

THE DRINK TANK 336

8TH ANNUAL GIANT
SIZED ANNUAL!

Jay Lake is a friend. He's also an amazing writer. He's been so kind over the years, including writing for several issues of *The Drink Tank*, and basically being one of the best human beings I've ever had the pleasure to know. It was amazing that he was up there on the stage when we won the Hugo and I ran up to him to give him a giant hug, and then, in a moment more prescient than he could possibly have known, Jay said "I think we know what one of next year's dramatic presentation short forms nominees is gonna be" and that was that. He's written amazing novels, some of which have been on my Hugo ballot.

He also has cancer. Has for good while and has been fighting it hard and hard and hard.

And thus, he's been blogging about his trip through Canceria, facing *The Fear*, looking at the world around him as he always does, with an eye half-setting in madness. He's fighting it, and now there is a moment when things look bleak, a new tumor showing up while he's on chemo. It looks bad, he himself has said that he sees the end coming near. It's gotta be hard staring death in the face, there's no way I could ever do what he's doing the way he's doing it. I would be a quivering mess. Hell, I can hardly handle everyday life with the threat of dying from a random bus crash looming on me!

But Jay, Jay fights. He won't go gently into that good night, and one of the things he's doing is a fundraiser on youcaring.com to raise funds to do whole genome sequencing. I won't pretend to understand what that's all about, but it could help to determine more about the cancer, and perhaps help to fight it better, to give him more time, to get him to his daughter's high school graduation, to see the final installment of *The Hobbit*, to get him to the Westercon where a bunch of his friends are gonna be GoHs!

The funding is now complete, and overwhelming in a sense. The goal was 20K, they're over 40K right now, which is huge, no? It also means that Jay can likely take at least a bit of a leave of absence, since he's been working not only as a writer, but at his day job, the entire way through his treatment. An extra 25 grand will go a long way to helpin' him out. So, go and support it if you can, <http://www.youcaring.com/medical-fundraiser/sequence-a-science-fiction-writer/38705>.

Jay's work is so great, so very great, and his struggle makes an important point. We love our authors, and we love our friends. This is one of those cases where a person in need is both. Jay's been one of the folks who is the closest to his fans, many of whom become his friends. Crowdsourcing has changed the way we can support our authors/friends, and Jay's example is one of the most impressive. Many authors, and even a few fans, have spent ages developing networks of people through their blogs, or their Facebooks, Twitter, or most often all of the above, and it has shown that these networks can be used to make good things happen.

I've been following Jay's posts since the start of his treatments. I love the guy, he's a star that shines bright, a personality that, to me, exemplifies what the current crop of SF's pros should be. He's a part of fandom, and a part of prodom, but most importantly, he's an amazing guy, and it's been something that has bugged me. I know, I know, I'm an emotional guy, but every time Jay mentions that there's a new occurrence, well, I take it kinda hard, because maybe it's just me, but I know there are hundreds more stories he's got for the world, and more importantly, there are more strange, dark and wonderful conversations that won't happen unless he's there to be a part of them.



ON JAY LAKE BY CHRIS GARCIA



Let us start with a note from the wonderful Beth Zuckerman!

I enjoy many b/w films but I just *hated* Eraserhead! It's the most awful film I've ever seen, and the reasons have nothing to do with its lack of color. At the time that I met a person who eventually became one of my best friends, the first thing he told me was that I had to see Eraserhead. It took me and Eric years to get around to seeing it, and when we did, we were disgusted and told our friend we were disappointed. When he was on his deathbed last September, we were still arguing with him that Eraserhead sucked, while he continued to insist that it was an awesome film.

Eeeewww....

Eraserhead was an interesting film. I get what Lynch was going for, and he absolutely nailed the texture and disquieting factor. It scared the hell out of me the first time I saw it. I have to say that the song In Heaven Everything Is Fine gets stuck in my head a lot!

Thanks, Beth! And now, Mr. Andy Hooper!

Dear Chris,

When you write the third LoC to a fanzine within six weeks, the desire to blow smoke up the editor's ass as to what a bright character they are almost completely disappears. If I emphasize the snark with little of the usual niceties, that may be why.

Well, Snark is my second language...

Issue #335 of The Drink Tank is certainly different from other recent numbers! So many contributing writers, and nothing from Taral. Will his silence be permanent? The dramatic piano music rises as the "To Be Continued" card is flashed on the screen....

The convention report is perennially one of the least appealing forms of fan writing. Readers who did

not attend the convention instinctively resent reading about other people's fun, and those that did want only to explain how their experience was different from the author's. Most writers organize a con report as a simple narrative of events, presenting them in the same order in which they occurred. Therefore, unless the convention itself has some kind of logical dramatic structure, a narrative that simply recounts the events that take place there will inevitably contain too many digressions, and end with the anti-climax of a dead dog party. Juxtaposing several convention reports in the same issue magnifies these problems. Thus, I'm sure that the various Westercon/Worldcon/Dragoncon reports that fill #335 are actually much better than they seem to be. But this is always the problem with themes that unify the contents of a given fanzine; several correspondents will inevitably tell you that you write well, but they just don't like baseball.

I rather like Convention reports largely because of exactly what you say! I don't look for dramatic structure, I just look for the fun folks had so I can share in it.

It is helpful to have one's prejudices reinforced. DragonCon has always given a strong impression of being "Worldcon for Idiots," and Fred Moulton's game efforts to find something intellectually engaging in his experience there do nothing to dispel that. His account, larded with about 250 words too many about public transit, simply screams for an editor to help it out with some judicious cutting. But you don't do that in your fanzines.

Nope, I don't, largely because if someone is willing to write something, I'm willing to run it! Plus I doubt my eye could produce an improved product...

In contrast, Dave Romm's piece made Convergence 2012 sounds like a lot of fun. Most Minneapolis conventions are. I loved the big photo of the fans doing communal exercises in the ballroom. And I was even more impressed with "Howeird's" experience of watching the STS Endeavour arrive at its permanent home in California. It occurred to me that one reason why Seattle's Boeing Museum of Flight had not been able to secure one of the retired spaceships was that our perpetual cloud cover would make its arrival here far less spectacular. But even more than a historic exhibit, I want new spacecraft to take us back up and out again.

There was supposed to be an Air & Space Museum on Moffett Field in the giant hangar, but the discovery of PCBs and the removal of panels on the hangar, led to scuttling the project and the shuttle they were promised went to LA. At least we got the fly-over!

Gosh, we all love Bradbury now that he's dead. At least part of Fandom despised him at one time, or at least it professed to – I recall a folksong to the tune of the Battle Hymn of the Republic, with the chorus "Glory, glory, how we hate Ray Bradbury." It wasn't all play-acting; Bradbury's attitudes toward technocracy ("I don't write about the future. I try to keep it from happening.") were the antithesis of our attempts to rule the future through scientific progress. This tension became a familiar feature of the SF landscape. I find myself wondering if these attitudes were as present in his early work and life as well; the average SF writer didn't break through by appearing in The Saturday Evening Post, either.

I always liked Ray, though I didn't read a ton of his stuff. I don't get why some fans so dismiss his work (and Kurt Vonnegut's). No matter that their views, they wrote damn impressive stories. The Veldt is one of the greatest SF stories ever written!

I enjoyed the list of the 25 additions to the National Film Registry. You don't have anything intelligent to say about some of them, but neither would I. Laurel and Hardy were geniuses, but all their best work was in silent pictures, and stylistically different from the realist sensibilities that have since conquered the world. Abbot and Costello were also good, but Sturgeon's Law applies to their work as much as it does to any other prolific performer. 3:10 to Yuma is the riveting movie High Noon is purported to be. Slacker is a wonderful love letter to Austin, Texas, and worth praising for that; the Reagan-weary world it portrays will never pass our way again. The single most exciting inclusion to me is The Middleton Family at the New York World's Fair, because it represents such a convergence of my personal obsessions – World's Fairs, Science Fiction and its fandom, the impending World War, cultural, technical and scientific history – its all there.

I've written up the Middleton Family for the Computer History Museum's blog, but alas, they've pushed back putting it up on the website! I've rewatched a bunch of these films, and I certainly have to agree, 3:10 to Yuma rules!

The short shrift that you give to Two-Lane Blacktop has already inspired me to research a piece on just how important that low-budget car chase picture was in shaping the course of the past 40 years. Esquire magazine

published the entire screenplay in 1971, and Brock Yates, the organizer of the Cannonball Baker Sea to Shining Sea Memorial Run, better known as “The Cannonball Run,” cites Two-Lane Blacktop as a major inspiration. You list cast members Dennis Wilson and James Taylor as if to undermine the film’s credibility, but it also features an excellent performance by the brilliant Warren Oates. And it preserves images taken along the classic “Route 66,” before it was decommissioned in the 1980s. I’m much more enthusiastic about its inclusion than I am about The Matrix or A League of their Own.

The Cannonball Run should be on the Registry. I love that movie!

Your reaction to The Times of Harvey Milk suggests a whole anthology: “Alternate Milk.” One wonders what leadership Harvey would have given during the AIDS years, and how much greater a martyr he would seem if so many of the people who loved him had not died themselves only a few years after him.

There’s a feeling among historians of theatre that the entire world of Broadway would have been seriously different if there had been no AIDS epidemic in the 1980s. There is potential for an anthology. Someone call Mike Resnick...

There is an impressive range of stuff in the 50 pages of TDT #335, but of course I clicked the link in anticipation of your comments on The Watchmen. You’ve obviously done some homework to come up with production particulars, but I’m not sure we’re in agreement on the central themes of both Moore’s novel and Snyder’s film. In short, Moore’s core premise is that power is toxic, and superpowers are supertoxic. Dr. Manhattan’s powers are, as he senses, incompatible with human civilization, and his very existence is gradually destroying us. Ozymandias, although he murders several million people in the process, is arguably the most committed hero in the story – his actions have the desired consequence of driving Dr. Manhattan from the Earth and freeing us from the burden of his miracles.

Yeah, the way a person reads the actions of Ozymandias is probably the best way to figure out their general feeling towards the world!

It’s abundantly clear that Moore sees truly powerful Superheroes like Ozymandias and Dr. Manhattan as corrosive to our humanity. But I don’t think he would agree that the golden age Watchmen were ever a positive phenomenon, even though they fought criminals on a more equal footing, and could be killed as easily as the racketeers they pursued.. I think Moore expresses this in the relationship between The Comedian and the original Silk Spectre. The fact that the contemporary Silk Spectre was conceived in an act of rape seems to compromise the golden age heroes even more thoroughly than their actions in the cold war. The Comedian’s crimes put his murder in a very different light, undermining the moral simplicity of Rorschach’s efforts to solve it.

One enormous virtue of the graphic novel that the movie lacks in the ingenious sub-narrative of Tales of the Black Freighter, a pirate-themed comic book which is being read by a young New Yorker on the morning of Ozymandias’ destruction of the city. Moore reasoned that a society “blessed” with real heroes would quickly lose interest in them as comic book characters, and proposes that an EC-like complex of horror, SF and especially pirate-themed comic books would replace them. It tells the story of a mariner whose ship is destroyed and his crew killed by marauders partially inspired by Bertolt Brecht’s Threepenny Opera. Moved to increasingly desperate and immoral acts in the effort to protect his home city from the pirates, he ends up



attacking it and murdering his own wife by mistake. In despair, he swims out to the Black Freighter, where he is accepted as one of the pirates. While it illustrates a significant consequence of the reality of costumed heroes, it's also a clear echo of Ozymandias' efforts to remake civilization in a more perfect form. Moore is so intent on this part of the story that he even proposed a real world artist and editor – Joe Orlando, and DC's Julius Schwartz. This second storyline appears in an animated featurette that accompanied the DVD release of the movie, but I don't recall any reference to it in the film itself. I know it would have been highly impractical to include it, but I miss it anyway.

There is, among the three different cuts available on DVD and Blu-Ray, a cut that integrates the Black Freighter stuff into the narrative. I don't own that cut, but I know Linda does!

Visually, the film is an amazing pleasure to watch; as you say, there are panel for panel reproductions of the graphic novel's most amazing scenes. It was delightful, for example, to see Lee Iacocca shot through the head in the attack on Ozymandias' offices. The sound design is also remarkable, and the use of classic pieces of popular music like "The Times They Are A Changin'" and Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah" was an effective means of creating the historic context in shorthand.

That's one thing that Zack Snyder understands: the importance of audio. There are some directors that really get that, including my man Kevin Smith.

Ultimately, I think Watchmen is an extended cautionary note to the fanboys of the world: Be careful what you wish for. Obedience and order created by the powers of masked heroes is no more wholesome or desirable than power wielded by political repression or military force. Man and Superman are not, in the long term, compatible.

I totally agree with you on that point!

Oh, and for the record, Bruce Wayne's father was a surgeon-engineer who revolutionized the quality of life for all Gotham City, and Bruce fights his enemies with devices of his own invention. If it isn't science fiction, what the hell is it?

The argument contrary to that is that if Batman is science fiction, than any story of an athlete who uses steroids is a science fictional story. I dunno, I could go either way...

Happy New Year,

Andy Hooper

And to you, Andy!

And now, there's Lloyd Penney on a bunch of issues!

Happy New Year!, and I have some more comments, I hope for yet another trio of Drink Tanks. How did that happen? 333, 334 and 335 await...

333...I wish I had the time and talent to be as prolific as Taral when it comes to fan articles. He has the time, and probably wishes he didn't, and I don't, and I wish I did. Letters of comment can take upwards of 60 to 90 minutes per publication or series of publications, like trying to make up something on the past three issues. I wish there were more people writing in the local, it would make for a wider conversation for all.

