

*Fornax* is a fanzine devoted to history, science fiction & gaming as well as other areas where the editor's curiosity goes. It is edited by Charles Rector. In the grand tradition of fanzines, it is mostly written by the editor. This is Issue #5 published in September 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. All contents are Copyright 2015 by Charles Rector. All rights revert to the original writers after publication. If you want to read more by the editor, then point your browser to: <http://omgn.com/blog/cjrector>

## From the Editor:

### The 2015 Hugo Awards

Have you ever taken a firm position on a subject only to realize later that you were on the wrong side and as time went on, you got to wonder how you ever took that previous position? That was my experience with this year's Hugo Awards. When the year started, I was on the side of the slates. It seemed that the slates were a good idea given the state of the Hugo Awards.

How low is the state of the Hugo Awards today? In *Alexiad* #81, the infamous letterhack and author of so-called "historical mysteries" Eric Mayer wrote about his experience reading four of the short story nominees from the 2014 Hugo Awards. Quoth Eric:

**At least I thought I was going to be reading short stories. What I found were...I'm not sure. An extended joke? The author's notes for a short story just slapped into a word processing file? Some sort of weird intelligence test? Okay, I'm no literary genius but who actually understands this stuff? Anyone. Really? Is it a matter of the Hugo nominated authors have no clothes? Or maybe the readers who pretend to understand, or think they do, have no clothes either? Beats me.**

Mayer also added that:

**"[T]here's something dreadful about Hugo nominated short stories. I agree the selection last year was awful. That sort of show-offish stuff is not real literature. It's sophomoric college lit-mag junk.**

For his part *Alexiad* editor Joseph T. Major added that he was, "**not fond of pretentious neo-New Wave nonsense put out by people with the right selection of victim statuses.**"

So what we had here was a problem that needed fixing. There were some folks who volunteered their services as slate creators who claimed to have only the best intentions. Only problem is that their slates, as actually executed, basically consisted of personal friends and professional acquaintances of the slate makers.

There was an also a previously obscure publishing house associated with one of the slate makers. It appears that the slate makers were more interested in exploiting the situation for their benefit as well as that of their friends.

Additionally, they also claimed some sort of ideological justification they were stalwart conservatives acting to overturn the tyranny of decadent liberals. This was apparently done to get people who otherwise would not have cared to support their cause.

This was an interesting strategy given only a few very few of the stories that they nominated could be called "conservative" in any way. The end result was a situation where the Hugo nominees for fiction were of arguably higher quality than they had been in recent years, but they were nowhere near as good as what they could have been. Given how many sci-fans have an instinctive aversion to slates and with it the idea that there are folks voting on the basis of what they have been told, not on their own reading experiences, this was a foolish move.

On top of that, you also had the disgraceful behavior of Kary English & Rajnar Vajra both of whom proved themselves of being capable of saying or doing anything to get the award. What happened was that they accepted the nominations not realizing just how upset so many fans were about it. Then when they did realize how many fans were upset, they failed to withdraw their names from consideration. Instead, they doubled down on stupid, calling Theodore Beale aka Vox Day all sorts of names as if that would earn them the Hugo's that they so clearly coveted. This was a strategy with no hope of success as shown by the fact that if it were not for Vox Day, neither one of them would have ever made the ballot in the first place.

And how did the slate makers and their friends react when their little gambit failed to attract majority support? They reacted with all sorts of hateful behavior including wholesale name calling. It's difficult to see how these people consider themselves to be any sort of sci-fi fans when they are so quick to get nasty.

For instance, Vox Day's colleague in slate making next year is supposed to be Kate Paulk. And how has Paulk acquitted herself the past week or so? Well, for starters, she has accused everybody who voted "No Award" for anything as being "communists." Basically, she seems to think that there is a war going on between elitist "TruFans" (TF) and the "Secret Masters of Fandom" (SMOF) who manipulate them on the one hand and the virtuous "wrong fans" having "wrong fun" on the other. All this is very interesting given that it's always been my impression that TF's and the SMOF's are basically jokes among the real sci-fi fans. Evidently, the would-be rulers of fandom like Kate Paulk and her ilk cannot tell the difference between fannish humor and reality.

In her most recent blog post at:

<http://madgeniusclub.com/2015/08/27/yet-another-post-hugo-post/>

Paulk doubles down on being a jackass. For instance, she claims that, **"It's a shame this year's hosts showed all the restraint of a Nazi rally along with the morals of a Soviet show trial and the taste and discernment of a cat in heat."** After going on with one vicious smear after another, Paulk finishes her blog post with the following statement: **"what's even sadder is this pathetic collection of power-hungry little Hitler's have destroyed what was once a genuinely respected award."** After reading this post, one is tempted to say that if she wants to look at a "power-hungry little Hitler," all she needs to do is look into the nearest mirror.

What's even more depressing is that if you look at the comments to her post, all you will see is varying shades of complete agreement with Paulk with scarcely any dissent. There are two ways of interpreting this. First, that Paulk and her allies have done a very good job of cultivating an audience that they can sell a complete bill of good to.

