

DANGEROUS VISIONS
HARLAN ELLISON

SIGMA

The Newsletter of Parsec July 2018 Issue 388

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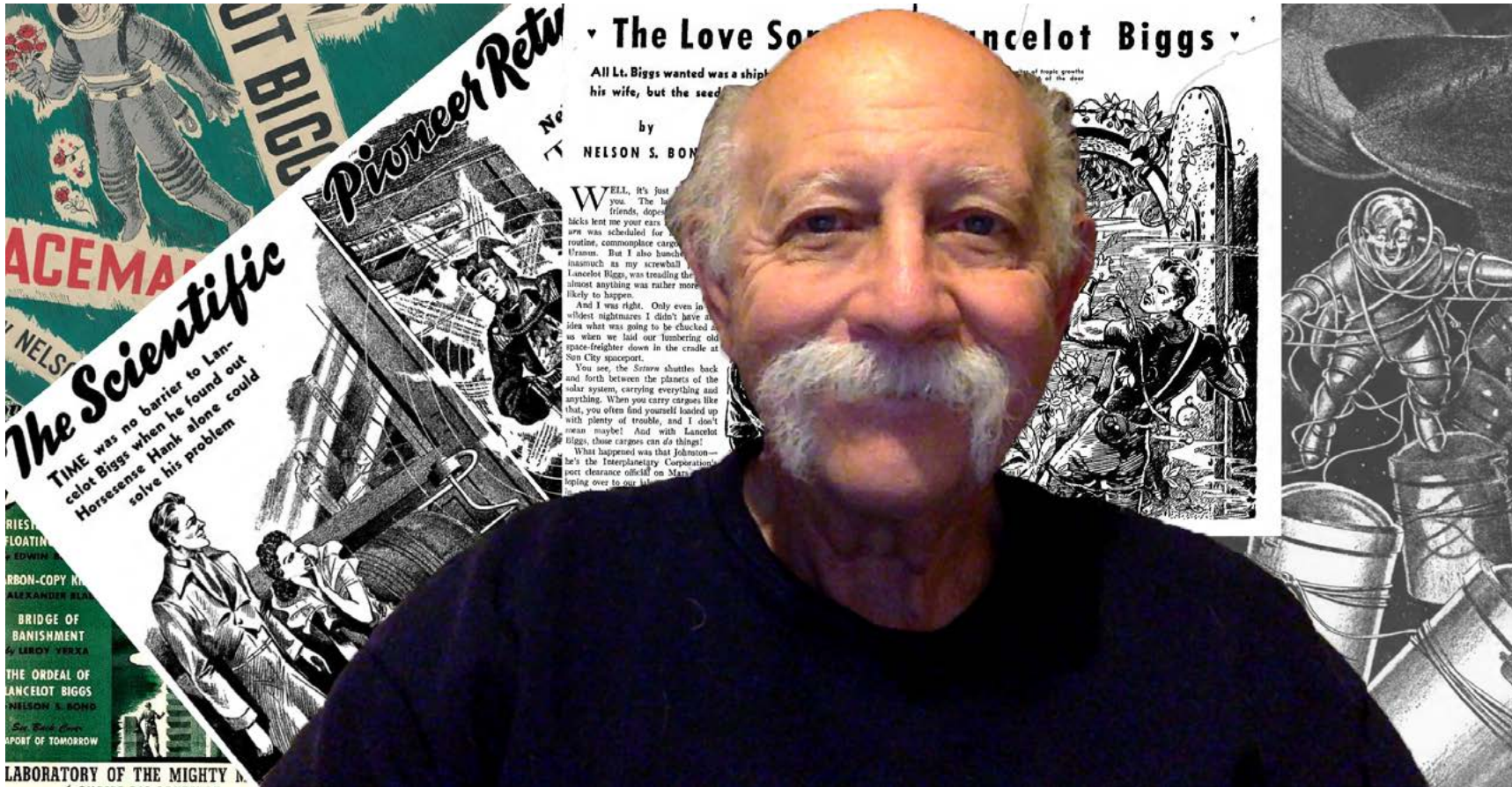
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President's Column



Fly me to the moon, let me play among the stars.

It is a terrible waste to wake each morning to a dyspeptic dystopian world. I have turned off all televised news to reduce the emotional tumult in my life. I read the news both digital and print when I can find the time. I begin my morning looking into some subject that furthers my emotional and intellectual wellbeing. Frequently it is some work of science fiction or science fiction criticism.

My AM choice reflects, more and more, the science fiction that was written before the 1970s. I couldn't put my finger on the why of it. I decided to take a prying bar to deconstruct my unconscious choices. It hurt.