He's a helluva writer, and I love getting to run his stuff. I imagine this is how Dick Geis felt in teh 70s as the main source of Tim Kirk illustrations.

Taral, if you were to stop writing for this fine zine, Chris would have to make it more of a perzine. Chris, is this what you want, or will you have to start pestering more people to write for you? I have promised you my Loscon 39 report, but the job hunt is on again, and I don't have a lot of time on my hands at the present. I have in mind an article about my own fannish change of mindset over the past few years, but I am still examining that idea to see if it's worth writing about, and how to start constructing it.

Hey, job hunt is more important, and I know that you'll send things my way when you get the chance... or I'll be forced to hex you!

My loc...no more disruptions in employment? I spoke too soon. I was let go the first work day back from Christmas holidays. I already have some resumes out, and I don't think I will be out of work for too long this time around. Still I think we're going to England, come hell or high water, we may be getting some help from Yvonne's family, and I will be continuing to monitor any Montreal in 2017 Worldcon bid.

Linda and I went over our plans for the next year when it comes to travel since we're trying to pack in a trip to the UK in 2013. As it stands, WorldCon may not happen for us. That makes me a bit sad as I haven't missed a North American WorldCon in a decade.

334...Ah, finally, you have one of my movies. WALL-E. Bless your heart. I have seen this movie four or five times, and I have the DVD, mostly because there is so much message in this movie. It contains the classic cautionary tale, about too much you name it...consumerism, obesity, ease of living, so much more, that had brought the human race to a stand-still, emotionally, progressively... We need to heed these warnings, and it was presented this way. Whether we pay attention, or just decide to enjoy the animation, is entirely up to us.

Perhaps this is the film that best shows that when we get what we want, we often lose what we actually need...

I can't comment on the current shootings in Connecticut...there is simply too many points of view, too many things I could say that would be sure to offend someone, and I am sitting safely in a relatively gun-free society, outside of America's borders. I wish there was enough will to overcome a powerful gun lobby, and see exactly the intent behind the Second Amendment of the US Constitution. I have a friend who moved from Canada to the US because he was nearly salivating at the idea of being able to carry a concealed weapon. With that attitude, that's the kind of person who shouldn't be able to get a gun. Too many people die needlessly at the end of a gun, wielded by someone with some kind of mental problem. Both these problems need to be addressed. **My Uncle put up a thing saying "I'm not Anti-Gun, I'm pro-gun control." on his Facebook. I responded with my current thinking: "I'm pro-gun control AND Anti-Gun." While there are more guns in Canada per capita, which I find weird, there's less gun violence. There are lots of reasons why (racial matters is what folks like Michael Moore point to, economic disparity, poor mental health availability, etc, etc) but the fact is there are other countries that have seriously restricted guns (England banning Hand Gun Ownership after Dunblane) and we should do that, if not more, at least.**

I am still pleased when people comment on how many letters I write a year. For the record, in 2012, I wrote 280, down from 310 the previous year.

I haven't been able to LoC nearly as much as I'd like, but I've had a few here and there. I gotta work on that!

Rock 'n' Roll HoF...yeah, Rush! We met them at the CBC open house some years ago, most from the Toronto area. I have yet to get my hands on the latest album, a steampunkish effort, heard it is fabulous. There are other Canadians in the HoF, I think Bachman-Turner Overdrive might be there, have to check it out.

I don't think BTO is in yet (they'd make my top ten), but Neil Young is in. He's Canadian, right?

WALL-E...I would like a Buy 'n' Large t-shirt. There might have been too much message in this movie to merchandise it, and besides, BNL also stands for Bake Naked Ladies. (They should be in the HoF soon!) Monsters, Inc. is also one of my favorites, which is why I am looking forward to Monsters University this coming June.

And you know, I HATE Bare Naked Ladies! There's a gag in Community where Jeff Winger rants against them and I am totally for that!

335...Whoops, I am not a comic reader, so I never saw the comic or the movie. Still, it's tough not to know the names of the characters.

And now you can catch up!

I read about the National Film Registry additions online...most I haven't seen, but I have to agree on The Matrix. Wish Keanu Reeves had been able to do more with it. I still think there are Mayans who are laughing at us foolish Westerners because we misinterpreted their ancient calendar, but also at the great hoax they let us play on ourselves.



Keanu is great if you cast him right. He's in three of the 52 Weeks movies and he's awesome! And the Mayans were, officially, lame.

Ah, the Mark Times awards. I haven't heard from these guys in a while. I am happy to say that I've been a part of one, possibly two award-winning radio-style shows. I am starting to look for more voice work, possibly narration.

The Dragon*Con article...this is a convention I will never go to, simply too big and too much walking, but I have to admit that the steam-powered monocycle looks extremely cool. Yes, there is a greying of fandom, but there are other fans to succeed us. Wish they were also reading fanzines and SF novels, but they like media SF, comics, anime, gaming, etc., and they have found what they like, just as we did. Smofcon will be coming to Toronto in 2014, I think, but I am not sure if this is something I should go to...I am retired from conrunning, and my experience is, I believe, very dated. I don't think I'd have anything to add to it, and I doubt I could afford it.

Dragon*Con is six conventions and a couple of academic conferences crammed into one building. I wanna go someday, because there are so many awesome things, but the timing of it is bad.

Three issues, two pages, that's not too shabby. Yvonne is watching the Murdoch Mysteries Season 4 and 5 DVDs I bought her for Christmas, and Season 6 of Murdoch starts tomorrow night on its new network, the CBC. I think I am, have a great 2013, hugs to the Lovely Linda, see you next time.

Yours, Lloyd Penney.





HUSBANDS

MEDIA ALMOST MORE DELICIOUS THAN QUICK BREAD
BY KRISTINA KOPNISKY

Husbands is a tightly written, content packed, rollicking comedy series. The premise of the show is highly relatable while being set in a near future alternate universe. A high quality production, *Husbands* has a phenomenal cast and production team that successfully utilize media mediums outside the rigid broadcast megacorp system.

Husbands tells a story that anyone who has been in a long term relationship can relate to. Political-social commentary inherent in the premise of the show is secondary to the love story of Cheeks, a controversial actor with no known last name, and Brady Kelly, a wholesome professional baseball player.

Season 1 opens with Cheeks and Brady waking up as unintended newlyweds after a night of Las Vegas debauchery. Even though they have only been dating for six weeks they attempt to make it work. The feel of this season is similar to classic sitcoms like *Happy Days* or *Night Court*. Each of the 11 episodes is four minutes, or less, in length.

Season 2 is set three weeks after the nuptials. Through the tensions of their nascent committed relationship we gain a greater understanding of who the boys are. Bell and Espenson have created a three fold viewpoint of the relationship: through the eyes of the media, how Cheeks and Brady's friends see them and how they are behind closed doors. Comprised of three roughly 10 minute episodes season 2 has a contemporary feel akin to *How I Met Your Mother* and *Big Bang Theory*. Watch and listen closely for the myriad of fandom references that are sprinkled through out each episode.

In 2012 the minds of Brad Bell & Jane Espenson became a TARDIS to the *Husband's* universe. This newest branch of the franchise was originally released in digital format of 15 pages each. Each of the six issues is a cross genre exploration with the unifying theme being a deepening of the bond between Cheeks & Brady. To add to geek appeal the hardcopy format will be released in March of 2013 with an introduction written by Neil Gaiman. Currently the digital versions are available in a bundle, or individually if you want to pay one dollar more, on the Dark Horse Comics website. The hardcopy is also available for preorder.

Jane and Brad have discussed using classic sitcoms like "*I Love Lucy*" as inspiration for the feel of *Husbands*. With the exception of some FCC restricted language there is nothing in either season that deviates from what can be seen on *Nick at Night*. Most pronounced is the similarity of Brady to Ricky. The relationship between Lucy

and Ethel/Cheeks and Haley as well as Ricky and Fred/Brady and Mark can be seen clearly in the “Lucy” episode “Home From Europe” http://www.cbs.com/classics/i_love_lucy/video/

Are you still asking why fen should be interested in the *Husbands* franchise? Let’s start with the fandom demi god Jane Espenson. Go ahead and look her up on IMDB. I don’t have enough room in this piece to fully convey her awesomeness. Brad Bell is fen. No really, he is a big ol’ fanboy. I’m not sure if he qualifies as otaku but I would be willing to bet he has seen his share of anime. Sean Hemeon, who plays Brady, is a vampire fan and has had a small role in that vamp soft core cable TV series many of us know and love. Jeff Greenstein, who directed both seasons, may not have had a huge hand in fan appealing media but he is a walking encyclopedia like many of our favorite fellow fen. Check out his Twitter account (@blue439) to see what I am talking about. He deserves honorable fen status. Now let’s look at some other cast members of the series. Alessandra Torresoni is one of the main supporting cast members. There are many, many, many cameos by other fan appealing stars and geeky media personalities. If none of these other people cause you to turn off your dvds of *Firefly* or *Dollhouse* to go check out the series these next few sentences will. The fen god JOSS WHEDON ...let me repeat JOSS WHEDON appears in season 2. The man himself does not just have a cameo but plays a major supporting character. In all three episodes of season 2.

Husbands delivers fantastic production quality on a shoestring budget. Jeff Greenstein has been quoted as saying that the total budget for *Husbands* is less than the bottled water budget for *Desperate Housewives*. You won’t be able to tell by watching either season. Season 1 was funded entirely by Jane Espenson. Season 2 was funded by Jane Espenson and a \$60,000 Kickstarter effort. To give some sense of scale, each episode of the series *Carnivale* cost an average of two to four million dollars to produce. I would love to see what the *Husbands* team could do with a four million dollar budget.

An extra bonus on top of all this fabulousness is the general accessibility that fans of the series have to the creative team behind *Husbands*. They are all chatty on Twitter. Jane Espenson and Jeff Grenstein are particularly responsive to fans who attempt actual conversation on Twitter. Bell, Espenson and Hemeon are also fond of hearing fans squee on Twitter about seeing or meeting them at events. Brad Bell has made a point of stating that taking pictures with them and autographs will always be free of charge anytime Team *Husbands* makes appearances at events or conventions. Should you feel inspired to make *Husbands* fan art, or cosplay characters from *Husbands*, they would love to hear about it and have a page set aside on the official website to showcase your efforts. They really do love their fans.

In various interviews Jane Espenson has referenced banana bread when discussing how they divided up the 2 seasons. It is also a fact that you can watch both seasons in the time it takes to bake a loaf. So I challenge you to put my statement to the test: Grab your mama’s best banana bread recipe, or use this one (<http://allrecipes.com/recipe/grandmas-homemade-banana-bread/detail.aspx>), and while you are waiting for your yummy homebaked treat you can watch both seasons of *Husbands* on youtube at <http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLA496E67789939596> . Enjoy!

PS- Please let me know what you think of the series by tweeting to @riotkop



THE TERROR OF DEMOCRACY

BY JAMES BACON

The British Science Fiction Awards are somewhat special to me. Maybe it is because I am a member, or because I frequently feel they reflect my reading a little more than say The Clarke Award, or last year they awarded Chris Priest, despite his rebellious attitude and over the years, I have liked them, a lot.

They happen fast. Members nominate in a variety of categories usually in January, and then the ones with the most nominations are short listed by February and then voted on by and at Eastercon, where the award is usually presented. Last year I was on a panel about fanzines, I think, when the awards were on and I missed what we would regard in the Home for Wayward Bachelors as a kerfuffle. Anyhow, the BSFA as one fannish friend put it, apologised to everyone and their dog, for everything and their dog and it was all OK.

I had a number of nominations that didn't make the cut this year, but I do not feel so bad about that, and actually it gave me the impetus to go and write about them. Of course the Hugos are ahead, and I have further time to read and cogitate on other works that may be valid for that award, but at this stage, I know I enjoyed these.

I have to admit, my intake of prose has reduced considerably this past year, as my intake of comics has expanded by some crazy amount. I find myself reading more and more comics. So diverse, and broad and even French.

My first, a short story by Lynda E. Rucker, "Where the Summer Dwells." Now this really captured my imagination. It is a dark fantasy work I think, and definitely not science fiction although it is not really horror in a gore way at all as much as a really chilling tale and not really fantasy. What it is, is great literature which is hard

to place, and it has a really nice flow to it. There is a railway element which always makes me interested and I thought overall it was a very slick in its delivery of the cold chill but gentle with it. (*F&SF* Sept/Oct 2012)

Rucker also caught my imagination with "Red at the End of the World," which was a very interesting mash of SF and fairy tale, and I really liked how it came together. It was discreet about its setting, giving the reader enough to flavour the sense of time and place, the situation that has befallen without a saccharin aftertaste of overkill. Red is an excellent character, and I liked this story a lot.

(*Daily SF* <http://dailysciencefiction.com/fantasy/fairy-tales/lynda-e-rucker/red-at-the-end-of-the-world>)

Yoon Ha Lee's "The Battle of Candle Arc" is a wonderful story. I think it is a short story, although may be longer in the Hugo categories. It is really beautifully written, and is an amazingly created universe. I liked the use of calendars, religion and maths but the vessels sound incredible. There is so much invented here, so much terminology that is new and interesting and yet somehow the author gets across the story really promptly. I decided it was a space battle but wondered if it could be something else. Vessels were referred to as moths, and so there were fangmoths and arrowmoths and there were different types of propulsion. The factions, as they are referred to, and the



religion which is connected to the calendar were fascinating. That a general of one faction could command another group was superb. It all just worked really well. I would have liked something on the piece by the author, some insight or thoughts. I also wonder if this is a taster for something longer, deeper and perhaps even more convoluted, a book or series. I can only wish. Regardless I was lucky that I found this story, and I really enjoyed it.