Either that or Paulk or someone working with her has been censoring the comments to remove the ones that she can't or won't answer. And it would appear that the latter is the most likely given my experience in commenting on the pro-slate blogs because with very few exceptions, all of my comments made to these blogs were either disallowed in moderation, or if approved would subsequently disappear.

Here's another example written by the normally reliable Cathy Young on the Real Clear Politics (RCP) website. How she can claim that science fiction is under the domination of "progressive authoritarianism," just goes to show how uninformed she is. What she needs to do is to broaden her horizons by reading such traditional fanzines as *Alexiad*, *Askance*, *Challenger*, *Fadeaway*, *Opuntia*, *The Pleasure of Ruins*, *The Reluctant Famulus*, *SF Commentary*, *Side Trekked* & *Spartacus* and see for herself just how much diversity there really is in science fiction fandom. One can only wonder just what the late Forrest J. Ackerman would have made of the idea that sci-fi fandom was under the domination of any sort of mundane ideology, let alone "progressive authoritarianism."

[http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2015/08/30/mutiny\\_at\\_the\\_hugo\\_awards\\_127934.html](http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2015/08/30/mutiny_at_the_hugo_awards_127934.html)

It might be noted that I did a blog comment that was similarly written to the above paragraph and unsuccessfully submitted it to RCP. I also wrote similar comments, addressed to different pro-slate bloggers, and none of those comments were allowed either. What this means is that the pro-slate crowd is bound and determined to get their way no matter how much damage is inflicted on the Hugo Awards, fandom or even Science Fiction itself. Truly the cure of the slates has proven to be even worse than the original disease.

### **Unclear on the Concept**

The August 2015 issue of *Popular Science* has a lengthy section called "Dispatches from the Future." It's not clear what these dispatches are supposed to be. Excerpts from forthcoming novels? Or super condensed versions of those novels? Whatever they are supposed to be, they do make you want to go out and buy any of them.

### **The Inconsistent Vint Cerf**

Back during the 2000 presidential race, Vint Cerf was seemingly everywhere claiming that Al Gore was right when he claimed to have invented the Internet. That was pretty interesting since Cerf had been the self-styled "father of the Internet." Now that Al Gore is no longer running for public office, Cerf is back to claiming that he is the one who deserves our praise for the wonders of the Internet. The article by Sarah Scoles in the August 2015 issue of *Popular Science* offers a look at the bloated ego of this charlatan.

### **Why the Surge in Sci-Fi's Popularity during the 1970's?**

Why did sci-fi surge in popularity during the 1970's? My take: I'd say that the writings of Erich von Daniken had something to do with it. If it was true that aliens visited Earth in the past, then suddenly those Buck Rogers stories were no so crazy anymore. It's also interesting that the growth of the genre's acceptance came when sci-fi came to be the accepted abbreviation instead of the stodgy old SF. Another factor was the advent of sci-fi on Saturday Morning TV. It was from those shows, especially Jason of Star Command, that I got my love of sci-fi.

### **The State of Today's Comic Book Business:**

Why comic books are in a state of decline sales wise? Since the late 1940's, their price have risen more than twice the rate of inflation. Of course there are other reasons for their decline, For instance, the over-reliance on gimmicks like having the world in mortal peril because of a laser being shot into Earth's atmosphere. Or the fact that during the 1970's, it seemed as if practically every female character shed at least half their clothing.

This was especially true of the Legion of Super-Heroes. Another factor was that it took so long for DC Comics to recognize the popularity of the JSA following the successful establishment of Earth-2.

Finally, there were so many stories when, even though it was established that a certain superhero was a member of a band of other heroes, there were too many stories where the fate of the entire world rested on just that one hero while the other heroes were seemingly oblivious to the world's plight.

## **The Roaring Twenties**

The decade of the 1920's were a unique period in American history. It was the decade following the horrors of World War I as well as the decade preceding the Great Depression and World War II. It was an age of extremes on the one hand it was an energetically exciting decade of fun & freedom while on the other hand, it was the decade of Prohibition and the rise of organized crime.

In genre fiction, the 1920's saw the rise of classy post-Sherlock Holmes detectives such as Miss Maple, Hercule Poirot and Philo Vance. It was also the decade that saw the rise of hardboiled detective characters such as Bulldog Drummond and Sam Spade The decade also saw the formation of the science fiction genre with the births of *Weird Tales* (1923) and *Amazing Stories* (1926).

The Twenties were also a notable decade for scientific and technological advancement. It saw the birth of sound in movies and the spread of the telephone. Such other things that we take for granted today also spread during the decade such as the motor car, commercial airlines and hydroelectric electric power.

The Twenties were a unique decade in American history and we are all the better for it.

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## **Essay: The ADA at 25**

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is now over 25 years old.

On the 25th anniversary of its passage, the establishment in this country did what it so often does: engage in self-congratulatory rhetoric about how wonderful it is and by extension, how wonderful they are for making it the law of the land. From all the media coverage, you would think that the ADA is an unqualified success.

In reality, it is anything but that. It has been estimated that there are as many as 57 million handicapped people in this country. In other words, about one in five of the persons who are here legally. Under the ADA, handicapped folks are supposed to be able to be able to enjoy the same work opportunities as able bodied people.