There is the famous dictum attributed to David Hartman but was really coined by SF fan Peter Graham, "The Golden Age of Science Fiction is twelve." (I believe the original put the age at thirteen, but what's a year among fen?) Although it is a pithy saying and is layered in a truth, and I am young-at-heart, it did not ring as a clear answer to my reluctance to find something that resonated with me in post new wave science fiction.

What about modern SF in film? I love the movies. Don't most people who claim they like "sci-fi" only refer to the movies with little regard to the whole literary tradition? That term sci-fi grates on my psyche. I do not love the endless science fiction sequels with endless plot points that don't really even end with the last anticlimactic scene which then points to yet another endless round of mind-numbing dull, "coming to you later this Fall."The

exceptions, I can tick on one gnarled hand."

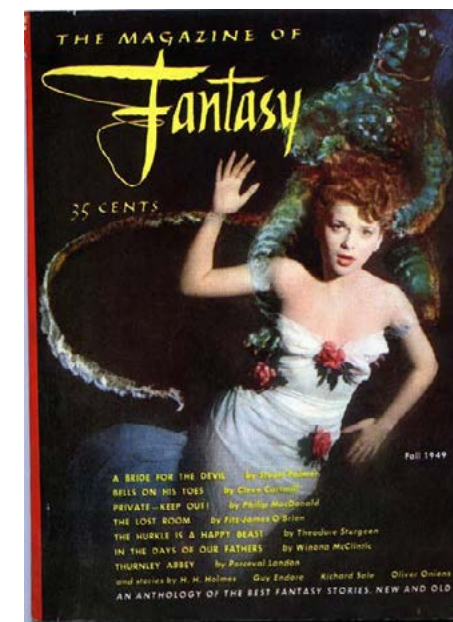
Is it possible I have become an old codger? Do I limp around the house and chant, "These damn kids don't read and write anymore? They watch movies and play video games that they then make into movies. They have forsaken the world of science fiction for the world of fantasy and horror?" I do not. It is a fact that I am more at ease with change than many people a quarter my age. I also realize that what I think doesn't amount to a hill of beans in this crazy world. Read, write, watch and enjoy whatever it is that stokes your passion.

I finally gave up mucking around for an answer. Decided to just let it be. To appreciate and study. I just read and enjoyed the thirteen Lancelot Biggs stories written from 1940 until 1945 in *Amazing Stories*, *Fantastic Stories*, and *Weird Tales* by Nelson S. Bond. Next, who knows, I might even begin a story that was written after I was born.

I thought you all should know as President of Parsec and co-editor of *Sigma*, I am not against printing articles about present-day science fiction. I hope that someone will take it as a challenge and write something for the Parsec newsletter. It cannot be me. Not because I am not interested, but because it simply is not my passion.

I intend to live the rest of my life in my passion. My bliss. I hope that you do the same. We seem to live in a world where the main purpose of all that we do during our quotidian existence attempts to strip meaning from us. We have a living to fashion. We make the most we can of it. Sometimes we even enjoy it. I admit that sometimes a good desperate day is a hearty thing for our soul.

Sherman, set the Wayback Machine to October 6, 1949, we are going to join Lawrence Spivak, Francis McComas and Anthony Boucher at the New York City Waldorf Astoria on the 100th anniversary of the death of Edgar Allen Poe as they launch a "new fantasy anthology periodical," *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*.



AC

Why Thanos Flunked Sociology

By Alan Irvine

(Spoiler Warning: the following discusses key plot points of Avengers: Infinity War.)

Avengers: Infinity War gives us something unusual for a super-hero movie: a villain who is not striving to conquer the world or simply fighting the good guys because that's what villains do. Instead, we have Thanos, who is trying to save the universe. In his mind, he is the good guy, willing to sacrifice everything he loves for the benefit of all. Too bad his plan addresses the wrong problem, won't work, and only considers part of the issue. Which he would know if he had paid attention in Sociology class.

Thanos has looked around the entire universe and observed that everywhere, sentient life is expanding too fast, out-stripping the resources of every planet, and teetering on the edge of collapse. So, to save every planet/race from this fate, he has devised a simple solution. He will cut every population in half. Originally, he went about this the old fashion way: invade a planet, divide the population into two equal groups and shoot everyone in one group. This proved rather time consuming and tedious, so in Avengers: Infintiy War, he moves on to Plan B: collect the six Infinity Stones, which, when assembled, will allow him to immediately turn half of all sentients into dust more or less instantaneously. Sounds like a rational, if extreme solution. It won't work.