Clarkesworld http://clarkesworldmagazine.com/lee_10_12/

I love Lavie Tidhar's writing. I adored *Osama* and his short stories can be really up my street. "A Lexicon of Steam Literature of the Third Reich" is quite an interesting one. It is very cleverly written, and I wondered at times what and if he was basing parts of the lexicon upon. An alternate history, where the Nazis won the war and DAMPFKRAFTMYTHEN or Steam Power Myths are a very popular genre of the Reich, across the world. I liked the series of entries. Things such as the DAMPFKRAFTMYTHEN WELTKONVENTION or Steam Power Myths World Convention, the excerpt with Brunhilda and Conrad which was a fine piece of shallow writing, but insightful into the thinking of the fictional author, that the Irish are now amongst other rare near-extinct lower races kept in Berlin's Zoo and that 'The Man in the High Castle (1962) posits a world in which Germany lost the War (see also FALSE REALITY, HITLER LOST). All known copies of the novel have been destroyed. The author perished in a rehabilitation camp shortly after.'

It is all very good.

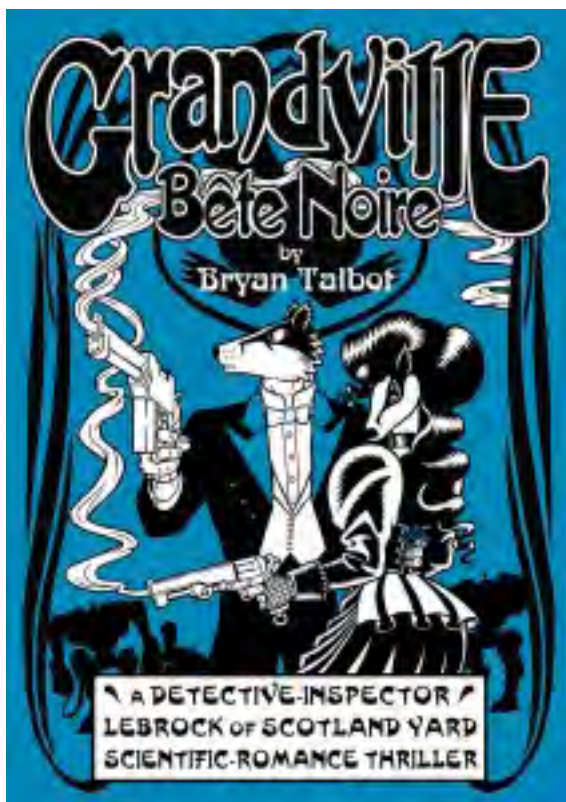
Of course there was another kerfuffle, in June when this was released on Lavie's blog, as he had previously tweeted 'I see Steampunk as "Fascism for nice people"'.

There is a lot more to that statement than I could ever deconstruct, and Lavie has also written about Steampunk on his blog, but I often have chatted with Chris about the British Imperialistic bias by many in the hobby, and how some peoples might see the red coat and pith helmet as older versions of a red armband and brown shirt.

Interestingly, some folk seemed to decide to boycott Lavie's books. That'd be after Captain Charles Boycott, once of the British Army 39th Foot, land agent in Co Mayo for Lord Erne, who was denied local labour during the campaign by Charles Stewart Parnell and Micheal Davitt as part of the Irish Land League for fair rent, fixity of tenure and free sale. That'd have been in 1880, height of Victorian grandeur, or subjugation.

Irony. Lots. All round. Gets my vote.

<http://lavietidhar.wordpress.com/2012/06/25/fascism-for-nice-people/>



China Mieville's "3 moments of an explosion" takes a few minutes less than Lavie's "Lexicon" to read, but in a similar fashion takes one to a different place easily and imparts upon one a different sense. It is really quite a quick read, but I have read it a number of times. I felt that I got it straight away, but even so I feel drawn to it, seeking what deeper meanings are hidden in between the words.

<http://chinamieville.net/post/31360742827/3-moments-of-an-explosion>

The BSFA doesn't have Graphic Story or anything like that, so I have previously nominated comics in the Novel section as have others it seems. *Grandville Bête Noire* is a blindingly beautiful crime adventure comic in which Bryan Talbot manages to satirically reflect many of the modern quandaries that we are faced with, while making art itself an important and fascinating element of the story. This is the third comic in the *Grandville* series, and my favourite so far. Set in a fantasy alternative history world, many of the characters are anthropomorphic, possessing animal faces with humanoid bodies, and we follow the badger, Inspector LeBrock of Scotland Yard on his latest adventure. Britain was beaten by Napoleon, and although at one stage part of the French Empire, is now an independent republic. LeBrock is a cunning detective of the

Yard, although perhaps too clever and blunt for his own good or career.

Talbot is just so wonderfully clever with his story telling. For instance in a single panel, we see a bear wearing a duffel coat, wellingtons and a Sloane ranger hat, quaffing a thirst, walking a little clumsily past the 'Cour d'Ecosse'. The facial expressions on two peelers looking on make one wonder what will happen to this bear, who is named after a train station.

Talbot can really give you the sensation of action taking place. The sequencing is perfect and of course the art is sharp. The line work is not too fine, giving it a boldness and clarity that then the wonderful colours ably fill in. In many panels, one eye is drawn to the surroundings. Be it the type of motive footwear a passerby is wearing to the designs, artworks or decorations in buildings, the detail is phenomenal. I really felt like there was a depth to the artwork that matched the depth and thoughtfulness of the story. The whole comic is utterly wonderful—the incredible inventions, the alternative uses of steam, the beauty of the buildings, interior and exterior.

What only makes this comic better is how at the end, Talbot himself not only writes about his ideas and how he got them, but also one learns how the CIA then funded the abstract art movement for twenty years during the Cold War. One can read this story, and just enjoy it and one can read it and allow the mental thought provocations to percolate, to look further or enquire oneself, to contemplate political, artistic or human issues. Yet it is a delightful adventure, beautifully drawn. The perfect Christmas present for any intelligent comic reader.

<http://www.bryan-talbot.com/>

While the article 'Modern art was CIA 'weapon' revealed: how the spy agency used unwitting artists such as Pollock and de Kooning in a cultural Cold War, Independent on Sunday, 22nd October 1995' is worth looking up.

www.independent.co.uk/news/world/modern-art-was-cia-weapon-1578808.htm

Red Shirts by John Scalzi just cements his place on my bookshelf. *The Old Man's War* series is one of my favourites. I have really enjoyed it and I was unsure what *Red Shirts* would be like, given initially it was obvious that it would be a reference to those red-shirted men in the original *Star Trek* who always got killed on away missions. I should not have been bothered. Scalzi brings his originality and wry sense of humour as well as a realistic angle to the whole concept. I always wondered why *Star Trek*, especially the *Next Generation*, seemed to never feature regular crew. You know, the actual sailors, not just the damnable officers. It always felt elitist in a way, unlike the 'Gropos' episode of *Babylon Five* which included the recognition that any military machine would need troops to sustain itself. Like who does the dirty jobs? Anyway, I loved how Scalzi made the book a parody as well as in many ways a homage to the redshirts, or those poor souls who have to do as their commanders wish. I have always enjoyed SF with some humour in it, and it is indeed a tricky thing to get right, but this is laugh out loud good.

Ian Tregillis had me convinced for a long time, based on the style of his writing, that he must be from the UK, and probably London, until the term 'sidewalk' showed up halfway through his novel. Then the hard fact that he lives in New Mexico was realized. But it shows the care and attention to detail that the man has. *Bitter Seeds* is the first in a trilogy depicting a different Second World War an alternative history with a nice fantastical element of magic and human capabilities enhanced by torture and science.

I have to say, at the start, well the scenes in London anyhow, could have been from the pages of *The Machine Gunners*. It was perfect and felt well-crafted.

The story is cracking good stuff. A German scientist has managed to force First World War orphans to harness various abilities over some considerable time through their will power by horrendous means and body modifications.

Raybould Marsh is not exactly the quintessential naval officer, but is working as they sometimes do in intelligence. He encounters these unnatural Germans and their abilities during the Spanish Civil War and is soon on a path to provide some sort of defence against them, and turns to a college friend, who dabbled in something mystical which was more than just fanciful. Soon British warlocks with the ability to summon forces, not exactly for good, but forces that for a type of blood duty, come to the aid of Perfidious Albion. The fact is that this negotiation is not exactly clean. There is a nastiness to the magic just as in war there are horrible decisions taken and lives lost. It is darker and of course therefore more enjoyable, while the German super-weapons are not exactly always that super. Gretel for instance, who is cognisant of the future, and understands it, is possibly the

most interesting and doesn't always do what is expected.

I suppose the image of Masterman and Maximan fighting one another in Grant Morrison's *Zenith* is so strong that this would normally be the image I think of, when a person beyond human emanates from Nazi Germany, but this novel is a different beast altogether. There is a much stronger feeling science element to the Germans, while the magic is very well thought through.

Anyhow, I really enjoyed it and especially like the UK covers from Orbit.

Railsea. Train captains hunting underground monsters, and one in particular, a big white one. China Mieville really captures my imagination with this story. It is so unusual in its setting and I really like his sense of humour. I had wondered about *Kraken*, as I had felt that it needed more humour, but with this story with its fantastical placement, obvious attachment to *Moby Dick* and a really beautiful dialogue with that smile at places, I felt this had everything spot on. Well, for me. I am not so sure the excitement for such trains would be universal.

While I am speaking of Mr. Mieville, I also think that *Dial H*, a DC monthly ongoing comic, is pretty stunning, and asks some interesting questions. The Brian Bolland covers have really been eye-catching and the story very different DC fare, while his *London's Overthrow*, which I found in a book shop after it was already online, is a very interesting set of pieces. Living in London as I do, I found that again his writings had me looking deeper and contemplating some.

<http://www.londonsoverthrow.org/onepage.html>

Along with *Dial H*, there have been other comics that are very strong and I hope get a nomination in the Hugo's. I didn't punt these forward for the BSFA, as they were not UK published. Straight away I would have to say that *SAGA* is a definite. Any SF fan who has not read this, is missing out, not only for the ideas, but the terrific dialogue and humour. It is a wonderful mix of Fantasy in a space setting and is terrifically personal, in a very skilled way.

Manhattan Projects is also one worth looking at, there is a wonderful SF element to this, and of course there is a lot of science going on, given the title, but it is not the same Manhattan Projects that history knows. Meanwhile, I would recommend Peter Panzerfaust, as alternate history, messing with literary characters as one of my favourites of last year, it is well told and the best is yet to come, with Hauptmann Hook on the Horizon. *Hawkeye* may be a marvel mainstream comic, but the aesthetic look and the excellent dialogue makes it a winner, the humour and sense of absurdity, pitched in a realistic way, make it delightful. Boomerang Arrow. That's all I need to say on that one.

All of the above, are on the cusp of having their first 6 issues or have had them collected, allowing the casual reader a full story, and making them prime for nomination.

I would also flag up *Storm Dogs*, it would be eligible, but that eligibility is odd with the Hugo and a graphic novel or full story is preferable I suppose, but this is good solid SF.

Overall, despite the BSFA not choosing all the things I personally find my favourites, I still think last year was a good year, and hope that if you have not yet, you give some of the above a shot.

That's the thing about democracy, you can choose.



Lights and Shadow from Michele Wilson



WORDS AND ART FROM NALINI HAYNES

Once upon a time a long, long time ago -

Well, would you believe six months ago, then?

Okay. Once upon a time six months ago, at Continuum -

Not the TV series, NO. Continuum is a national SF convention in Victoria, Australia.

Once upon a time six months ago at a science fiction convention in Melbourne, Boxcutters -

Not the kind using Stanley knives to cut cardboard boxes. Boxcutters is a podcast about what's on TV (<http://boxcutters.net/>.)

Once upon a time six months ago and a science fiction convention in Melbourne, the Boxcutters volunteered for a panel. The program said: Australia has a great tradition of SF & fantasy children's television, but why don't we make it for adults? Josh Kinal and John Richards from the Boxcutters podcast investigate with special guests!

Josh and John ARE the Boxcutters. Really. Can I continue?

Okay. So. In their infinite wisdom, Josh and John took liberties with the above program description and, apparently at Josh's behest, decided to debate "All science fiction on television is crap." At a science fiction convention. Seriously.

During the preliminary speeches John vowed and declared that this debate AND this topic were NOT his idea AND that he'd warned Josh that Josh was likely to be LYNCHED.

Josh took the affirmative. I suspect that John REFUSED. Unsurprisingly they didn't find any volunteers to join them in this debate.

Early in the debate Josh showed clips of a few TV shows. INCLUDING *Blakes 7*. Admittedly he showed the bit where the Liberator was attacking Avon and Blake with really cheesy special effects...

BUT JOSH USED *BLAKES 7* TO ILLUSTRATE HIS ARGUMENT THAT ALL SF ON TV SUCKS.

...

I came home and promptly posted this on Dark Matter's website:

Have you ever wondered WHO the suck fairy is? I found out today at Continuum 8. SOMEONE played a scene from *Blakes 7* with Blake and Avon as part of his illustration to 'prove' that all SF on TV is rubbish. Yes, that's right, the suck fairy is JOSH KINAL.