However, the overwhelming majority of the handicapped population, such as myself, are unable to secure lasting gainful employment. The participation rate for handicapped people is lower than that of women and minorities. During the outbreak of the recession in 2008, handicapped workers exited the workforce at a faster rate than did able bodied workers.

From the above facts, it appears that there is a serious problem regarding employment for handicapped people. However, the politicians in this country are not even trying to fix the real problem: the fact that the economy is still arguably stuck in a recession. Instead, they are talking about measures that could make the situation even worse.

Among other things, politicians are talking about the idea of having mandatory hiring quotas for handicapped workers. Recently, the Obama U.S. Department of Labor considered requiring federal contractors to hire at least 7% of their new employees from the ranks of the handicapped. Former Senator Tom Harkin of Iowa has long wanted to "make the issue of disability employment a national priority." Likewise, Delaware Governor Jack Markell has also pushed this issue as a top priority.

The politicians have often talked about how federal agencies need to do a better job employing handicapped people like myself. In 2010, President Barack Obama signed Executive Order 13548 that specifically set a goal of hiring at least 100,000 additional handicapped workers by the end of 2015. The Office of Personnel Management has estimated that handicapped employees constitute 7.5% of the federal workforce. The figures increase to 11% when you add veterans who are at least 30% disabled. As of now, more than 200,000 handicapped workers are now employed by the federal government.

What is the big picture for handicapped workers? Still under-employed. The recession that began in 2008 and that is still arguably going on disproportionately affected employment for handicapped folks. A much greater percentage of handicapped workers lost their jobs compared to able-bodied workers. There are misperceptions about handicapped workers and negative attitudes linger.

There are also legitimate concerns that accommodating handicapped hirelings could be expensive or that health care costs could spike. Tax policy needs to be changed to alleviate these concerns. While the politicians and press both celebrate the anniversary of the ADA's passage, we need to reflect on what we were promised when the law was passed. That is, handicapped people were promised an equal opportunity to work.

Currently the economy is recovering and veterans are returning from the War on Terrorism, and kids in special education programs are making their way through public school. What we as a nation need to do is make sure that the handicapped among us are treated fairly and squarely.

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## Book Reviews:

**Colonial Arkansas, 1686-1804: A Social and Cultural History by Morris S. Arnold.** (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1991. xv + 232 pp., index, notes, cloth, \$28.00).

Back before there was there was a territory officially called "Arkansas," there were settlements in the area of the future state. These settlers were Frenchmen who lived in the area under the jurisdiction of the colonial governors of Louisiana. These Frenchmen were primarily engaged in hunting and trapping with the fur trade their primary line of work.

Arnold's book centers on the town that would later become known as "Arkansas Post." It was a French/Canadian outpost that was founded during the early Eighteenth Century. This town never had much in the way of population and the area remained a backwater in the French colonial empire in North America.

**Colonial Arkansas, 1686-1804** by Morris S. Arnold is not an especially good book. It is weak on matters to both colonial politics and the military situations that the settlers found themselves in. It is a shame that this is still the only book that has been published about this interesting subject.

## **The Ironclad Alibi** by Michael Kilian

This is the third novel in one of the most frustrating series of historical mystery novels ever written. The hero, Harrison Raines, is a slavery hating member of a successful Southern family of tobacco planters. It is never clear just why he hates slavery. It is this abolitionist spirit that drives him to serve the Union during the Civil War as an intelligence agent in the Secret Service. His being a member of the Southern plantation aristocracy gives him a base of operations in the South from where to work.

Raines has a constant companion named Caesar Augustus, a black man. Raines supposedly freed this guy, but the black man hangs around him and acts just like a slave. Even worse, the supposed abolitionist Raines treats him like a slave. This is but one of the reasons just why it is difficult to buy into the idea of Raines being a rebel against the Southern plantation aristocracy from which he sprang. This helps makes Raines a character that the reader finds it difficult to believe in.

There are other ways that hampers the quality of both this novel and this series as a whole. In every book, Raines has a top secret mission of the most utmost importance to accomplish. However, he seems more interested in the ladies than in doing his duty for the Union that he supposedly believes in so much. This is in contrast to James Bond who, despite his messing around with females, always knew that his duty came first. Harrison Raines, on the other hand, always seems to treat his mission as an afterthought.

Additionally, there is always a murder that complicates things. Raines always takes the attitude that solving the murder is more important than his espionage mission. However, he never solves and of these murders and he never really does his duty to the Secret Service either. The end result is frustration for the reader who expects much better given the fact that author Michael Kilian was one of the most outstanding writers for the *Chicago Tribune* when that newspaper was one of the best papers in the nation. As for the title of this particular book, there are ironclad warships, but no alibi.

### **The Star Rider** by Doris Piserchia

Doris Piserchia is one of the most unjustly obscure sci-fi writers around. Part of this is because her last work was published in 1983. The other part is because all of her work is experimental. This particular novel is about telepathy and telepathic communication. It is interesting through its length. This one is well worth looking for through the stacks at your local library and through the collections at your local used book store.

