course, getting the girl.

The fearless leader of Megaforce was Hunter (Barry Bostwick) who was most dashing as the leader/super warrior of the elite force. Hunter seemed to have had the same body as a Ken doll. Hunter blew kisses the manly way, by kissing his thumb and then flicking the thumb at the usually feminine target.

Hunter's chief sidekick was Dallas who was most proud of being a unreconstructed southern redneck. The scientific genius of **Megaforce** was The Egg. The Egg was continually developing new and exciting weapons. He was also rather absent-minded.

The Egg's intellect and imagination combined to create a truly awesome arsenal for **Megaforce**. For instance, he invented motorcycles equipped with rockets and

machine guns. He also created dune buggies armed with lasers and Gatling guns. Another useful invention were throwing knives that fly like darts.

**Megaforce** operated like no other elite military unit in movies. They parachuted from their airplanes riding their motorcycles, dune buggies and other vehicles! They used a hologram projector to create realistic looking vehicles and troopers to cause the enemy to vastly overestimate their numbers. There was also the shrinking ray! All this and the over the top acting and good script helped make **Megaforce** a remarkably funny movie.

Perhaps the best thing about **Megaforce** is the fact that it is an action adventure movie fit for the entire family. You won't hear a single curse word in the entire film and as far as violence goes this movie falls well below most anything on TV, with no death scenes, and no blood.

If you like fun, escapist movies to watch and rest/relax with, then **Megaforce** is the movie for you.

### **Yor, the Hunter From the Future (1983)**

**Yor, the Hunter from the Future** is without a doubt the single worst science fiction flick from the decade of the 1980's. This is a movie that is so bad that it must be seen to believe. Everything about this film is so bad and poorly conceived, one can only wonder from seeing if it was made as part of a sinister plot to dumb down the human race to make planet Earth that much more vulnerable to an alien invasion that was called off due to the colossal failure of this motion picture at the box office.

**Yor, the Hunter from the Future** is the story of an extremely blond barbarian who, despite being in a tribe of darker skinned barbarians, never dreamed that he was adopted. Despite the obvious fact that Yor is no genius, even he came to believe that his origins were not of that world. Central to his doubts about his origins is the medallion that he wears and the desert goddess that he hears about who allegedly wears a medallion just like his. This fact really bothers Yor since he always thought that his medallion was unique. Bravely, Yor steps out in the unknown to find the desert goddess and see if her medallion really is the same as his.

Interestingly, whenever Yor enters unfamiliar territory, a cheesy rock song is blared: "YOR! He's the Hunter from the Future! & Yor swore he's their man!" When you hear lyrics like that, you know that you are in for a really cheesy viewing experience. One of Yor's first battles is with the head of a dinosaur, but you never see

the beast's body. Yor also rides a pterodactyl. Yor fights dinosaurs, hordes of desert zombies and sex crazed ape men among other perils.

Yor somehow manages to spread fear and havoc all by his lonesome. Every village he enters winds up getting destroyed. Nothing whether it be human or monster can stand up to the mighty Yor. However, just when it looks as if this flick is going to witness a final victory by Yor, there is a last minute glitch. You see, right in the midst of this primitive, untamed world, there is a futuristic society ruled by some guy who looks like Darth Vader who aims at conquering the primitive planet with advanced weapons of super science. Talk about a massive violation of the suspension of disbelief.

Given the above facts about the sheer badness of **Yor, the Hunter from the Future**, you would think that no film festival would ever include it except as a joke. You would also be wrong. At the last minute, the staff at the Flashback Weekend 2005 horror film festival held in the Chicago area decided to cancel one of the previously advertised/scheduled horror movies to show **Yor, the Hunter from the Future** in its place. This was yet another instance of Anchor Bay Entertainment's mishandling of the festival that has led to many horror flick fans in the Chicago area deciding that they do not ever plan on going to Flashback Weekend again as long as Anchor Bay runs it.

In any event, **Yor, the Hunter from the Future** is a movie to avoid like a plague. Unless, of course, you enjoy watching cinematic train wrecks.

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### Website Reviews:

2xs Industries <http://www.2xsindustries.com/>

Remember the old Avalon Hill wargaming company? 2XS Industries is your leading source for game counters and game variants for Avalon Hill titles.

Ant's Quality Foraged Links (AQFL) <http://www.aqfl.net/>

Ant's Quality Foraged Links (AQFL) is a blog featuring news, opinion and just plain speculation concerning computer gaming and whatever other subjects that appeal to the fiendish minds of the mysterious Ant and his sinister accomplice Mousey.