PS I enjoy Josh's work on [Boxcutters](#) - just not his choice of topics or choice of sides for a debate.

PPS By the time John Richards had responded ONCE, Josh started to try to change the basis for the debate... <http://www.darkmatterfanzine.com/dmf/suck-fairys-secret-identity-revealed/>

Josh, being the stirrer that he is, promptly 'liked' and retweeted my tweet broadcasting this link.



BEFORE



AFTER BEFORE WATCHMEN BY CHRISTOPHER J GARCIA

It didn't quite work out as I had thought it would. Yes, the first issues of the *Before Watchmen* comics sold very well, took up several of the monthly top-sellers slots, made DC a ton of money.

It didn't last.

Even before the summer ended, the *Before Watchmen* comics were slipping down the sales registers, still making some damn good change, no doubt, but they weren't the hottest things in town. I was wrong, it turns out, to think that they'd be the biggest sellers of the year. As a whole, they sold a lot of comics, but still, DC had three titles that sold better (and all their Issue #0s did much better) even when they are taken as a whole. Was this the audience rejecting DC's mad cash grab? I don't think so, if that were the case, those first issues would have been as widely purchased as they were. I think they rejected the stories themselves.

Which is a shame, as on the whole, they were my favorite comics of the year.

This year in comics, there hasn't been a lot to move me very far. Paul Cornell's *Saucer Country* certainly did. China Mieville's *Dial H* was awesome. the graphic novel *Gone to Amerikay* was really good too. IDW did some fun stuff, though the only one I'd say qualified as an artistic success is the *Godzilla* title (and may I say that I kinda wanna see *Mars Attacks Honey Booboo*, the concept of which has to be AT LEAST ten times worse than *Before Watchmen*). I read a few *Avengers* issues, and they were better than most. But, as almost always is the case, DC just had it all over Marvel.

And my comic of the year is *Silk Spectre*.

Amanda Conners is awesome, and her take on the 1960s in San Francisco was gold, especially with Darwyne Cook's writing anchoring the thing. I was impressed by the direction he took the story, but the ways

they explored not only the characters, but the setting and the reasons for the existence of each. As much as I expected to be let down after a first issue that didn't exactly set my world on fire, I caught what they were doing and I could feel my thoughts adjusting. By the end, the entire thing made sense and a read of *Watchmen* following it actually added layers to a character who I wasn't 100% sure of when I was first reading it. Was she Moore's vision of Silk Spectre II? Maybe not, but in the end, Conners' pushing of her into new corners made her seem a bit more flesh. The final issue of *Silk Spectre* is the best single issue of all the *Before Watchmen* comics.

The one I was most excited for had to be *Minutemen*. The backstory to *Watchmen* held much more sway over me than any of the backgrounders on the regular characters. Part of it might just be that Darwyn Cooke has the best mind of any of them involved in *Before Watchmen*, and maybe it's that he's so different from Moore, and in fact better suited to writing about the kind of team that the Minutemen are. I wish *Minutemen* were an on-going series, but alas it can not be. The fact is Cooke's vision of the individual Minutemen is just about as good as you could expect. The second and third issues were the best, while the fourth and fifth were a touch scattered. It ended right, and the way we were presented Silhouet made me fully understand what she meant to the series. Hollis Mason under Cooke's command is even better. The only thing that keeps it from being the best of them is that middle two issues. I really think that the way Cooke handled them was not only respectful to Moore's vision, but more accessible to the general reader than Moore's. That might be heresy, but it's true.

On the other hand, *Dr. Manhattan* was good. Not great, but good. It took a series of steps. This is the major departure for me. It's got the feeling of what would have happened if PKD were to have taken the *Watchmen* concept and played with it, and while there's a world-bounding story, it also feels like J. Michael Straczynski was just playing in Moore's sandbox. This is what folks who were afraid of the folks who took on the *Watchmen* characters doing, but it's well-done. That feeling of JMS trying to work like Moore in *Dr. Manhattan* is unavoidable, but it's still not a bad series at all. Part of that is the art of Adam Hughes. While Conner's work on *Silk Spectre* is most distinctive, *Dr. Manhattan*'s art drew me deeply in.

The *Nite Owl* comics were OK, but it was readable. I haven't finished *Ozymandias*, but I enjoyed the first issue quite a bit. *Moloch* was just meh. *Comedian* was an interesting comic that I enjoyed on one level, but not on others. This was so far from what I could imagine Alan Moore having intended. That is less important to me than to most folks, I imagine, but here, it was so obvious that this was a gimmick title. It wasn't vital to everything,

but it was fun, the dialogue was snappy, and I enjoyed the story, though I recognise that it wasn't great comic storytelling. One of the very few issues of *X-Men* I can ever remember loving was *Kitty's Fairytale*, where Kitty narrated a bedtime story that was all swash-buckley. I mentioned this to a hard core X-phile and he was aghast.

"There's the WORST *X-Men* story of all-time. It was just a lame gimmick."

But, you see, I loved the gimmick. That's the difference, and I can certainly understand that hard core *Watchmen* fans might hate the way they took *The Comedian* title, but I enjoyed it.

The worst to me was *Rorschach*. I don't think there's anything that you can do with *Rorschach* that won't feel tacked on. *Rorschach*, at least to me, is a fully-told story, and unless you're going to go back and give just 'Day in the Life' sort-of stories. there's no real reason.

Now, the hard question: was it worth it?

Hard question, and the one that I think is answered two ways. Was it worth it financially? Well, it basically happened that they all started hot and cooled by their third issues. They were, towards the end, selling like the rest of the mid-list, decent-selling titles that DC does. That's important because of the backlash. If they're selling like they were the regular titles, that means either



there's no backlash, people just flat-out forgot about all the hype and bought the books anyhow, or that they did turn their back on the books, but folks who don't regularly buy DC titles stepped up and bought these titles specifically because they were *Watchmen* titles. I tend to lean towards that latter scenario. I think that a fair number of hard core comics fans stuck by their guns (maybe buying the first issues) and that it was non-regular buyers who made up the rest, and after reading the first and second issues, faded away in their numbers, though keeping enough going to keep the numbers in-line with what the other titles were doing.

Second, story-wise, was it worth it. if it were only *Silk Spectre* and *Minutemen*, I'd say without question. I think that overall, those two titles, and *Dr. Manhattan*, make the entire project worthwhile from the point of view of adding to the world of the *Watchmen*. Was it respectful to Moore? I think some of it was, and some of it certainly wasn't. I know, I know, just doing the project is disrespectful, but I disagree. If you can bring more enjoyment out of the characters, then you should do it. Give the fans what they want. I know, that's such a naive thought-process, but it's true. What makes comics something that people will come back for is when we give them what they want. The argument that the creator's job is to give people what they need and NOT what they want, to me, that's the ultimate in egotism. If you give the audience what it wants, you are being ultimately respectful, and if you can give them what they want mixed seamlessly with what they need, that's when the magic happens.



Before Watchmen is not *Watchmen*. No question, but it does not diminish it, and I think there are parts that enhance the World of the *Watchmen*. There is some proof here of the classic wrestling (or TV, or Movie, etc) problem of Too Many Returns. At first, people were excited, whipped up and psyched, and as it went on, every time was with less returns. Diminishing returns, they call them, but at the same time, they add something, they can drop new ideas, new exposures, and re-introduce old material in a new light. I think a fair amount of *Before Watchmen* did that, though they almost certainly would have been better off just introducing it as a single Mega-Volume.

What next for *Watchmen*? Supposedly, there's no plans for anything after the ones that are out. I think a brief retirement is for the best. Would I expect more volumes in five, ten years? Sure, I would. This is a well that is not dry, but at the same time, I think they can tell in the sales graphs that it's not going to be a huge, long-term seller.

And will we see the *Watchmen* cadre in the regular DC Universe?

That is the biggest, and to a degree most terrifying question. I think they're smarter than that, I really do, because there is no way to do that and be able to keep the franchise special.

NOT THE MIRACLE OF JAMES GARFIELD

2012 BOOK REVIEW

BY HOWEIRD

~~It was a dark and stormy night.~~
~~It was a day just like any other, untill~~
~~was just sitting here minding my own business~~

I was online. Suddenly there was this blog. Suddenly there was this blogger telling us about The Miracle of James Garfield: How she had her heart set on buying James Garfield and hanging his happy, two-tusked face on her wall. And then there was this link to an earlier blog entry telling the whole story, and it was told with the kind of wit, charm and insanity which usually one only hears from filkers. As I was reading the whole story,

I was laughing so hard my monitor was shaking its way toward the edge of the desk. When James Garfield's fate was finally decided, I went back to the entry which got me there, and saw the note that there was a book. At the time there was only a hardcover version, but I bit the 30-round clip and in a few minutes it was in it's Amazon.com Prime way. She calls herself The Bloggess. Her name is Jenny Lawson, and the book is called *Let's Pretend This Never Happened: (A Mostly True Memoir)*.

I'm guessing the title is accurate, because people can't make this stuff up.

If the book is to be believed, she is the daughter of a batshit crazy Texas infraredneck taxidermist. I'm guessing here that infrarednecks are more redneck than rednecks, my guess based on the work of Christian Doppler, and my instinct that going the other direction – orangeneck – makes no sense at all. It's science, deal with it.

Jenny takes us, in somewhat chronological order, from her childhood to what was probably the present when her publisher finally had had enough and inflicted the manuscript on what I can only believe were unsuspecting typesetters at Amy Einhorn Books. Amy is a Stanford grad who has been publishing her "imprint" at Putnam (owned by Penquin) since 2009. Her mission is "to hit the sweet spot between literary

"There's something wrong with Jenny Lawson—magnificently wrong.
I defy you to read her work and not hurt yourself laughing." —Jen Lancaster

LET'S PRETEND THIS NEVER HAPPENED

(A Mostly True Memoir)



JENNY LAWSON
The Bloggess

and commercial—intelligent writing with a strong narrative and great storytelling.” Her imprint was off to an auspicious start with *The Help*.

Let’s Pretend is not on that plateau. It is basically a retroactive blog, a first-person journal told as if it just happened today. A blogography. What makes it an easy read is Jenny’s small vocabulary (growing up poor in Wall, TX might have something to do with that) and the fact that the chapters are short, and each one is its own little story. Like Michener’s *Tales of The South Pacific*, but without the grass skirts.

There are some seriously LOL moments, and the chapter titles are amusingly misleading (“Stanley, the Magical Talking Squirrel”, “And That’s Why Neil Patrick Harris Would Be The Most Successful Mass Murderer Ever”, “My Vagina Is Fine, Thanks For Asking”, “And Then I Snuck A Dead Cuban Alligator On An Airplane”, “Thanks For The Zombies, Jesus”). The book starts out as very promising, keeps some of its promises, sidesteps others and in the end abandons self-deprecating humor for honest self-deprecation with a tad too much waving of the blue card with the wheelchair icon.

The book gives very short shrift to the story of James Garfield, and makes no mention at all of the miracle.

If you are a fan of slapstick humor, especially slapstick humor involving roadkill hand puppets, you will be in stitches. Otherwise, you might want to wait until the paperback finds its way to your favorite used bookstore.

Let’s Pretend This Never Happened: (A Mostly True Memoir).

By Jenny Lawson

The Bloggess

April, 2012

Amy Einhorn Books/Putnam/The Penguin Group

ISBN 978-0-399-15901-5

Now available in Kindle, paperback and audio CD

<http://thebloggess.com/>

The entry which started it all:

<http://thebloggess.com/2009/11/its-like-losing-james-garfield-all-over-again-for-the-second-time-although-technically-i-wasnt-alive-when-the-world-lost-the-first-james-garfield-so-i-dont-really-know-what-that-was-like-but/>



MY BEST RELATED WORK BALLOT

BY CHRISTOPHER J GARCIA

One of the areas that I am always scratching around for come Hugo nomination time is Best Related Work. It's been called many things over the years, with Best Related Book being the longest-lived, I think, was Best Non-Fiction Book (maybe Best Related Book), but now, it's not only books. That actually makes things a bit harder. In this category, in recent years, blogs have been nominated, and a podcast, an album, and books, so how do you narrow it down.

It ain't easy, but I think I've got my ballot.

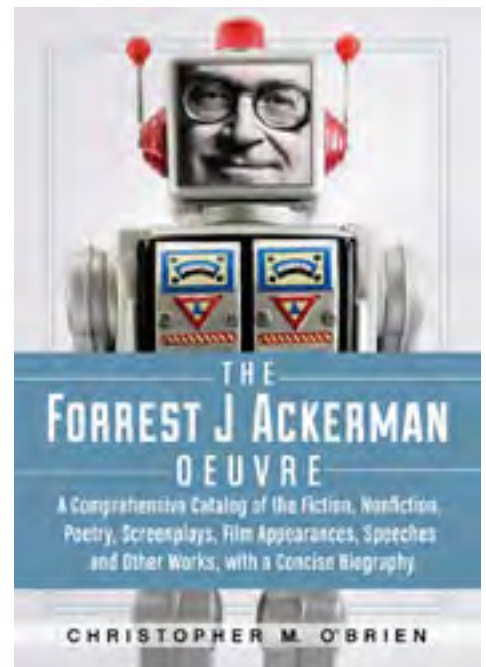


The first one is certainly *Chicks Dig Comics*. There's a good review of it in Journey Planet issue 12 (which you can find at the new Journey Planet website, <http://journeyplanet.weebly.com/>, as well as right here on eFanzines.com!) and it's a fine book. I actually thought it was 2011 at first, but it turns out that I was wrong! It's well-worth nominating, and if you haven't already bought a copy, go to <http://madnorwegian.com/> and get some!