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### **Fanzine Reviews:**

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

#### *Fadeaway* #46

Quite a bit in the latest issue of *Fadeaway*. The main article is about *The Shadow* with an in-depth rundown about both the magazine and the radio show. There is also a decent amount of stuff about the character, although not as much as I would have liked. There was also mention of a *Shadow* comic book, but hardly anything in detail about it or about later *Shadow* comic books. News about the march of Political Correctness with regards to the HPL and Cecil Rhodes statues. Sad to see Mr. Jennings joining the ranks of those who want to fight alleged fascism with real fascism.

There is a list of available back issues for \$6 a pop. Some of the pre-E-Fanzines issues look pretty interesting.

Pretty interesting article about comic books about how, contrary to the reports in mundane news media, comic book sales are not doing especially well now. Some discussion on why sci-fi became so popular during the 1970's. Mr. Jennings reports that even in the late 1970's, people made unkind statements whenever he evinced a love of sci-fi.

This ties in my experiences at Platteville High School in 1983 where I was run down for reading a sci-fi book during study hall.

As usual, the best part of the zine is the Letters of Comment that this time ran to about 20 pages.

<http://efanzines.com/Reluctant/ReluctantFamulus-106.pdf>

#### **The Reluctant Famulus #106**

For the most part, Issue #106 of *The Reluctant Famulus* was just as good as previous issues. Only problem was an unfortunate column by Matt Howard that was loaded with all sorts of errors. Every factual claim that he made was factually erroneous. For instance, he claimed that the *Saturday Evening Post* was founded in 1897 by Benjamin Franklin. This was most interesting since Franklin had passed away 107 years earlier.

Gene Stewart writes about "fascist capitalism" without spelling out what exactly he means by that. Does he blame Obama for this? Also, he writes that "magazines are scarce." Is he aware of the huge numbers of webzines of various genres that are being published? Or does he not consider them as being magazines?

Mr. Alfred D. Byrd's follow-up was every bit as excellent as the first part about what if the South won the Civil War, especially in pointing out that if the Confederacy had won its independence, then there is no more reason to believe that the USA would have been reunited than there is no reason to believe that the USA will ever become reunited with Great Britain.

Is the letterhack Milt Stevens the same guy who back in 1975 wrote the piece, "Visit to a Pulpy Planet" that appeared in *The Alien Critic* #12? If so, one wonders how would have handled himself if, instead of Detective Tom Lange, he had to answer 200 or so questions from Johnnie Cochran pertaining to his house in Simi Valley.

As is the case, with most other long-running fanzines, the LOC's were the best part of the mix.

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## Game Review:

### Masks of Nyarlathotep Chaosium 1986.

Back during the years 1997-2000 when I was a member in good standing of the heavily gaming oriented Little Rock Science Fiction Society (LRSFS), they had the attitude that by the mid-1980's, all he innovation in the creation of roleplaying games (RPGs) had withered away. That being the case, they believed that chronologically, the very last RPG ever created that was worth playing was the 1986 Chaosium effort **Masks of Nyarlathotep**.

Although this was originally created for Chaosium's *Call of Cthulhu* system, it can be easily adjusted to play in other role-playing systems. This alone makes this an unusually good game. The fact that it is generally considered the single best game ever based on the works of H.P. Lovecraft makes it even better.

This game's background concerns an archaeological expedition led by a wealthy New York playboy who comes across as a slightly insane 1920's version of Hugh Hefner. The expedition discovered something big in Egypt, but the leader chose to keep it a secret while the expedition proceeded deeper into Darkest Africa. However, the expedition was reportedly destroyed in Kenya by the natives. An author who is also a respected authority on archaeology has uncovered something about the expedition's true fate has called you up to ask for your help, but before he can tell you everything, the call is cut off.

That being the case, what you the player and your friends do is trace the path of the Carlyle expedition and find out what really happened. This game really adds a wallop to the *Call of Cthulhu* system. It adds 29 new magic spells, 11 new monsters, 57 supporting characters, 21 different classes of people as well as a new skill. This latter is Martial Arts. It seems strange that the *Call of Cthulhu* system did not have any sort of martial arts skill prior to 1986, but there you are. There are also hundreds of clues for the travelers to use in this game.

There is quite a bit of materials included in this game. It is all done with a nice 1920's period look. The same goes for the game's packaging and is very tastefully and elegantly done. As far as RPGs go, **Masks of Nyarlathotep** is just about perfect. If my friends in the LRSFS were right about this being the very last RPG ever created that was worth the bother playing, then this is the very best way for a line of game development to end at.

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## Movie Reviews:

### **The Adventures of Pluto Nash** (2002)

There are some movies that are not meant to be great art. They aim to be nothing more than a fun way to pass time and eat popcorn at the same time. **The Adventures of Pluto Nash** is one of those movies.

Eddie Murphy is great as the intrepid hero Pluto Nash as he fights the sinister space mafia. Originally, Nash was a small businessman who the mafia tries to shake down. However, Nash decides to fight the mafia in what turns out to be one of the most slapstick sci-fi adventure flicks of all time. Thrills, spills and chills abound in this wild and wacky funfest. **Pluto Nash** is a well-plotted futuristic sci-fi adventure story with a comedic bent.