For one thing, Thanos completely misunderstands how populations grow. Fast growing populations are the exception, not the rule here on Earth (and, lacking other examples to consider, we'll have to assume other sentient populations work like human populations do.) For the most part, death rates and birth rates are more or less in balance, and thus populations remain stable. For much of human history, high birth rates were balanced by high death rates. People had many children, but many of them died young, pparticularly of disease and famine. The on-going wear and tear of manual labor claimed adults. As a result populations grew very slowly, slowly enough that no one really noticed, and society could adjust to increased numbers over the centuries. Explosive growth only occurred with the coming of the Industrial Revolution, when improved medicine, sanitation, and nutrition dramatically reduced the death rates. More people lived, and especially, more children lived to be adults (and so have children of their own.) However, the various cultural forces that had always encouraged people to have large families (more children means more people working to create the resources and wealth that feed the family, more productive adults supporting those too old to work, and more) continue to operate. Culture changes slowly. Industrialization lowers the death rate, but the birth rate remains high, resulting in rapid population growth. That is what is happening in much of the world today. But this Demographic Transition (as demographers call it) is a temporary state. Eventually the changes from industrialization impact culture. (The fact that most children survive means that you don't need as many children over all, for example. Add to that the fact that in industrial societies children are expensive to raise.) Birth rates begin to fall, and soon births and deaths come back into balance. Indeed, birth rates may well fall faster than death rates, leading populations to begin to shrink – that's been the case in the industrialized countries for the past generation. The process does not take place simultaneously across the entire planet. The West (Western Europe, U.S. and Canada) went through this back in the 18th and 19th century. The underdeveloped world is going through it now at different rates, and some parts of the world still haven't experienced this growth at all. Thanos assumes explosive growth is universal and permanent, and thus only drastic intervention can prevent collapse. And that is just plain wrong.

But even if population growth worked the way Thanos assumes, his solution won't work. True, killing off 50% of the population will reduce the size of the population and the drain on resources. Temporarily. But, if the conditions that led to high births/low deaths remain in place, the population will just start growing rapidly again. Within a couple of generations the universe will be right back where it was and, assuming Thanos is still around, he will have to do the whole thing over again. And again. And again.

Even worse, Thanos may be solving the wrong problem. Thanos' assessment of the entire problem represents only one possible view of population. The idea that growing populations will outstrip available resources and crash is not a new idea. Thomas Malthus first suggested this in his 1798 Essay on the Principle of Population, and it has been reiterated over the centuries. There is a compelling logic to it. We know that we live in a world of finite resources: there is only some much arable land, so many deposits of coal and oil, only so much iron ore and uranium. At some point, those resources will be used up. In a famous exploration of the problem, The Club of Rome published *The Limits of Growth* in the 1970s, trying to forecast how long/how many people before we hit these limits and world population crashed. Of course, population and civilization haven't crashed. At least, not yet. That may be due to the fact that we haven't yet tapped out all the Earth's resources, but we will at some point. Unless Thanos cuts our population in half, so that we use less. If Thanos and the other Malthusians have correctly diagnosed the problem. But what if they have not?

What Thanos missed is that there is another side to this debate. Humans are not necessarily at the mercy of our environment. Facing limitations, we can adapt, we can change our behavior and change our environment. Again and again, we hit a crisis and innovate. A hundred years ago, for example, cities were reaching their "natural limits." Too many people and too many demands on the transportation grid led to incredible traffic. Vehicles clogged every road, bringing transportation to a near halt, while the pollution from those vehicles covered the streets and filled the air. Critics predicted the demise of cities. And then we invented the automobile. Soon the big, slow-moving horse-drawn wagons were replaced with smaller, faster cars and trucks. Horse dung vanished from the streets, and dried, pulverized horse dung vanished from the air. The innovation of the automobile saved the city. Again and again, when faced with a potential collapse, we innovative and change. Not always, of course. Sometimes we don't change and society does collapse. But often, we innovate and survive. However, it is in nature of invention and innovation that we don't know where they will come from, who will invent the solution. Population is not just the problem, it is also the source of the solution. For those who take the anti-Malthusian position, more people means more ideas, more points of view, more inventions and innovations, more chances of finding the way out of the problem. People may be the problem, but they are also the solution.

By killing off half the sentients in the universe, Thanos may have killed off the very scientist who was about to solve the problem of nuclear fusion, or the farmer about to design a new irrigation system, or the artist about to bring key issues to everyone's attention.

On the surface, the movie presents Thanos as a thoughtful "villain," as the one person who sees the truth about the crisis the universe faces, the only entity willing to sacrifice everything, to endure the weight of billions of deaths, the only one who can and will do what it takes to save the universe.

And yet, he is wrong in his analysis of the problem and even more wrong in his supposed solution.

If only Thanos had paid attention in sociology class when we discussed population growth, but no, he spent his time sitting in the back of the class, texting about his daughter's annoying boyfriend...