The second, and the one that's actually closest to my heart, is a bibliography. Now, I know not everyone is as into the dude we call Forry as I am, but McFarland has put out an awesome book called *The Forrest J Ackerman Oeuvre: A Comprehensive Catalog of the Fiction, Nonfiction, Poetry, Film Appearances, Speeches, and Other Works, with a Concise Biography* by Christopher M. O'Brien. That concise biography is the big selling point to me. Deeply researched, it is illustrated with some amazing pictures of Forry with some of his friends, including some legendary actors and fans. The biography, at less than 30 pages of text, is very good, covers his life with a strong view towards his activities in publishing, and gives you an idea of what Forry did, though slightly less about who Forry was. Still, in the space it got, it did a very good job. The forwards were also excellent, including a reprint of an article from Stephen King that was excellent. The meat of the book is the bibliography (and yes, The Drink Tank's Forry Memorial issue is listed!) and it is thorough and wonderful. While there were a couple of things that didn't make it on, the mass of Forry's work was there and that's what matters. This is one of those books that is endlessly useful to folks like me who love Forry and hope to keep his name alive by keeping his work in mind.

Now, there's the idea of Podcasts. Pro Podcasts, vidcasts and so on go here, Fancasts in Best Fancast (I'll talk more about that in a future issue!) and I have two that I think belong on my ballot! The first is *Sword & Laser*. I love *Sword & Laser*, it's a great show and it should fall into the Best Related Category. Tom Merritt I remember from when I used to hang around TechTV when it was in San Francisco, and Veronica Belmont is a fellow Emersonian and we got the chance to meet at BayCon. She's done much better after leaving Emerson than I did, though I am the first Emerson grad to ever win a Hugo! I would say they have a pretty decent chance at winning if they get on the ballot, which would, alas, make me less special...

The other Podcast is *Writing Excuses*. It's been on the ballot twice



already, and have I lately mentioned that the *Writing Excuses* team and I will all be Guests of Honor at Westercon 67 in Salt Lake City in 2014? They do really good stuff, and while they haven't won, I could see it happening. I rather like their chances, and I have enjoyed their format for a while now.

Now here's where it goes a little off the rails for me. You see Best Related Work is so wide, almost anything SF&F related can fit into it, and thus I suggest a museum exhibit. In Seattle, there's the Experience Music Project, and in it, there's the *Icons of Science Fiction* exhibit! The EMP in Seattle is an amazing place. It's as good a rock 'n roll museum as there is (Full disclosure, I've never been to the Rock 'n Roll Hall of Fame) and the Science Fiction portion is exceptional. Hell, they've got a Frank Wu painting in there! It's web-presence doesn't do the exhibit justice (<http://www.empmuseum.org/at-the-museum/current-exhibits/icons-of-science-fiction.aspx>), but it shows that this is an excellent place for Science Fiction fans to experience the stuff that SF is made of. The interactives in particular are exceptional.

And that's five, but here are a couple of more potentials

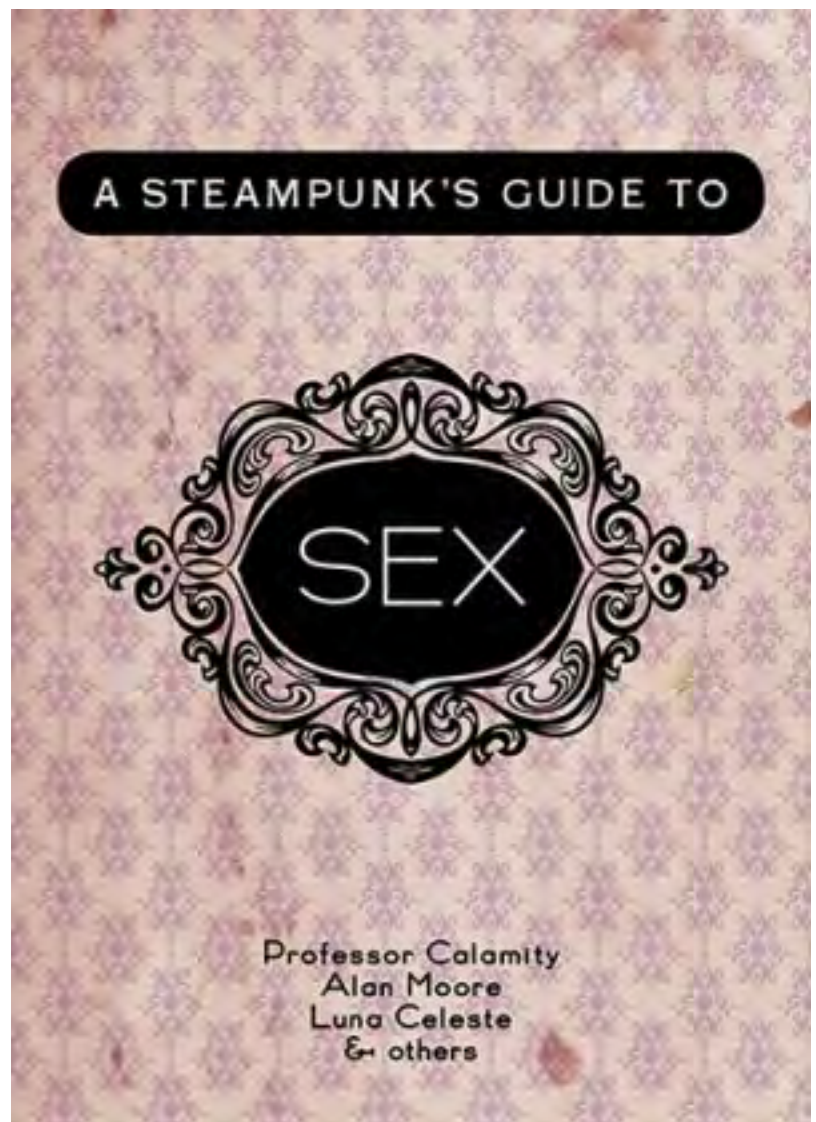
Another exhibit that deserves mentioning, and I imagine that the crowd that is dismayed that *Doctor Who* has conquered Best Dram Pres Short Form will be unhappy with, is *The History of the Universe in 100 Objects*. It's a funky book and the only reason I haven't listed it in my main picks is that I only got to read it while in a Bookstore! It's hilarious, fun, a touch silly, and a whole lot awesome.

There's a book called *1950s Rocketman TV Series and Their Fans* that I was turned on to by the Hugo_ Recommend LiveJournal group. yes, there is still such a thing as LiveJournal! It's a pretty good book about that early SF TV programs like *Space Patrol* and *Tom Corbett*. It's well-worth giving a read to, and damn near made my top five.

If you like *Hunger Games*, then you really should read *Katniss the Cattail: An Unauthorized Guide to Names and Symbols in Suzanne Collins' The Hunger Games*. It's by Valerie Frankel (a BASFAn in good standing!) and it's one of the more impressive books looking at an on-going series.

Another one that got my attention is another 'Huh, never thought about it that way' nominee. There's an editor name of Margaret Killjoy., the founding editor of *Steampunk Magazine*. She put together the wonderful *A Steampunk's Guide to Sex*. It's got so many wonderful essays, including several by the great Alan Moore! There are several wonderful essays on the history of various sexual practices and the like, but it's not particularly SF&F, aside from being aimed directly at the hearts of Steampunk fans. I'm not 100% sure it's got much Genre content, so maybe it's not a lister. I dunno!

There are so many more, including a large number of Academic books that I haven't read. It's one of the reasons why I'm often forced to read so much during the period after the announcement of the Ballot and the Handicapping the Hugos issues. One thing that I've nominated some years is the *Steampunk Scholar* blog by Mike Perschon (steampunkscholar.blogspot.com/) which is one of the best views of Steampunk and genre in general!





LOOPER

REVIEWED BY JAMES BACON

You are in Kansas now.

I had not expected *Looper* to be as enjoyable, or as good as it was. This is a dark story of a cold killer and also a really neat time travel story.

Set in a grimmer future, it tells the story of a 'Looper' an assassin who kills people sent back by criminals to that time, as murder in the further away future 2074, is impossible. Time travel is possible, and so the masterminds find a solution. Simple really. With the condemned they send silver, poignant, as one can imagine, as reward for the looper.

It is a lovely concept, well thought out and of course then the story unfolds of a Looper. Loopers are contracted and have to 'close the loop' when they wish to cease working, this allows them a further thirty years of existence, before their younger self kills them.

You know, I wondered as I watched this movie if it was written by Philip K. Dick. I know, that sounds really odd, but the movie had the skill and style of his writing, of his brilliance, of his ability to make one wonder what is real and what isn't real, what could be going on, to question and there was an incredible level of depth to the characters that is unusual in movies. Not the type of get to know real well depth, but a flexibility and de to them that surprised me, and took them and me on a better journey than I had expected.

After the concept, the second thing it did, was really neatly dispel the physics or difficulty of understanding how this Time Travel works. The character played by Bruce Willis says 'I don't want to talk about time travel because if we start talking about it then we're going to be here all day talking about it, making diagrams with straws.'

This is so simple, but basically Time Travel is a mechanism for this story and it works, telling a great story. If you want to get your slide rule out, you are stuffed, as then you need a different type of entertainment, and so, this was perfect for me, lets not worry too much about the way too difficult stuff and thus it allowed me to think about the characters, the paths, the divergence, whether this time was elastic, or whether it was determined, a loop that was unending, and impossible to change, or if it didn't really matter too much, as it was fascinating and thrilling as it proceeded.

So there were no Time Paradox's to worry about, or to melt my brain with, where basically time travel would create a story blockage. This is perfect, in many ways we truly do not know how Time Travel would actually be. It doesn't really exists and anyhow, I wanted a good story.

There were no problems arising from a person meeting themselves in a time travel situation and in actual fact a lovely way to deal with the possibility of divergence regarding memories, but I didn't focus on this too much, as it would have spoilt other elements, such as the way to send information into the future, or some of the more gruesome moments of the film, which were really quite frightening.

Anyhow, it was lovely. The dystopian America was just right, it's the way the place sometimes feels like it could go, and I thought Willis did a good job of being the character that he played. One expects a certain charisma and charm from Willis, but here he was allowed to act a part and he did so really well, and against Joseph Gordon-Levitt, he was superb. A great way of showing how time can have an effect and how humans have the power of change and the ability to be hard and cold.

The really brilliant character, was played by Emily Blunt, her performance was strong, I found her quandary realistic, the way she dealt with things, not just a tool, but an important and key part to the overall journey and it added a really nice element. Interestingly love and romance feature in the story but are managed well, again being key rather than just filler.

I really enjoyed this movie. Best of the year. Better than *The Muppets* and *Avengers Assemble*, or *The Hobbit* or *Hunger Games*.

And would you believe it, the Time Travel part has been explained in straws.

There's an excellent graphic explaining the story with a series of straw diagrams at <http://i.imgur.com/lyMILN.png>



YOUR 2012 IN BOOKS

Deb Geisler

What were your favourite books this year, of any genre?

- 1) The first 90% of *The Long Earth*, by Terry Pratchett & Stephen Baxter (And then we discover that there is no true climactic ending or well-spun denouement, because it's the first part of a trilogy...peevd? oh, I was peevd.)
- 2) *Captain Vorpatril's Alliance*, by Lois McMaster Bujold (in which we find that Ivan-you-idiot isn't nearly as idiotic as he's seemed for years)
- 3) *The Rapture of the Nerds*, by Cory Doctorow and Charlie Stross (written by two hyperactive madmen in tandem...brilliantly funkily them)
- 4) *Rapid Response*, by Dr. Stephen Olvey (This is not a new book, just a new book to me. It is written by one of the main track physicians for CART racing, with a forward by Alex Zenardi. Olvey saved Zenardi's life after a crash which resulted in Zenardi losing both legs to amputation. Zenardi credits Olvey for his return to racing... and for having the drive to change sports. Zenardi won two gold medals in this year's Paralympics in London, racing in handbiking.)

How would you recommend these to a friend?

#1: Wait until they're all out.

#2: Read the rest of the Barrayar books first...then giggle at Ivan's alliance.

#3: Drink five espressos before starting this book.

#4: Even if you know nothing of CART or Formula One racing, this is a fascinating look at how medical professionals must work under dangerous conditions to save life and limb.

Why was science fiction or fantasy left out, if it was?

'Twasn't.

Are there any SF or Fantasy books that you are currently really looking forward to?

Yes...a book by Charlie Stross that hasn't made it out of his head, yet, but which I know will exist in another year's time. His head is a dangerous place, fraught with monsters.

Why is it important, or unimportant that people involved with organising predominately literary SF and F conventions read the stuff?

I don't think we can have the same level of joy in what we do if we don't love all aspects of SF/F fandom. Read the books, marvel at the costumes, rock on the music, shudder to the flicks. Then we can truly craft a showcase for how our particular social group connects to life, the universe, and everything.

What science discovery/occurrence, or historical discovery, etc was especially pleasing to you this year and why so?

Writes Ken Crosswell today (19th December) on the web site **Science Now**: "Astronomers have discovered what may be five planets orbiting Tau Ceti, the closest single star beyond our solar system whose temperature and luminosity nearly match the sun's. If the planets are there, one of them is about the right distance from the star to sport mild temperatures, oceans of liquid water, and even life. Don't pack your bags just yet, though: The discovery still needs to be confirmed."