It also features a great cast with Rosario Dawson, Pam Grier, John Cleese, Randy Quaid, Peter Boyle and Jay Mohr. Murphy is good in the title role. Randy Quaid almost steals the show as Murphy's robot companion & bodyguard, Bruno. There are other hilarious robot characters such as a prostitute robot. Cleese plays James the chauffeur robot driver of a luxury car. This movie also features great special effects and pretty good music. The lunar environment that it was set in was quite interesting.

**The Adventures of Pluto Nash** is set on the Moon in the year 2087 and the Moon is built up like a Las Vegas type settlement in space. There are also some beautiful scenes of Earthrise and exteriors of lunar habitats. The photography in this flick is exquisite.

Essentially, **The Adventures of Pluto Nash** is a science fiction comedy along the lines of 1984's *The Ice Pirates*. The goofy gadgetry should keep you amused and the one liners only add to the comedy. This movie is also a sharp satire of other science fiction movies.

Basically, this is what back in the pre-TV era would be called a B movie. It has a fun plot and lots of action. You can tell that the actors really enjoyed themselves while making this movie. The fact that the actors obviously had so much fun helps make it easier for you to have fun watching them. If you just want to relax and have fun while eating popcorn and drinking pop, then this is a great movie for you. Essentially, when you just come down to it, **The Adventures of Pluto Nash** is a kid's flick. And what a kid's flick it is! This movie is heartily recommended for everyone who wants get their rest and relaxation watching a fun family movie.'

### **The Amazing Spider-Man** (2012)

The 2012 flick **The Amazing Spider-Man** is the single greatest Spiderman movie ever made. It is also a great family film. It is also very entertaining. A young man Peter Parker (Andrew Garfield) is bitten by a spider and acquires incredible super powers. He soon develops a recipe for making artificial webbing so that he can go about New York City like a humanoid spider.

Andrew Garfield is a marked improvement in the role of Peter Parker aka Spiderman over Tobey Maguire. Likewise, Emma Stone in the role of Parker's girlfriend Gwen Stacy is much better than the vapid Kirsten Dunst who played Parker's girlfriend in past Spiderman movies. Just these two casting decisions alone make this a much better movie than its predecessors.

At first glance, the story of this flick is not much different than that of the first Sam Raimi Spiderman movie. Peter Parker gains amazing powers such as super dexterity and incredible tactile strength after being bitten by a radioactive spider. Parker also humiliates the high school bully Flash Thompson. Parker also starts climbing all over New York City.

However, there are some very real differences between **The Amazing Spider-Man** and the three Sam Raimi Spiderman movies. First of all, in the Raimi movies, the bite of the radioactive spider bestowed upon Peter Parker/Spiderman the ability to shoot organic webs.

In the original comic book, Peter Parker invented his own formula for artificial webbing. In this way, Parker gained super powers through both accident and design. This movie restores the original comic book's version of how Peter Parker created the artificial webbing and the result makes for a better movie.

Additionally, in this flick there is a very real romance between Peter Parker and a girlfriend who is worthy of him. In the Raimi flicks, the girlfriends were all a bunch of doltish losers. Finally, in **The Amazing Spider-Man**, the fate of Peter Parker's parents was presented as a very real mystery while in the Raimi movies, they were hardly even mentioned. While it is true that this movie is much better as a Spiderman flick than any of the Raimi movies, there are still some problems.

For instance, this movie was missing the magical spark that people have come to expect of superhero movies. The origin story of the green lizard bad guy in this movie was patently unbelievable. On top of that, the reptilian villain looked and acted too much like the Incredible Hulk. In a way, this is also a way in which this movie stays true to the original comic book since Dr. Curt Connors aka The Lizard was always one of the least convincing of all the bad guys in comic books.

Overall, a good case can be made that this is the very best of all the Spiderman movies made thus far. If you liked the Sam Raimi Spiderman flicks, then you will definitely love this one.

### **Fast Company (1938)**

When you look through Hollywood history, you will find there are times when movies or movie series came about for seemingly unlikely reasons. For instance, following the success of the A budget "Thin Man" movies, theater owners started complaining about the time lag between the production/release of new Thin Man movies.

In order to please these theater owners, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM) decided to produce/release a series of three B budget movies. These films were about the husband and wife detective team of Joel & Garda Sloane. As you can expect, the Sloane's were a knockoff of the Nick & Nora Charles husband and wife detective team from the Thin Man movies. Essentially, MGM's Sloane detective movies were the Thin Man flicks done on a lower budget.

Perhaps the most unusual aspect of the Sloan detective flicks was the fact that in each one of the three movies in this series, different actors and actresses played the husband and wife detective team. In first film in the series, the one that is the subject of this review. Melvyn Douglas played Joel Sloane and Florence Rice played Garda Sloane. Although Rice is pretty much forgotten today, back in 1938 when this movie was made, she was a major actress.

The Sloane detective series were unusual in that the detective couple were in the rare book business. The husband was widely regarded as an expert in the field. Rare books is an area where there are all sorts of forgeries and other frauds, Also, they are skillful at recovering lost or stolen volumes for insurance companies. In order to survive in this business, you have to develop detective skills that are useful in other areas including solving murder cases that the incompetent cops can't handle. This was a departure from the pattern set in The Thin Man where Nick and Nora Charles lived off Nora's inheritance and did not do any real work.