Alan Irvine is a storyteller, playwright, director, writer, teacher who tries to find time for games whenever he can.º



MONTH Parsec Meeting Minutes

In addition to the launch of the Confluence newsletter, we also got news of our Parsec Short Story Contest. The theme had been “Flawed Reflections” and the three winners were all women. We got over 200 submissions, about 50 of which were fairly good, from all over: China, India, Russia, Nigeria, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain. Our new topic will be “Noir,” played any way you like – science fiction, fantasy, horror, whatever.

Treasurer Greg said we had over \$2000, so yay. Anthologies from our Parsec library include “A Spectrum of Worlds,” with sources ranging from Ambrose Bierce to Samuel R. Delany, and “More Than Honor,” gathering stories from David Weber’s Honor Harrington cosmos. Speaking of anthologies, Pittsburghers such as Larry Ivkovich, Tom Sweterlitsch, and Diane herself have Halloween-themed short stories in one called “Knee Deep in Little Devils.” (Larry strikes again – at Confluence of Saturday from 5 to 7 PM he will have a book launch complete with pizza. Pizza, I say.) There will be an Alpha writers workshop from 2 to 4 PM on July 29 at the Greensburg Barnes and Noble (yes, the same Sunday as the end of Confluence).

It was time for Tom Sweterlitsch to speak, and here I must interrupt and make a big confession and something of a book review because although his “The Gone World” came out back in February I kept putting off reading it. It took my meeting Tom at the Nebulas and the endless teasing descriptions of “World” to properly nag me into buying, reading, and perhaps most foolhardy of all, striving to understand it. I, of course, knew Tom a few years back from his “Tomorrow and Tomorrow,” a future tale of an investigator roaming a virtual reality recreation of a destroyed Pittsburgh while haunted by the loss of his wife, but the rumors went that this was more ambitious and perhaps more difficult. In sum, I would say Yes – and worth it.

As a Parseckian I get the feeling that I’m “supposed” to love all our Pittsburgh output equally, but as a human being I just plain don’t. About a quarter century ago these very pages (sadly not paper anymore) would feature “yet another mindless gushing review” of another John DeChancie book about a castle fitted with thousands of inter-dimensional gateways. Well, I don’t usually have much of a gushing nature. I can tell you that “The Year of the Human” is a fine and solid work of YA science fiction by my old friend Barton Paul Levenson, who has written a wide variety of other fantasy and science fiction works, but beyond that, I tend to keep quiet. It’s nothing personal – perhaps I blame the genres far more than I blame Pittsburgh.

Something has happened to me in the past twelve months or so. I blame Wonder Woman, which I saw on the big screen thirty times. While by no means a perfect movie, it slapped me awake and earned my unabashed enthusiasm. Now, a year later, Tom’s “The Gone World” – in a very opposite way – has had the same effect on me.

While taking nothing away from “Tomorrow and Tomorrow,” I consider “Gone” to be lightning striking Greenfield, a turning point in literature somehow hiding in plain sight.

“Gone” is willfully, defiantly what one sort of editor or bookseller might dismiss as “inaccessible.” Which genre is it? All of them at once, sort of. Its language rings of hard science and intimate verisimilitude, with occasional flashes of poetry and philosophy, its structure is mystery, its tone is horror, and yet all that is just the beginning. Quite simply, “Gone” screwed with my head. It’s a tale of time travel quietly packed with a hundred little details which get sneaked in over and over, and soon I found that it affected my sense of Time itself. Time usually feels neat, straight, linear, but “Gone” gave me a feel of Time oozing like water through the labyrinthine pores of a giant sponge. It gives little reassurances of a “terra firma” of time, a true Present besides which all futures are simply flickering tantalizing mirages of probability, and yet I felt time-space itself dissolving into quicksand under my feet, helpless against an unstoppable onrushing cosmic nightmare from out of a once far future. Our one point of solidity is steely heroine Shannon Moss from Canonsburg – yes, Canonsburg – who to me seems to run a gantlet between the aforementioned nightmare, called the Terminus, and a band of gruesome madmen who seem to simultaneously fight and herald said Terminus.

I even derived my own “moral” from the book. It is perhaps silly and I may never share it, but the fact that a book could even accidentally lead me to such a “moral,” striking so satisfactory a chord of reflection, grabbed my attention.

By perverse timing, I spent the weeks after the Nebulas immersing myself in “Gone” and trying to understand it. That may well be impossible. Next, I heard that Tom would be our speaker. So I tried to come up with a lot of questions, and then I showed up.

Tom gave a couple of readings and talked a fair bit about the divide between books and movies, as his “Tomorrow and Tomorrow” has been in development limbo for years and director Neill Blomkamp has been looking at adapting “Gone.” His push for realism first led his heroine, Shannon Moss, to be interacting with a great many characters, but he got talked back from that. Writing for movies slashes that back even further. At one point there was discussion of combining the characters of Brock and O’Connor – and if you’ve read “Gone,” you know that Brock and O’Connor are two entirely different people.