If true, this may provide a near enough goal to get Americans interested in getting their asses off of this planet again. Anything which reignites the American manned space program is fine with me.

Niall Harrison

What were your favourite books this year, of any genre?

2312 by Kim Stanley Robinson; *Flight Behaviour* by Barbara Kingsolver; *Rapture* by Kameron Hurley.

How would you recommend these to a friend?

2312 is a panoramic social science fiction novel filled with vibrant and vivid images; *Flight Behaviour* is an intimate contemporary climate change novel and family drama, forcefully emotive; and *Rapture* is a brilliant conclusion to an action-sf trilogy featuring one of the most radically inventive settings of the current century.

Why was science fiction or fantasy left out, if it was?

I didn't read any core fantasy novels this year that excited me the way these three did.

Are there any SF or Fantasy books that you are currently really looking forward to?

Sofia Samatar's first novel, *A Stranger in Olondria*; Karen Lord's second novel, *The Best of All Possible Worlds*; Adam Roberts' short story collection, *Adam Robots*.

Why is it important, or unimportant that people involved with organising predominately literary SF and F conventions read the stuff?

Because how can you possibly put together a relevant and exciting programme for a literary convention if you're not familiar with contemporary literary sf??



HELEN MONTGOMERY

What were your favourite books this year, of any genre?

I realize I risk the scorn of James when I say this, but I was kind of busy organizing a Worldcon this year, and didn't read nearly as much as usual.

I read very few *new* SF books - much of my reading was going through the backlog of my TBR pile. You know how it goes - "I swear I won't buy any new books until I read through this pile... Enjoying the heck out of most of them, including the first four GRRM books in preparation for reading *A Dance With Dragons* for the Hugo Awards voting. Plus I picked up *loads* of older freebie books at Chicon, and am steadily working through them, in many cases finding their sequels and reading them as well.

As far as 2012 publications - I did read *Redshirts* by John Scalzi and thoroughly enjoyed it. I think it's a very accessible work for people who claim they aren't SF fans, but enjoy shows like *Star Trek*, and of course is a marvelous work if you actually know you're a fan.

I also read *Discount Armageddon* by Seanan McGuire, which was a pleasant surprise - I am not generally a big fan of her work, got this one as a freebie so what the heck, but I actually liked it and will read future books in the series.

Other new books from 2012 largely fell into the romance or paranormal romance category (During and Post-Chicon I've felt the need for light and fluffy and happy endings. Don't judge me.). If you're into paranormal romance, I would recommend Nalini Singh's Psy-Changeling series and Ilona Andrews' Magic/Kate Daniels series, both of which saw new books in 2012. Contemporary romance - Julie James - *About That Night* came out in April 2012 and is the third book in the series. April 2013 cannot come soon enough for the next one...

I did manage to read all of the Hugo Novel nominees though - so there!

Are there any SF or Fantasy books that you are currently really looking forward to?

One book that came out in 2012 that was given to me as a gift is *Intrusion* by Ken MacLeod, and I'm looking forward to reading it soon (Did I mention needing light and fluffy? This novel isn't that, hence the delay in reading.) . Another 2012 in the pile is *Throne of the Crescent Moon* by Saladin Ahmed.

Why is it important, or unimportant that people involved with organising predominately literary SF and F conventions read the stuff?

It's awfully hard to organize a literary SF and F convention without knowing what your attendees are reading. Besides that, if I didn't read it, why would I bother organizing a convention dedicated to it?

What science discovery/occurrence, or historical discovery, etc was especially pleasing to you this year and why so?

Wait, the world continued on while I was working on Chicon? And I missed it?

Hah - there have numerous studies regarding mental illness and treatment this year that have been very promising, some great advances in neuroscience, and I'm boggled by some of the medical things they are doing with 3D printers now.

I also thought I heard something about Mars?

Ian Stockdale

What were your favourite books this year, of any genre?

China Mieville's *Embassytown*, which is from 2011 but I did not read until this year. Among other things, a really interesting exploration of language. Tim Powers's *Hide Me Among the Graves* was near the top of the list - a fantasy/horror secret history set in one of my favourite periods featuring among others the Rosettis and Swinburne. Not at all new, but new to me and great fun was Winifred Watson's *Miss Pettigrew Lives for a Day*. Highly recommended if you're having a down week.

How would you recommend these to a friend?

Pretty much by pointing out what I've noted above, likely with a few more details (but not too many). The Powers novel is dark, and there are people to whom I would not suggest it.

Are there any SF or Fantasy books that you are currently really looking forward to?

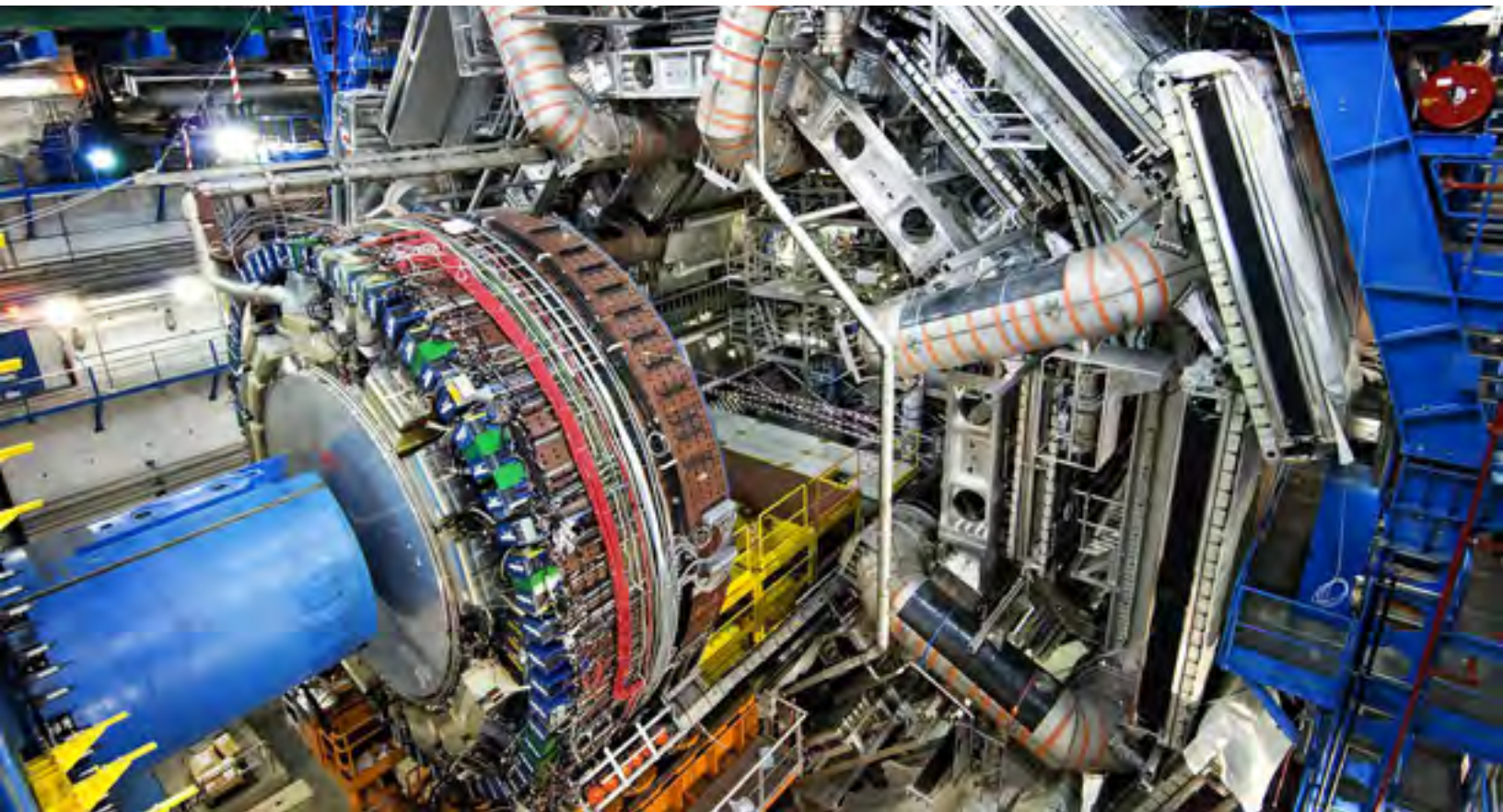
Top of the list is M. John Harrison's *Empty Space*. Also Samit Basu's *Turbulence*. On my to-read stack, I want to get to the second and third books in N.K. Jemisin's trilogy that started with *The Hundred Thousand Kingdoms*. And many more, most which I will not get to unfortunately.

Why is it important, or unimportant that people involved with organising predominately literary SF and F conventions read the stuff?

I don't think that we all need to keep up, but its key to several aspects of the job - especially programme. It is central to what we do organising conventions, and in fact working on conventions got me back to reading more SF & F. Not that everyone keeps up with everything. The conversation that results from us having read differently is part of the fun.

What science discovery/occurrence, or historical discovery, etc was especially pleasing to you this year and why so?

The probable observation of the Higgs was it for me. This has been part of the Standard Model since before I was studying physics. Experiments have been homing in on the Higgs for several years now, and it was exciting to see it turn up. That said, it would have been even more exciting if it did not turn up.



Chris Garcia

What were your favourite books this year, of any genre?

I like lists, you know? The big three were Christa Faust's *Chokehold*, a mystery novel from Hard Case Crime, *Fair Coin* by E.C. Meyers, and Cat Valente's *The Girl Who Fell Beneath Fairyland and Led the Revels There*. I didn't read nearly as much as I'd have liked, but it was also a better-than-average year for my reading.

How would you recommend these to a friend?

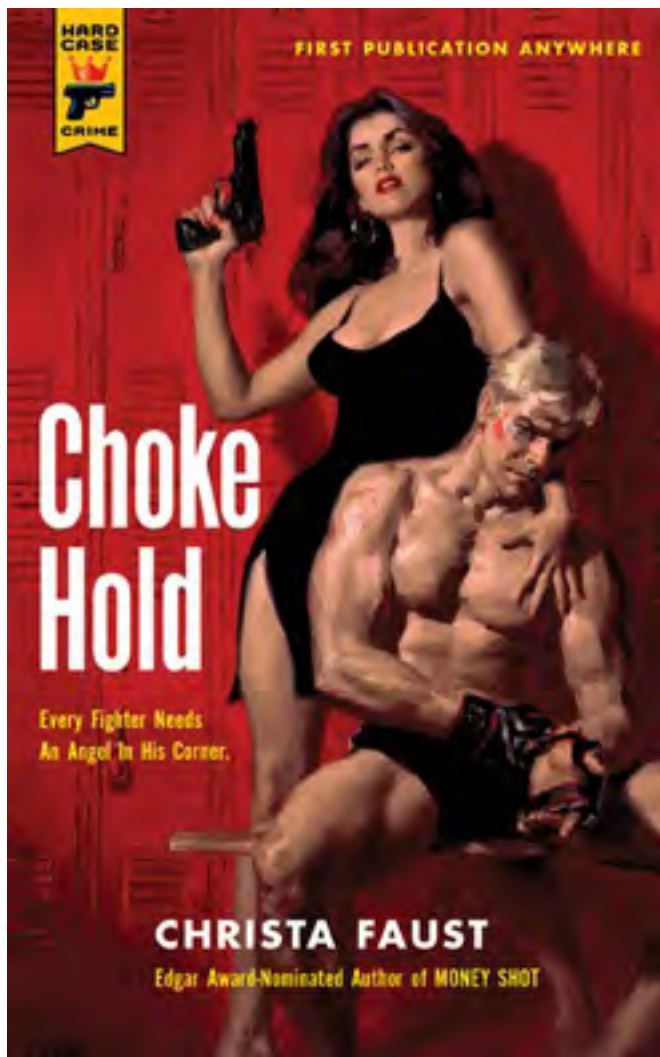
The Faust would be a good read for those of us Crime lovers, but it might be a bit much for some of my friends. *Fair Coin* has made the rounds with several of my friends who have enjoyed it on my Rec. I've turned Evelyn into a fan of Cat's, so there's that!

Are there any SF or Fantasy books that you are currently really looking forward to?

Several. I've got the new Valente (*Six-Gun Snow White*) and have started in on *Earth Girl* by Janet Edwards, which I'm excited for. Also, a new Gail Carriger book! I love them so many much!

Why is it important, or unimportant that people involved with organising predominately literary SF and F conventions read the stuff?

I don't think that folks running cons need to read SF, but they do need to keep their ear open for what's out there to keep themselves in the know and how to program for the genre of today. I also think it's important for folks running cons to be aware of who is under-seen. There are some great authors who have been out of the limelight (like Ken Wharton) who might be helped by being brought in to speak to get 'em writing again!



What science discovery/occurrence, or historical discovery, etc was especially pleasing to you this year and why so?

While I don't understand science, don't have the mind for it, I love it and read about it quite a bit. 2012 was a big year for science. There's one that I read about that turned my head. It was a team that found a new type of plastic that can absorb CO2. That's important because the CO2 suction could lead to a way of making artificial trees, or what about using it as a building material, so that increasing the use of land doesn't have to be such an addition to the CO2 in teh atmosphere. Of course, there's still a lot to do along those lines.