Although the Sloane detective flicks were considered B movies, they were actually on a similar level of quality as the A movie Thin Man films. The two main actresses in **Fast Company**, for instance, were Claire Dodd and Florence Rice. Both of these actresses were much better than Myrna Loy in the Thin Man series.

Although it has been more than three quarters of a century since *Fast Company* was made, both Claire Dodd and Florence Rice continue to impress as truly gifted actresses. Both Dodd and Rice were remarkably beautiful women whose careers faltered as they grew older. It is a shame that both performers have been left in obscurity.

The first movie in the Sloane detective movie series was **Fast Company**, released in 1938, four years after *The Thin Man*. The shady rare books dealer Otto Brockler (George Zucco) was murdered and the list of suspects is quite long. It is up to the Sloanes to find out who really committed the dirty deed to prevent an innocent man from being executed for a crime that he did not commit.

The end result is a fast paced movie that has just the right amount of humor thrown in. This movie is quite entertaining even though the lead actor (Melvyn Douglas) is stiff and unconvincing as a rare book dealer. Florence Rice has to shoulder the movie with the assistance of Louis Calhern, Claire Dodd and Nate Pendelton.

However, to watch a movie that fully realized the potential that the Sloanes had for mystery mixed with comedy, moviegoers had to wait for the sequel *Fast and Loose*. In any event, **Fast Company** proved to be the first of a series of movies that you can love for good old time mystery fun.

### **Movie Review: The House Bunny (2008)**

The House Bunny is a good example of a modern day fluffy comedy. Certainly, its script is well thought out and executed to be a barrel full of laughs for its intended teenage audience. The House Bunny is a flick that includes Hugh Hefner, the Playboy Mansion and a Playboy Magazine centerfold photo shoot in addition to other unusual ingredients for a comedy. In the hands of most directors, this would be the mix for a tasteless piece of trash. However, under the direction of Fred Ward, The House Bunny is a well Done comedy that actually veers on the verge of being a comedy for the whole family.

The House Bunny stars Anna Faris as Shelley Darlington, A quintessentially dumb blonde Playboy Playmate who gets kicked out of the Playboy Mansion by Hugh Hefner himself. Darlington winds up homeless and wanders around without a clue as to where she is or what she wants to do. Eventually, she meets some members of the local Zeta Alpha Zeta sorority. This local sorority house is in particular danger of losing its charter due to a lack of recruiting new pledges. In a rare display of initiative, Shelley offers her services as a "housemother" for the goofy sorority sisters. The girls hire her and soon Darlington's bubbly optimism and ability to make homely girls beautiful make Zeta Alpha Zeta the hottest sorority on campus.

Shelley Darlington's chief helper in this sorority house makeover is Natalie (Emma Stone) who begins the movie as a rather awkward sorority sister. Under Darlington's guidance, Natalie blossoms into a flower of beauty and competence. The other girls are all interesting characters with the pregnant Harmony (Katharine McPhee) being the most hilarious. As a group, the girls all have the same problem in that they are all pretending to be what other folks want them to be like instead of being themselves. Shelley teaches them to be true to themselves and to be themselves.

Perhaps the most surprising aspect of *The House Bunny* is the stunning performance of lead actress Anna Faris who previously played the role of Cindy Campbell in all four installments of the *Scary Movie* series, as well as other movies and guest roles in TV series, without ever hitting the big time. This is because most of her pre *House Bunny* roles were as just plain dumb blondes. In other words, Faris's previous roles were basically one dimensional versions of Shelley Darlington. In *The House Bunny*, Faris showed that she was capable of both being your basic dumb blonde, but also of playing a much more nuanced character who is also capable of leadership.

While Anna Faris is surprisingly effective, that cannot be said for the rest of the acting. Other than Faris, the most effective actor is Colin Hanks in the role of Shelley Darlington's boyfriend Oliver. Of the remaining acting talent, both Emma Stone and Katharine McPhee are nice in their roles while Hugh Hefner was just being himself. The rest of the acting ranged from average to pretty bad.

Despite the inconsistent acting, most of the remaining aspects of the movie were fairly decent. The work of director Fred Ward was good and the cinematography was crisp. *The House Bunny* is a surprisingly good movie. The script was aimed at a teenage audience and it succeeds at creating a movie that is very funny by the undemanding standards of teenage audiences. The best line in the flick was "You're 27? That's like 59 in Bunny years." A great deal of what the producers intended as being humor is of the sexual innuendo variety. For instance, Shelley refers to one's eyes as being "the nipples of the face."

Had the filmmakers based this movie's humor around the characters and the situations that they are in, *The House Bunny* could have been just as funny, but it would also have been a comedy for the entire family. Just why they did not follow this route is subject to speculation, but it would appear that the movie makers felt that including the likes of Hugh Hefner and the *Playboy* milieu made this movie "sexy" and if you have a "sexy" movie, then you should not go for the clean stuff.