The book evidently began when Tom talked with a brother-in-law who is an investigator, who mentioned that

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investigations rarely lead to truly surprising suspects but can still break down if people won't talk right away. Oddly enough, an investigation might work better years later as a "cold case" in which witnesses finally start opening up. This is specifically mentioned in "Gone" when Moss gets sent into a future to hopefully gather such late-breaking clues.

Tom draws upon a far-flung quilt of inspirations. He kept trying to apply a cinematic imagination while thinking steadily about the concept of heresy. Specific details came from Dante's "Inferno," paintings by Dali and Caravaggio, and an absurdist Edward Albee story.

As I listened, so many of my questions evaporated, as half of them involved asking him about this, that, or the other inspiration, and all my hopes for such inspirations seemed wrong. Dante? Albee? I was not thinking on that level at all! However, Diane remembered that I had questions and so I got to talk with Tom anyway. I noted how the phrase "Brandt-Lomonaco" kept repeating throughout the book, handily summing up so much technomagic, and wondered why a time traveler did not simply set out to meet Brandt and/or Lomonaco. Tom seemed struck by the idea and confessed that he had in mind two scientists, Howard Brandt and Samuel Lomonaco, who in fact were mutual colleagues and friends. I gather that other characters, with names ranging from O'Connor to Laura, simply honor real people. I also noted that he managed to "implicate" real life master scientist Roger Penrose, who is supposed to provide a rationale for rather nasty things called QTNs.

One character disappointed me slightly, a politician named C. C. Charley. Later Tom would confirm for me that he does indeed function as a dangerous clueless jerk, which is fine and believable, but for so pivotal a character I would not have minded a bit more background.

So my meeting and asking Tom did not bring definitive answers, but that is fine. Van Gogh's "Starry Night" is generally described an idle raft to go drifting around on in a reverie, but I take it as the complete opposite, a reminder that our story on Earth is nothing compared to all the furious drama going on out there in the universe. Likewise, I take a "moral" from "Gone," and it is probably entirely wrong, but that doesn't matter because it satisfies me anyway. When your book pushes Time forward like water through a sponge, you should expect some ambiguity. I think Tom wonders a little at possibly being more sharp, clear, unambiguous, linear – that is to say, "accessible," "marketable." But would that come at the expense of something genuine? It's a decision many a writer has to face. I hope someday he may be able to have both at once. Till then, he is our open secret, hiding in plain sight, and that is a rather cool thing.

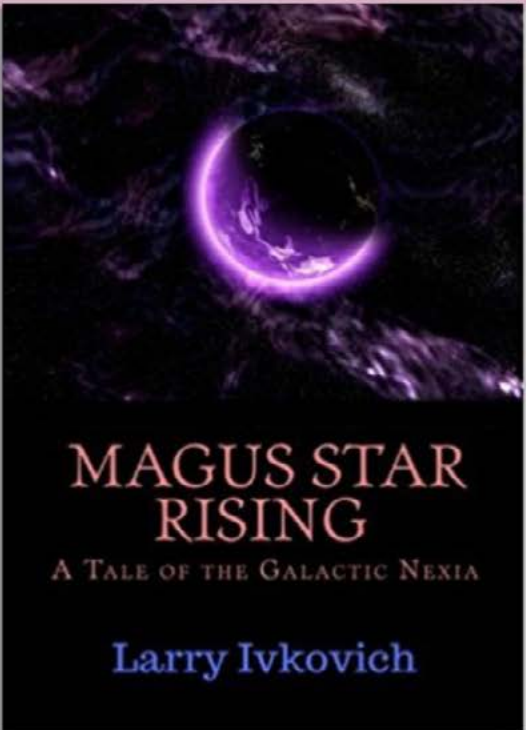
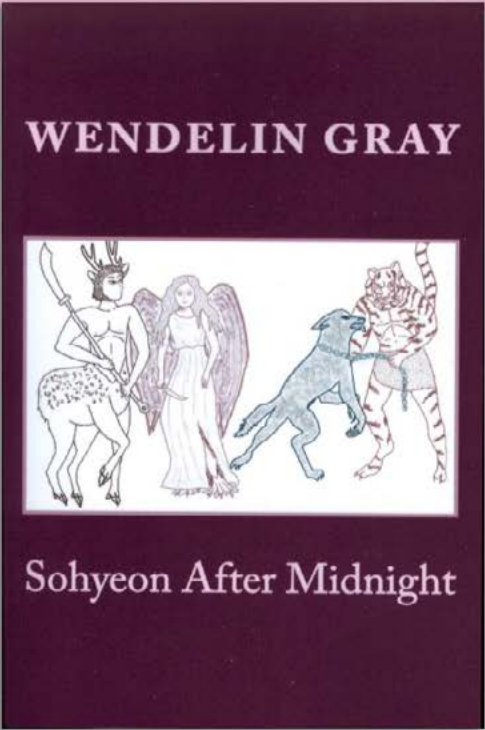
Secretary Bill Hall

!!BOOK LAUNCH PARTY!!