And, of course, there's the world of technology, which produced two big IBM announcements. The first being the 12 Atom Bit, proving that storage has a LONG way to go until it exhausts current techniques, though it did take super-cooled iron to make it happen. Then, IBM also proved that nanotubes will likely be the next thing in the world of processors. And, like Xerox PARC in the 1970s, they'll probably not be the ones to produce the products that take advantage of them.

The things that always get me are the new animals. There's the frong that's the smallest known vertebrate, which was described in 2012., along with the Lesula, which is a monkey that is awesome.

Yeah, I like science.

BEST COMICS OF THE YEAR 2012

BY ZAINAB

I love lists. I especially love lists of comics and books because it usually throws up a whole host of interesting things that I've missed out on (because despite how passionate I am about comics, it's a vast medium). 2012 was, as has been established by most people, a very interesting year for comics. It was the year I became more aware of self-published comics, partly due to the many micro-publishing outfits that sprung up, like Oily Comics, Retrofit, Bill Kartalopoulos' Rebus Books, Patrick Kyle's Distance Mover subscriptions and lots more. I have been a bit cheeky and produced 2 lists (ssshh, don't tell Richard)- one for comic 'books' published through more established publishing houses and one for 'mini-comics' which are independently published. Neither are in any particular order. The ones that have been reviewed either here or on my blog I've linked to (clicking on the title should do it), and I'm afraid there are a few I haven't got around to, which simply means the wonder of discovery is upon you.

Giants Beware by Rafael Rosado, Jorge Aguirre: Brilliant, brilliant, brilliant. Claudette lives in a town famous for its giant-slaying and huge giant-repelling stone walls. Despite this rich history, the townspeople are now content to sit in their safe haven and no longer actively seek out giants, a development Claudette is not happy with. And so she sets out dragging along her culinary sensation of a little brother and best friend and feminist princess-in-waiting, Marie to do what she has always dreamed of. Bristling with personality, humour and verve, *Giants Beware* is simply a must-read comic.



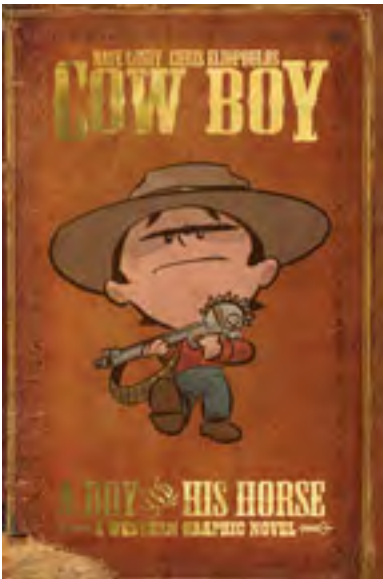
But I Really Wanted to be an Anthropologist by Margaux Motin: Richard describes this as 'Posy Simmonds meets Sex in the City': I've never watched Sex and the City so I'm going to take his word for it. I have to admit I grappled a little with this choice, it seems a slight, sort of trifle-y choice, but not everything has to be



thematically important and deal with ISSUES. It is so beautifully rendered and the humour so entertaining, you'll find yourself, like me, rifling through it in one sitting.

Through the Walls by Jean-Luc Cornette, Stephane Oiry: Oiry's art made this book for me, his fine-lined whimsy prettily off-setting Cornette's tales: 'Through the Walls is a series of little stories about unconnected people possessing the same ability: to walk through walls, or pass through any kind of material-people animals, metal. Having eased the reader in with a light, humorous opener, Cornette then begins to insinuate ideas that unsettle and make you question. What at first glance appears to be a collection of quirky, light vignettes, turns out to be something altogether off-kilter, and as the book goes on, it interjects a weird thought here, some jarring behaviour there, getting progressively more

morally dubious and indeterminate.'



CowBoy by Nate Cosby, Chris Elipoulous: My dad imbued his love of kung-fu movies and westerns in me from a young age and the tone of *CowBoy* is perfectly done, serious but with knowing asides. It was the first book I read early in the year and knew it would make it to this list:

‘On paper, a comic about a 10 year old boy riding through the wild west to round up errant members of his family doesn’t sound like it would work -shouldn’t work- let alone be one of the best books of the year, but that’s exactly what it is. Sick of his family’s errant ne’er do-well ways, Boyd has taken the law into his own hands and decided to round them all up one by one and deliver them to the Marshall. The best and perhaps most surprising thing about *Cow Boy* is the depth of emotion it manages to convey.’

Nobrow 7 Brave New World: Volume 7 of the *Nobrow* anthology was where it all came together beautifully for me. Both the comics and illustration sections were outstanding and the sheer quality of the contributors involved

staggering: Joseph Lambert, Anders Nilsen, Tom Gauld, Jiliina Tamaki, Joost Swarte, Micahel DeForge and many, many others.

‘The illustration in *Nobrow* has always been of a high standard, but as with most multi-author anthologies, the comics have been a little inconsistent, although these have steadily and vastly improved. As much as I enjoyed *The Double*, *Brave New World* is a wowzer- it felt like there was a greater creative scope at play here.’

Batman The Court of Owls by Scott Snyder, Greg Capullo, Jonathan Glapion: I’m a childhood *Batman* fan, but I’ve always read in trades, which allows you to pick and choose the *Bat* titles you’re after. I’m a big fan of what Snyder’s doing with the book:

‘Snyder describes his approach to *Batman* as ‘steak and potatoes’ and on the evidence of this, *The Black Mirror* and *The Gates of Gotham*, it’s one that serves him well. *The Court of Owls* combines a lot of elements to deliver a *Batman* story that triumphs on several levels and is intriguing, entertaining and engrossing.’

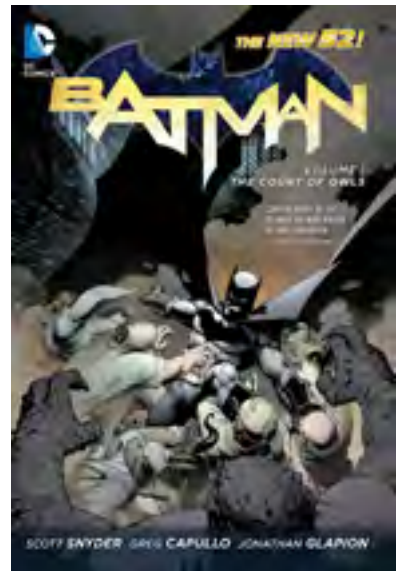
Koma by Pierre Wazem, Frederik Peeters: This had a little of everything-ambition without pretension:

‘Bold and skewy, imaginative and fresh, bursting with ideas, humour, charm,

weirdness and above all just so much heart: in the story, but more from the people behind it, whose sheer effort

and talent is evident on every page. It’s that heart which pushes you onwards through its flaws and knotty, convoluted bits. . . It jumps from genre and plot-point to sequences like a joyful little character bounding through the stages of a video game, incorporating everything from super-heroics, otherworldly creatures, mystery, family drama, emotion, surrealism, creationism.’

Pippi Moves In by Astrid Lingdren, Ingrid Vang Nyman: I love slightly twisted children’s books and this comic adaptation of *Pippi Longstocking* fulfills that remit beautifully. Vang Nyman’s skewy, weird, static drawings (those eyes!) combine with the ultimate parent-less fantasy as *Pippi* marches through life young, rich and good at everything.



The Complete Rainbow Orchid by Garen Ewing: The first time I read this, and collected together as Ewing originally intended, I believe. I'm a sucker for ligne claire, but Ewing's adventure of a search for a rare, possibly non-existent flower left me more excited than that sentence can possibly recount. I have no further words for it: it's just a fantastic comic.

Amulet 5 Prince of the Elves by Kazu Kibuishi: There are two 'series' I follow religiously- The Stuff of Legend and Kazu Kibuishi's excellent Amulet adventure books. Kibuishi excels at world building and where the last volume felt that perhaps the end was nigh, he developed new angles here in a manner that felt real and fitting and left me once again eagerly looking forward to 2013's book.

Best mini-comics:

The Monkey in the Basement/ It Doesn't Exist by Corinne Mucha: I wrote about Mucha being the queen of mini-comics [here](#), do yourself a favour and go buy some. Monkey won her an Ignatz, but I particularly enjoyed *It Doesn't Exist* which was more thoughtful in tone.

New Sludge City by Brendan Leach, *Retrofit Comics*: Box Brown had a stonker of a year with *Retrofit Comics*, and in an ideal world he would receive recognition of some kind. I'm a fan of Leach's art: its sharp and scrappy looking and he handily writes rather well too. *Sludge City* reminded me of *Inception*, but perhaps only in the swapping mind/bodies sense.

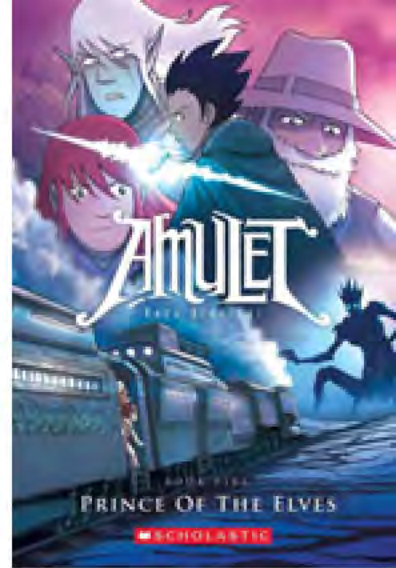
Flocks by L. Nichols, *Retrofit Comics*: A perfect example of what mini-comics can achieve:

'Despite the topical nature of her subjects, Nichols retains an even handed, non-judgmental tone, perhaps because the focus is largely on her individual struggle here. Discussions and stories about religion and homosexuality are still rare, so it makes me proud to see it being done in comics and done in such a beautiful, resonant and evocative manner.'

Gold Star by John Martz, *Retrofit Comics*: And just to hammer home how awesome *Retrofit* was this year: this is the fourth entry from them on this list, and no, they're not paying me. Martz's *Gold Star*= situational comedy with a sharp little twist.

Ablatio Penis by Will Dinski, *2D Cloud*: Review upcoming, hopefully. On the surface Dinski's comic appears to be a pithy and timely commentary on politics in the USA and the maneuvering of morals and campaigns, but ostensibly it's about what defines a person and the difference in the way in which we perceive ourselves and the way others perceive us.

Farmer's Dilemma by Sam Alden: A comic about a fox cub raised by two chickens, which is essentially about growing up, expectations and fulfillment. Alden's art is a thing of quiet majesty here. I'm really proud of the fact that I managed to grab a copy of the print edition of this- it's one of my most treasured possessions.





The End of the Fucking World by **Charles Forsman**, **Oily Comics**: I've only read the first seven issues of Forsman's slice of Americana out of fourteen and it's pretty breathtaking what he achieves over 12 pages per issue. The reader never feels they're being skimmed on in any way: I don't know how he does it, but it's a lesson in storytelling.

Murder She Writes by **John Allison**: Is there anyone left who hasn't heard of John Allison's comic mastery? It seems perfunctory at this point, but Allison's output and quality shouldn't be taken for granted. As consistently good as *Bad Machinery* is (and it is very good), I do enjoy the spin-off tales featuring one of the kids outside their normal environment. Mystery is my favourite genre and Lottie my most-loved character, so this was a real treat.



The Whale House by **Andrew Cheverton**, **Chris Doherty**, **Angry Candy**: I really liked this, though it's perhaps technically a first issue rather than a mini-comic. However, I don't know when, or if, we're getting another and it certainly impressed me enough to merit a spot on here. An intriguingly set up mystery complete with rambling country house and oddball characters. I'd love to see more.



Comiques vol 2 by **Anne Emond**: Anne Emond is very funny and makes comics that are snarky and familiar and warmly-drawn. This is a collection of them. You know someone is good when you wish they produced more work. I wish Emond produced more comics, but I was happy to settle for this this year.

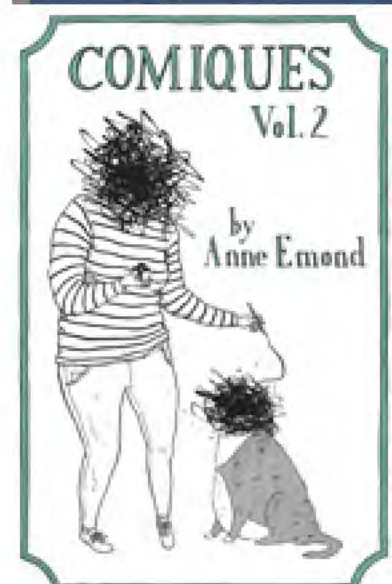
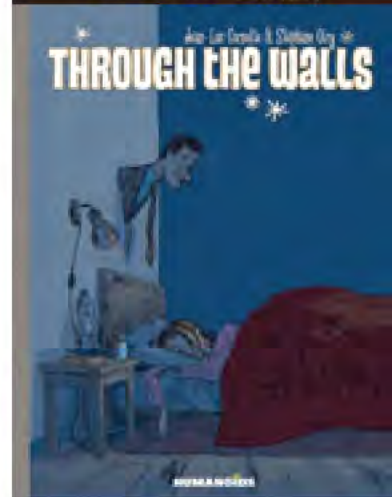


Webcomic of the year:

Black is the Colour by **Julia Gfrorer** at **Study Group Comics**: there should be no excuse for missing out on this- it's online, it's free, it's bloody superb.