In the end, *The House Bunny* is a surprising movie. It works well for the teenage audience that it was made for. It does have a strong, positive message for its targeted teenage audience. The lead actress gives the best performance of her career thus far and director Fred Ward has a strong movie on his resume. This is a movie well worth considering going to the theater for.

### **The Rocketeer (1991)**

**The Rocketeer** is a greatly underrated science fiction action flick set during the late 1930s in the Great Depression while the world was inching toward World War II. This particular movie was made in 1991 and based on a graphic novel by Dave Stevens.

This movie is of the same flavor of the Republic serials of the 1930s and 1940s, and it captures the spirit of the pulp magazines of the time.

This is fitting because the original Dave Stevens comics captured the spirit of 1930s aviation pulps, as well as Doc Savage and Republic Studios. Unfortunately, Doc Savage could not be included in this movie, but Howard Hughes made a great substitution. The film was full of action and humor, cliffhangers and character, just like Stevens' creation.

The movie opens in 1938 when air races were as important to the American people as auto racing is today. Heroes were made out of aviators. Airplanes that later became famous as fighters in World War II, Curtis P-40s and the British Spitfires, were originally designed as racers. Hollywood is at its zenith, and Cliff Secord (Bill Campbell) and his friend/mentor Peevy (Alan Arkin) are getting their newest stunt plane ready for a national flying competition. Meanwhile, Cliff's girlfriend Jenny (Jennifer Connelly) is a struggling young actress trying to make it in Hollywood, one bit-part at a time. Cliff finds and dons an experimental rocket pack.

Unknown to Cliff, actor/Nazi agent Neville Sinclair (Timothy Dalton) wants the rocket pack very badly indeed, and when he overhears bit-player Jenny and her boyfriend Cliff talking about the rocket while on the set of his latest film, he immediately sets out to seduce the young actress in an attempt to get to Cliff and his coveted jet-pack.

Although the film does have its credibility stretched pretty thin in places (why doesn't Cliff ever run out of fuel or get his legs burned off?) the story is solid and enjoyable, and the visual effects still hold up quite nicely. The movie also features a neat explanation for how the "HOLLYWOODLAND" sign was shortened to "HOLLYWOOD."

The acting is consistently good. Campbell was perfect for the role of Cliff Secord. Arkin made a great Peevy, although he's a bit less cantankerous than in the original comic. He was more of a Connecticut Yankee than grouchy mechanic. Dalton made a great Errol Flynn type, and this was the first on-screen hint of Flynn's involvement with the Nazi's during World War II. Much has been written on the subject, but nobody, until this picture, dared to dramatize it.

This movie has everything: Hollywood in its golden age, German spies, G-men and gangsters, elaborate nightclubs, big band music, and best of all, a hero who flies around like a bat out of hell with a jet-pack strapped to his back. The fact that during his first few times with the rocket he kept crashing into everything made Cliff Secord more believable as the Rocketeer.

**The Rocketeer** is a "feel-good" movie. It has an all-American, baseball, and apple pie feel, to it, and for that quality, it's great. It's a very good movie for kids and adults alike. That's why this movie is wonderful.

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**Website Reviews:**

<http://chivalryorcery.myfastforum.org/>

**Chivalry & Sorcery RPG Fan Site** is a major forum devoted to the great tabletop RPG of Chivalry & Sorcery that many hard core gamers consider to be the best game of its type ever made.

<http://ericreedmysteries.blogspot.com/>

**Eric Reed Mysteries** is a brand new mystery novel review blog by Eric Mayer & Mary Reed who have announced that they will begin writing mystery novels together under the pseudonym of "Eric Reed."

<http://www.masksofnyarlathotep.net/>

**masksofnyarlathotep.net/** is a comprehensive resource website for the tabletop RPG **Masks of Nyarlathotep**.

<http://www.medievalists.net/>

**medievalists.net** is a leading website devoted to the study of the Middle Ages.

<http://www.medievalwarfare.info/>

**Medieval Warfare & Medieval Arms** is a major website that offers in-depth coverage of the military history and weaponry of the Middle Ages.

<http://skymanbob.com/>

**SkyMan Bob** is the official website of noted astronomer and *Astronomy* Magazine columnist Bob Berman.

<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.

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

**TGN: Tabletop Gaming News** is a leading website dedicated to covering the world of tabletop gaming and related subjects.

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**Letters of Comment:**

**The following was from Lloyd Penney's website since the email he sent did not reach my Inbox....it's probably stuck in a server somewhere...**

Dear Charles:

Thanks for Fornax 4...this may have to be a fast one, I am so far behind in my locking. Wish me luck in this...

As a journalism student, I have made complaints to various local media outlets, saying that they are facilitating the dumbing-down of the public by running entertainment stories and similar fluff too near the top of the newscast or front page, while taking their minds off the important news of the day. Rather than do what I learned to do long ago, the only letter I received said that to ensure that the public continues to watch the newscast, get the best ratings and sell the most advertising, they had to run stories that the viewing public wanted to see, not what the newsroom thought they should see. Chicken and egg logic, I'm afraid, but no matter what, the public gets dumber, and their attention span gets shorter, if that is possible.