Wendelin Gray and **Larry Ivkovich**

CONFLUENCE - Saturday, July 28, 5 - 7pm

Sheraton Pittsburgh Airport Hotel, Room 225



!Pizza! !Readings! !Giveaways! !Presentation!

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Fantastic Artist Of The Month

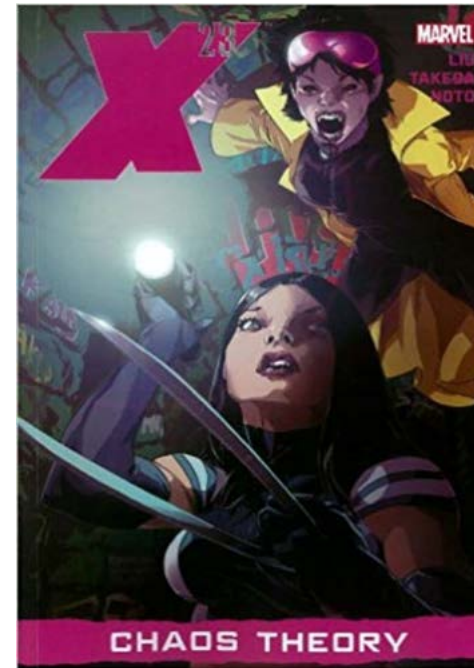
Sana Takeda and Marjorie Liu



This month's Fantastic Artist of the Month is a duo – illustrator and comic book artist Sana Takeda and fantasy and comic book author Marjorie Liu. Both have collaborated on the Marvel comic X-Men spinoff series X-23 and have created and worked together on Monstress, which won a 2017 Hugo Award for best Graphic Series.

Sana Takeda (born 1977 in Niigata, Japan) originally did 3D CGI design work for Sega and became a freelance artist at age 25. She's also illustrated other Marvel Comics series including X-Men, Venom, Civil War II, and Ms. Marvel. She has also worked for Aspen and Image comics.

Marjorie Liu (born 1979 in Philadelphia) writes novels, short stories, and comics. Her paranormal romance and urban fantasy novels include The Hunter Kiss and The Dirk and Steele series. She teaches a course on comic book writing at MIT and is a guest lecturer at UC Berkeley in their popular fiction workshop, VONA/VOICES. She has won and been nominated for numerous awards including the Eisner, the GLAAD, and the Romantic Times.



From - A DIFFERENT DRUMMER . Number 16
Eric Leif Davin, February, 2009.
All photos are from Pittcon 1960 World Science Fiction Convention in Pittsburgh - Jay Kay Klein

Right the First Time

I have recently been elected the president for 2009 of Parsec, the Pittsburgh area SF club. The Parsec mascot is a little furry creature with a pencil in its mouth. We call this creature “Scribble.” No doubt the reason we do so is because so many of us love to scribble. Although perhaps that word isn’t quite right. The word actually means to write fast and carelessly, without much thought. That may be an acceptable method for producing a first draft, but I’m sure most of us invest our writings with much care and thought and, if a first draft is produced quickly, subsequent drafts are not.



Andrew Reiss, Harlan Ellison, Barbara Silverberg

week, however, Avenue Victor Hugo displayed something else in its front window: A writing Harlan Ellison.

For five days Harlan sat in the window of Avenue Victor Hugo from Noon till five p.m., pounding away at a story on a portable typewriter. (Yes, Dear Reader, this all happened long, long ago in those distant days of yore before everyone had laptop...or desktop... computers!) Anyone who wished could go and gawk at Harlan writing. You could stand on the sidewalk and stare through the window, or you could go inside and stand up close to him, almost reading over his shoulder as he wrote, piling up page after page beside his typewriter.

But, you couldn’t talk to him. You could talk to anyone else you wished, other gawkers, your Significant Other, yourself...but not him. There was a sign taped to the side of his writing table with the dire warning: NOT NOW! But, promptly at five p.m., Harlan finished what he was writing. He sighed, leaned back, and pulled the sheet of typewritten paper out of the platen. And then you could talk to Harlan. Indeed, he wanted you to talk to him. It seemed he was tired of being interior and was eager to meet and greet. You could make insulting comments about his personality, obtuse observations

Harlan Ellison produces first drafts quickly, and there is nothing careless or thoughtless about them. If you’d like to read one of his first drafts, just read any of his stories. What you see is what he wrote, first time, last time. I know this because I watched him do it.