Chaosium <http://www.chaosium.com/>

Chaosium is a leading publisher of games and books of a strictly RPG nature.

### Knights of the Galaxy

(KOG) <http://www.angelfire.com/nc/broomcloset/knights/frame1.html>

The Knights of the Galaxy (KOG) was a clan that was originally intended to be a multigame outfit, but for all practical purposes its operations was limited to TDZK. It featured a recruitment/training clan, the Crusaders of the Galaxy (COG) and a second such clan the SPQR. The KOG was an unique clan that operated on the highest principles of chivalry and honor. Its web pages offer resources and ideas for other clans to abide by. Although neither the KOG/COG/SPQR alliance or the game of TDZK are still in operation, its legacy and reputation remain to this very day

RPG Bloggers Network <http://www.rpgbloggers.com/>

The RPG Bloggers Network takes feeds from RPG-oriented blogs that deal with RPG's and presents the posts on its website. The website also carries links to those blogs.

Real Role-Playing <http://www.rpgrm.com/rmsmf/>

Real Role-Playing is a RPG website that caters to fans of non d20 games. Features include Play By Post, a very busy forum, articles and downloads. Everything on the RRP website is completely free.

Texas Navy Association, The <https://texasnavy.org/>

The Texas Navy Association exists to document the existence of the Navy of the Republic of Texas during the Nineteenth Century. Also covers U.S. Navy ships named after persons from Texas and places in Texas.

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### Letters Of Comment:

From: Dale Speirs  
Calgary, Alberta

You were wondering about the lack of zines by fans of historical, romance, and western (hrw) fiction. I suspect they use blogs rather than pdfs.

Each August I attend the Calgary readercon When Words Collide, which includes all genres of fiction. Fans of hrw fiction are everywhere, pack the panels on their subjects, and gush over authors. But none of them seem to be involved in convention running. Their absence from zinedom seems to be due to an inability to write extended essays, as opposed to snippy paragraphs on blogs.

My zine OPUNTIA has run considerable Canadian SF fanhistory over the years. I have scanned all the back issues but haven't posted them all online at [efanzines.com](http://efanzines.com) and [fanac.org](http://fanac.org). Both Websites have a cumulative subject index of OPUNTIA but no one seems to use it. I will gradually post all the back issues online but if anyone asks me for a specific issue, I will post it.

**[Only problem with that is I have come across only a few hrw fiction oriented blogs that were written by fans, not authors. Chief among these is the Western Fiction Review that offers in-depth reviews, but hardly any "snippy paragraphs."**

**This raises the question of why fandom arose among fans of sci-fi, fantasy and horror, but not among fans of other genres. As for your back issues index, be careful of what you wish for, you might just get it.]**

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July 15, 2015

Dear Charles:

Thank you for Fornax 3. It's time to take the time to respond with a letter of comment, and see if anything intelligent comes out of the process. One never knows.

For me, I grew up in a small town, and when my mother went to the library to find some interesting reading, she brought home SF anthologies, edited by Gold, Asimov, Carr and others, and I'd devour them. That's where I found out about fandom, Worldcons and Hugos. When I arrived in Toronto many decades ago, local fans were good enough to tell me what was happening, and what they were involved in, and that's how I learned about conventions, apas and fanzines.

I hope you're right about GamerGate. Brianna and Frank never deserved that kind of harassment, and I hope no one ever has to go through that kind of thing again.

If doing away with the Rebel flag makes some people happy, and solves a problem or two, then keep it gone. Same thing goes if its disappearance eases discomfort.

I always have enjoyed almost all of the fanzines I receive in the mail or download from eFanzines.com, and that definitely includes Robert Jennings' Fadeaway. I have tried to get copies or e-copies of Michelle Zellich's the Insider, without luck. That's okay, I have more than enough fanzines to keep me occupied and happy.

Canada annexed by the US? Won't happen. The US government can barely manage its own land, and no one here, regardless of politics, would want US citizenship any time soon.

This might not be much, but it is what I have right now. I will get this to you as soon as possible right now, and please do keep the zines coming.

Yours, Lloyd Penney.

**[In my case, the biggest city that I've ever lived in was Little Rock, AR. Like all Southern cities, it had far fewer sci-fans than its size would indicate. For instance, before Barnes & Noble came to town in 1998, there were very few sci-fi books to be found anywhere. Even the local Books a Million store that would close by New Year's Day 2000 had no more than a few dozen sci-fi books. Since I'm not especially eager to move to a big city with all the attendant traffic jams, its likely that I will never have the kind of fandom experience that you enjoyed.]**