And that is it for 2012. Honourable mentions to *Saga* and *Days of the Bagnold Summer* who just missed out on spots. Often when you become really immersed in something it can be difficult to gain perspective and writing about comics does take away the pleasure of reading them a little, which is ironic as that's usually what gets you started in the first place. Looking back, I think what I've personally been most surprised and impressed by has been the discovery of creators who self-publish and distribute and the genuine quality of that output. Most of my reading material has revolved around that area and it's one I'm looking forward to exploring further next year. Happy 2013! The Best Graphic Story Hugo



ON THE BEST GRAPHIC STORY HUGO BY CHRIS GARCIA

We've done this before, haven't we?

There have been arguments for and against the Best Graphic Story Hugo, including a rather testy session at the Business Meeting in Chicago. Recently, Paul Cornell has been talking about his disappointment with the category, even referring to it as a Fan Hugo, which is not a good thing. He points out *Fables*, which has been on every ballot, has won 17 Eisners, the highest honor in Comics, and not a Hugo.

This got me thinking.

The reason we have different awards, even within a given genre, is that awards are the reflection of different groups. While the Eisner is a juried-nomination award voted on by Comics Pros, the Hugos are a popular nomination-and-voted award, and thus they'll both have different views, and in fact, different desires of what to award with their honors. While Comics pros may have a better understanding of the form, almost certainly in fact, they might not be representative of the taste of those who actually ingest the material. In fact, often it's directly opposite of what fans like. Every award has a set of biases. Look at the Eisner winners: how is it that Warren Ellis has never won Best Writer? THAT'S AN OUTRAGE! Or Mike Weiringo not winning every award ever presented during his lifetime! RAGE!!!! The Eisners don't do a great job of giving attention to smaller comics (it seems about every year one or two smaller than Fantagraphics presses win one), but that's kinda understandable. Every award has their biases.

Even the Hugos.

The big sticking point for Paul, and he is far from the only one I've heard say this, seems to be that folks who are 'Fans' keep winning, denying *Fables* of the Hugo it deserves. I don't know if I agree on that point. Yes, all the winners have been small press. Phil & Kaija Foglio's *Girl Genius* and Ursula Vernon's *Digger* are the only things that have won. None of them are DC, Vertigo, Marvel, Dark Horse, Image, etc, etc. They're smaller pieces that have very strong fan bases among fans. I'd argue that every year *Girl Genius* won, it was the best comic I was reading at the time. True, I don't buy as many comics as I used to, but I feel solid in that assertion. *Digger* is a spectacular work that I came to at the end and fell in love with. *Fables* was also very good, though I think there was something special about *Digger*, which had come to an end after a long run. The only thing I liked better than the two of those was *Spaceman*, and I don't believe it was eligible.

But what does this mean? Do Big Company Comics not have a shot?

I think it says something about the Hugos that voters have been rejecting *Fables* in favor of smaller comics. It says that they are looking wider than the mainstream and finding things they enjoy there. This is the same group that can hardly look beyond *Doctor Who* and has only given the Hugo to a small film once in the last decade. I don't think we can say these are uninformed voters: they just prefer non-mainstream comics.

Is that a negative?

Now, looking at this coming year, well, *Fables* is nowhere near my ballot. *Dial H* (one of my all-time favorite comics concepts) *Saucer Country* (by Paul Cornell), *Silk Spectre*, *Dr. Manhattan*, and perhaps most importantly of all, *Justice League*. If it makes the ballot, I'll be voting for *Dial H*.

But does this mean that the Hugo voters have been wrong all this time? No, not at all. They have biases, of course, all award voters do, but I don't think that it's a bad thing: it's simply what this set of voters believe are the best things they're reading.

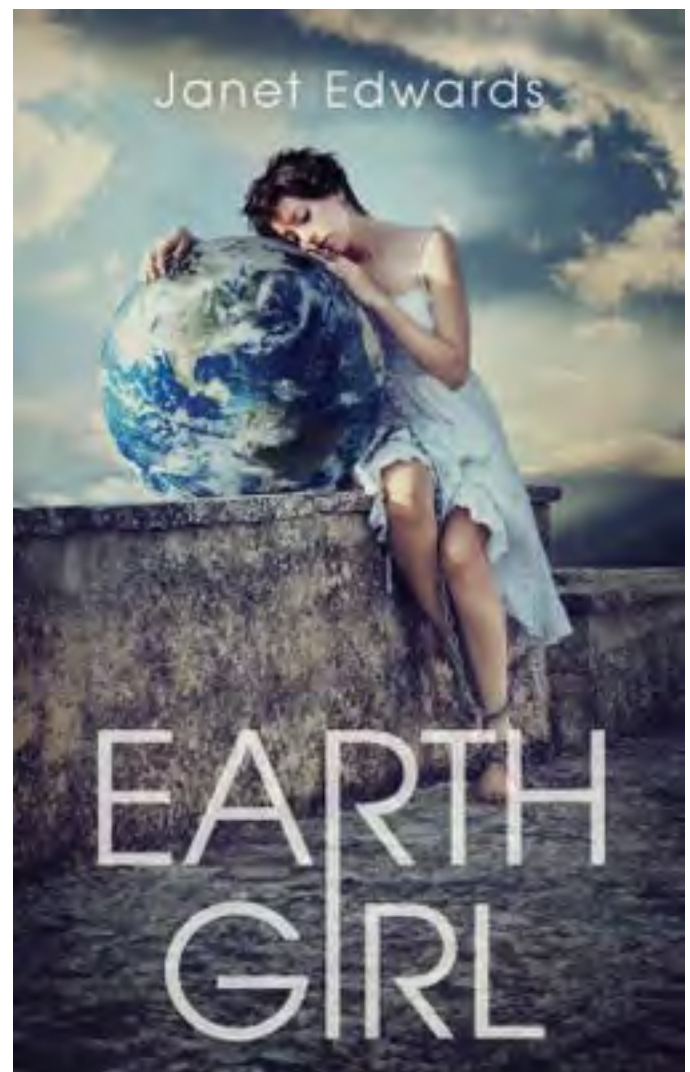
EARTH GIRL BY JANET EDWARDS REVIEWED BY CHUCK SERFACE

In the 2788 of Janet Edward's *Earth Girl*, humanity has colonized the galaxy thanks to planet-taming technologies and transportation portals resembling those from *Stargate*. Medical science provides for the regeneration of lost limbs, and many ailments exist only as descriptions in history books. However, a segment of humanity remains trapped on Earth due to an immunological defect that renders them allergic to off-planet environments. If these individuals – known as “apes,” “neans” (for Neanderthals), “throwbacks,” or, in what is considered polite terminology, “handicapped” – transport through a portal to another world they go into anaphylactic shock and will die quickly if not returned to Earth. Enter the central character, Jarra.

A bright young woman ready to start university, Jarra hopes to study history, preferably at a university not located on Earth. The problem? Jarra is handicapped, making travel from Earth impossible. This fails to stop her, however, as she enters a history program in an off-world university that requires beginning students

to live on Earth. Jarra fails to plan what she will do once required to leave Earth, but for now she has matriculated with the aid of legal finagling and by disguising herself as a daughter of military personnel, an “exo” from another planet. Throughout the story, Jarra proves again and again that she's more than qualified for the program, but she maintains her façade to circumvent prejudices that many hold about the handicapped and their abilities.

Already this novel has been reviewed in a number of sources, where much of the criticism centers on the perception of Jarra as bitter, and whether Edward's future world represents a utopian or dystopian point of view. As to the first question, sure, at times Jarra comes across not only as bitter, but extremely unlikeable. Given how others treat the handicapped has led me to sympathize with her, however. Hospitals do not euthanize the handicapped upon birth, nor are they herded into death camps. Indeed, society provides much for them in terms of upbringing and education. Yet imagine that you are part of this group that cannot travel the stars in a time where others take such adventures for granted. Imagine that due to your condition, your birth parents have abandoned you to foster care, very good foster care, but they have abandoned you nonetheless. Imagine that you will not attend any university other than Earth University, no matter your level of talent or ambition. Imagine that others call you “ape,” “nean,” “throwback,” or “handicapped,” and, by the way, “handicapped” is deemed polite? Really? No



wonder these children automatically enter psychotherapy. Jarra, whose personality brings to mind Arkady Darell from Isaac Asimov's *Second Foundation*, seems much more adjusted and pleasant than I might be under such circumstances.

As to the second question of this imagined future being utopian or dystopian, I would applaud Edwards for the ambiguity she infuses into this theme. Surely, some of us might give up a leg to live in this society with its huge advantages and easy interplanetary travel. And why not give up a leg since doctors can grow you a new one in about two weeks? Okay, onward to Utopia . . . maybe. The handicapped could see this reality as distinctly dystopian, not as dystopian as the reality depicted in *The Hunger Games*, but far from perfect if medical science has yet to discover a cure for the condition that keeps them trapped on Earth and perceived as substandard. After she adopts her façade, Jarra unfortunately witnesses how others view the handicapped when they assume that she is an exo, itself a derogatory term used among the handicapped, and speak openly around her about the "apes." A few scenes reminded me of the famous skit from *Saturday Night Live* starring Eddie Murphy as an African-American man who applies cosmetics to pass as White and then undertakes a satirical romp through what happens when Whites think that they are alone. A list of non-satirical novels with similar themes would feature Nella Larsen's *Passing* and James Weldon Johnson's *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, both of which describe central characters who, like Jarra, create false identities to mingle openly among the upper caste. If I were an English teacher designing a unit on "Multiculturalism" or "Prejudice in Society," I would note that *Earth Girl* fits in well with these two classics, allowing for comparisons and contrasts that emphasize differences in perceptions, possible outcomes related to these perceptions, and comings of age, Jarra's being more positive than those of the other two characters, even if she takes her role playing to a psychologically self-devouring extreme as she confronts a moment of crisis, and consequently her own assumptions about culture and the exos.

Edwards wisely avoids becoming heavy-handed while undertaking this exploration. She includes characters that either begin with an enlightened view of the handicapped or become more enlightened as the story progresses. Rather than reading as a shallow indictment of prejudice, a portion of the novel instead reads as a constructive discussion with the characters representing the wide range of stances that people take on this issue. For example, Jarra's instructor, who knows her secret, consistently rewards her for achievements, and at least one couple chooses to live on Earth rather than to abandon their handicapped child, showing that individuals can avoid developing unhealthy biases. And, as mentioned, Jarra herself falls victim to faulty conclusions that she makes about herself and others. So, as with the theme of utopian versus dystopian, the author here wisely introduces a sense of liminality that forces readers to think.

Fear not, those of you who do not enjoy polemics, because Edwards includes plenty of action and old-school, science fiction sensibilities. We have Jarra's resemblance to Arkady Darell. Other influences stem from Heinlein's view of group families, as well as from the film, *Gattaca*, in which Vincent Freeman's predicament greatly mirrors Jarra's. To appeal to the young adult audience for which the novel is intended, Edwards depicts teens who watch television shows that reflect ones aired on the CW. Additionally, just like many teens these ones make life decisions based on the plots or on the characters they so adore! Romance abounds along with quickly paced rescue scenes and a wonderfully developed history for this universe. A few sections fall too deeply into explication, and sometimes the mawkishness in Jarra's voice veers toward the inauthentic. Nonetheless, the novel represents a fast, exciting read that should appeal to a broad spectrum of tastes.

AN UNPOLISHED GEM BY TONYA ADOLFSON REVIEWED BY CHRIS GARCIA

There are some characters that will not die, and Tonya Adolfson has managed to create a character I'd take a bullet for. It is not at all what I expected.

I'm not a series guy, typically and it's getting harder and harder to be a genre fan without 'em. However, once in a while, I am pulled in deep. The Souls of the Saintlands books by Tonya Adolfson are the kind that get me, even though they're in a genre I don't usually walk with. The first book, *Thine Enemy's Eyes*, was a damn fine read. The second, *An Unpolished Gem*, is one of those second books in a series that actually out-distances the original. First off, the personalities that Tonya has managed to create are spectacular and they have so many different wisdoms to them. They interact in ways that highlight their most powerful attributes. There's an exceptionally fun wonderful and playful little scene early on with Tanglwyst and Duncan, the two characters that I consider the most worthy of admiration. It's obvious that Adolfson loves her characters, and she sets them into scenarios that allow them to come forward. There is a sexiness to them characters throughout this novel which plays up the entertainment.

The real highlight, though, and the character I would do anything for, is Myrgen. Tonya proves her understanding of her reader's reactions when dealing with Myrgen. Such a great character! There's a wonderful scene at the Incense House which might feature the funniest line of the year for me!

"Why would you think it was a brothel?"

He looked at Xannu, at the other women, at Catriona and swallowed, embarrassed. Yes, he was quite familiar with the difference between an incense house and a brothel. "Wishful thinking. So!" He clapped his hands together. "Let's get soapy."

It's through Myrgen that we get the most natural interactions. There's a nearly Han Solo-ian feel to him, especially in his interactions with the other plot-carrying characters.

The way the story moves is so solid, and while it's a long novel, it does draw you along with it. What makes me

happiest is that I had to fight the urge to jump ahead to see if what I expected to happen happened. At the same time, I didn't want to miss out on anything!

This is a story of many characters, but really, my eyes clung to Myrgen and Catriona. Understandable, as they are not only the most fully-realized, but the most fun. When we get to the end, Adolfson shows that she's a master of plotting and timing. She makes everything happen in a way I would not have expected happen. I loved that finish! It's more than a smart bit of plotting. It's a good flow and measured with the rest of the novel. It slides perfectly into the stable, while still keeping me wanting more and more.

Maybe that's why series' work for most people. If all fantasy novels were like The Souls of The Saintlands, I'm sure I'd be as completely obsessed with them as everyone else!