Once upon a time I lived in Boston. One of the premiere independent book stores in Boston at that time was Avenue Victor Hugo, although it wasn’t located on Avenue Victor Hugo. There was no Avenue Victor Hugo in Boston. Instead, it was located on chic Newberry Street not far from the Boston Commons. It had a large department store front window usually filled with popular new titles, all facing outward. One



Marty Greenberg, Reporter, Harlan Ellison, Jean Bogert, Stu Hoffman



Leslie Gerber, Dick Schultz, Sylvia White, Andrew Main, Ingrid Fritzsh, Walter Breen, Harlan Ellison, Phil Castos, Ted White

about his writing, or you could ask questions. Harlan didn’t seem to mind. He gave as good as he got and had an answer for everything.

I arrived around four the day I went to watch Harlan write, knowing he always stopped at five. Not even the sight of Harlan staring at a sheet of paper could be entertaining for much longer than that. I hung around chatting until five. Harlan typed his last words exactly at five and climbed down from the window. He gave his pages to a store employee for Xeroxing. In those pre-inflationary days of yore, if you bought \$10 worth of books from Avenue Victor Hugo you also got a copy of the story Harlan wrote in the window that day. I made sure I bought \$10 worth of books so I could have a copy of the story I watched Harlan finish. There wasn’t a single typo or correction anywhere on the pages. And, when Harlan’s story was later published, I compared the published version to the photocopy I owned. It was exactly the same, not one word was changed. After handing his pages to the store employee for copying, Harlan turned to the encircling crowd of gawkers, ready to talk.



Harlan Conducts an Auction - ?. Walt Cale, SamMoskowitz, Harlan Ellison, ?



A female reporter from a local college newspaper asked him the first question: "Why do you write just one draft?"

"Because I get it right the first time," Harlan answered. Badda-Bing!

After a few others asked similar questions, I ventured my own: "Are there any circumstances under which you can't write?"

"Absolutely none," Harlan replied. "If you're a true writer, you can write under any conditions...in the middle of a party, riding in a car, in a store window, anywhere."

I tried to complicate the question. "What if you're a welfare mother with seven kids, living in a small public housing project apartment with no time to yourself, with no privacy?"

"You can write one paragraph, or one sentence, sitting by yourself on the toilet. If you do that every time you go to the bathroom, it adds up. Or you can go into a closet, shut the door, turn on a light,



Andy Reiss, Harlan Ellison, Nick Falasca, Sandy Cutrell, Howard Devore, ?

and write. Proust wrote Remembrance of Things Past in a small closet. It was cork-lined to keep out the noise, but it was a closet.

"Let me tell you something," Harlan continued, warming to his subject. "Last year was the worst year of my life. I got divorced, which proved to be very expensive. There were massive renovations on my house, which proved to be far more costly than anticipated. My mother died, and there were huge death bills associated with that which I had to pay. I was constantly on the road giving readings, more than ever before, because I needed the extra money that brought.

"But I wrote more than I've ever written in my life! A writer writes. And, if you really are a writer, nothing can stop you. You'll write anywhere, under any conditions, you'll just do it. It's that simple."

OK, so a writer writes, it's that simple. In a closet, a motel room on the road, or a book store window with gawkers

crowding around. And here I was thinking that writing entailed staring at a sheet of paper, or a screen, until drops of blood appeared on your forehead.

I suppose many professional writers produce a lot on a daily basis. Certainly Isaac Asimov did, as he hardly did anything other than write. And perhaps Harlan still knocks out a story or more per day. Most pro writers seem to work at a more sedate pace, perhaps a thousand words a day, which comes to about four pages. I understand that this is (or was) Fred Pohl's daily quota. That amounts to 365 pages in 91.25 days, a little more than three months. And 365 pages is a novel. At that rate, you could easily knock out a novel over the summer.

But say even four pages a day is way too much for you. Let's say a page of rough draft per day, about 250 words, is all you can do. Even so, at the end of a year you'll still have a novel of 365 pages. If you decide to take the weekends off and just kick back, you'll still have 260 pages at the end of a year, which could still be a novel, although slimmer. And a year goes so fast, faster all the time as we get older.

And how long does it take, really, to pound out 250 words? I've written 1,240 words in this little essay as of right NOW...and it's taken me about two hours. That's a little over 600 words per hour. Say that's too fast, though. Let's cut it way down. Let's say it takes an hour for you to write 250 words of rough draft. Anyone, no matter how busy, can find one hour in their day, even if it means 30-minutes here and 30-minutes there. Wake up 30-minutes earlier, go to sleep 30-minutes later. Whatever.

And, if you just can't find one hour a day for writing, no matter how hard you try...maybe writing's not for you. After all, there's still plenty of books that others have written that you have to catch up on.

And, without readers, where would all those scribbling writers be, anyhow?

They also serve, who only sit and read.