No one may have responded to the Best Fan Writer/Fanzine discussion because with the names that appear on the ballot, we are totally unaware of their writing and where to find it. Fanzine fandom as we know has truly been passed by Modern Fandom (TM).

My only real experience with D&D is the fact I went to school with Ed Greenwood. While I was taking notes in journalism classes, he was designing rooms of the dungeon that he sold to TSR for megabucks. Who spent his time the best way?

Not much of a loc here, but it is what I can squeeze out of my tired brain at the moment. Send me issue 5, and I will see if I can do better. See you then.  
Yours, Lloyd Penney.

[Well, Modern Fandom, as you call it, may have more adherents, but fanzine fandom is clearly better. There is for certain hardly any name calling in fanzines and there is real discussion of the issues going on. You look at blogs, such as those being written by this year's "Best Fan Writer" nominees and all you have is just so much mean spirited vituperation. None of those nominees added anything to Fandom. When I suggested to them that they at least try to interact with fans by reading and then sending LOC's to fanzines, all I got was that my comments never got put up. Before you blame the slates for this, the non-slate winner Laura J. Mixner is just as bad as the others and there was an analysis done by the i09 website that showed that if it were not for the slates, the nominees for fan writer and fanzines would have been just as bad. What this means is that those of us who prize traditional fanzine fandom need to get our act together and promote fanzines to the larger fandom instead of just writing to each other. Easier said than done. ]

Dave Haren tyrbolor@comcast.net

Hi Charles,

Seems like I missed commenting on issue 3 by procrastinating which is not the same as amacrastinating. I haven't finished my application to the procrastinator guild.

I'm not Canadian according to the white mans weird laws which paint invisible lines on the ground which turns the first people into Mexicans on one side of the line and Indians on the other. I did my full obligation service 62-70 as regular US Navy.

I don't have much to say about anime. I follow One Piece because it has the sense of wonder quality I remember from early science fiction. I also like the Railgun and her friends because of the lessons hidden in it about being loyal and letting your friends help when you have a problem. I spent enough time around the Japanese to know how alien their society really is. Some parts of it are admirable and other parts are horrible but both parts are there for a reason.

I was a gamer before D & D and played it using the original Greyhawk and Chainmail rulebooks. It was so incomplete it forced players to fix it so it could be played. High school takes a dump on anyone perceived as a bit different it is part of the indoctrination schools inflict on people. I horrified my whole math class once by talking to the teacher as if we were equals. Ruined my reputation. That's the kind of nitwit behavior students have been shaped into. You hear a lot of loose talk about being unique but if you actually are the whole culture converges to pound you into the slot they have imagined for you. The SF community is the same even as they pay lip service to idealistic visions, they mean well but viewed from a distance they aren't exactly mainstream material themselves.

Role playing games evolved quite a bit over the years. The crude attempt to allow miniature gamers a quick game as individual figures started to mutate into full blown systems elaborated by all of the added nuances of players imaginations. The best version got buried in personal and business animosity. That was the Fantasy Trip system of Metagaming. GURPS had to redo the whole thing from scratch with slightly more awkward mechanics but it is still around while TFT is gone. I did some playtesting for the GURPS system but now that the new editions are out I'm probably no longer famous...: ^) The amount of dis-information about RPGs is appalling to those who were there at the time. To hear the tedious stick in the mud Gygax described as a minion of Satan luring innocents into celebrating the Sabbat with his witch cult is so ridiculous that you question the sanity of those who talk about it with a straight face.

The last time we called up Satan for some ritual abuse he was so badly battered we bandaged him up out of pity and sent him home without any more abuses.

Well keep on keepin' on. I do enjoy reading your ezine.

Warm Regards

Dave Haren

The picture is the diversity example from the UNH webpage. Fun to contemplate as apparently they couldn't find a white student to pose for the picture...: ^)

[That seems so typical of colleges nowadays, in what way was Gary Gygax a "tedious stick in the mud"? Do you mean his buying *Amazing* and then failing to do anything to either promote it or improve it? Or do you mean his disastrous appearance on 60 Minutes in 1986? Also what was TFT? Question: Did your military service help make you a better war gamer? ]

opuntia57@hotmail.com

From: Dale Speirs Calgary, Alberta

I don't play RPG games but your essay on D&D triggered a memory. Attached to this email is a scan of a newspaper article I clipped years ago about the suicide of a young Calgary boy that was blamed on D&D. I didn't know the boy or his family but my coworker did; they were next-door neighbors. The suicide was the talk of the office lunchroom for a couple of days and then forgotten.

I'm never going to do anything with this clipping, so perhaps you might want to reproduce it in your zine. Other than the family, I am probably the only person left who remembers this story. [Interesting thing about that was how after I left Platteville in 1984, the national discussion about D&D shifted from Satanism to suicide. On that, the critics were on much firmer ground.

It was reported on 60 Minutes in 1986 that there had been more than 50 suicide cases linked by law enforcement to D&D. Nearly all of them involved kids whose characters had just died in-game. One of these was the son of Pat Pulling who became D&D's Number #1 critic. It's always seemed interesting how no other RPG ever got linked to either Satanism or suicide anywhere near as much as D&D.]