Harlan Ellison, Larry Shaw, Dave Kyle, Eric Bentcliffe, Robert Coulson, Norm Metcalf, Bjo Trimble

Brief Bios

Eric Leif Davin

Leigh (Douglass) Brackett, (1915-1978)



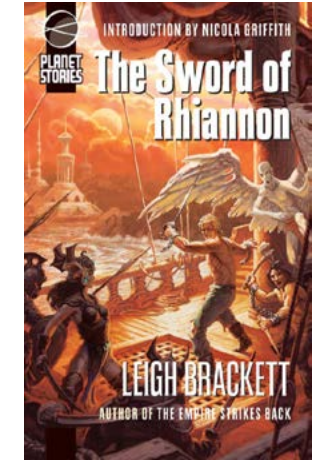
Brackett was born and raised in Los Angeles. She was discovered by John W. Campbell in 1940 and became a major and prolific writer who contributed to many genres, including the fantasy, science fiction, western, and detective fields. She was the recipient of both the Jules Verne Award and, from the Western Writers of America, the Silver Spur Award.

In 1946 she married noted SF writer Edmond Hamilton (1904-1977). They were joint Guests of Honor at the 22nd World Science Fiction Convention in 1964.



In the late Forties and early Fifties she was the incontestable “Queen of the Space Opera.” Perhaps the best

example of her work of this type is The Sword of Rhiannon (1953). However, she was quite capable of writing other types of science fiction, such as her 1955 novel, The Long Tomorrow (perhaps her best SF story), a sophisticated treatment of post-nuclear holocaust society.



She also wrote many hard-boiled detective short stories and novels. It was the latter which brought her to the attention of Hollywood director Howard Hawks, who recruited her to work for him. She then wrote many Hollywood screenplays, including co-authorship with William Faulkner of Raymond Chandler's classic, The Big Sleep (1946), starring Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall. She also wrote John Wayne's Rio Bravo (1958). Howard Hawks directed both of these. Her other notable screenplays included Chandler's The Long Goodbye (1973)



and The Empire Strikes Back (1979), the latter for George Lucas. This was the middle film in the original Star Wars trilogy. She died before the film was released, but was posthumously awarded a 1980 Hugo for the screenplay.



Confluence 2018

July 27-29
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Confluence is ...
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 Your weekend membership includes:
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 Workshops * Poetry Readings
 Writing Exercises * Beer Tasting * and More!

30th Anniversary
Honors guest:
Judi Miller



BELATED REFLECTIONS ON THE NEBULA AWARDS

I attended and presented at the Nebula Awards last month, the annual event sponsored by SFWA, the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America. It was really great, you might say stellar, with fans, agents, editors, and authors of all speculative fiction genres attending.

Peter Beagle (*The Last Unicorn*) was awarded the 34th Damon Knight Memorial Grand Master Award for his contributions to SF and Fantasy literature, *The Stone Sky* by N.K. Jemison won for Best Novel of the year, and Jordan Peele's movie *Get Out* won for Outstanding Dramatic Presentation with Parsec member J.J. Walton accepting for Mr. Peele.

Martin Robinson, who portrays Mr. Snuffleupagus on *Sesame Street* was the toastmaster this year and very entertaining he was! He also held a Q&A on Sunday and allowed attendees to work (or play) with some of the Muppets. I asked him if he had worked on the great SF show *Farscape* and he hadn't but wished he had.

As for myself, unlike last year, I participated in a couple of different aspects of the convention, which were interesting, informative, and... frightening!

First, the interesting and informative part - I signed up for the Mentor Matchup and met with my mentor, author and blogger Rebecca Gomez Farrel, on Thursday. I had picked "social media" as my identifier in signing up and Rebecca, as a Twitter and social media expert, was matched with me. She was very good. I learned more from her about tweeting in fifty minutes than I have in some of the longer classes I've taken on the subject. We talked a couple more times during the weekend and she recently emailed me more information.

Secondly, I presented. This was the frightening part. I was part of a group of nine (along with our own Mary Soon Lee) who participated in the Ignite Talks (thanks to John Thompson's shout-out last month!). These are 5-minute flash presentations on any topic. The presenter gets 20 slides to talk about for 15 seconds each slide. I had pitched my "SF and Rock" presentation to the Nebula committee - thanks to author Wendelin Gray for suggesting I do that - and author/puppeteer Mary Robinette Kowal replied and asked if I'd be willing to do that as an Ignite Talk. I agreed before I realized what I was doing and then the panic set in. 5 minutes! 20 slides! No notes! What the heck was I thinking?

But it all worked out pretty well (I'll be giving the full-length presentation at Confluence this year). I really did enjoy the experience. Mary's own Ignite Talk about her Periodic Table of the Elements haikus was terrific, as you might expect.

I also participated in the Mass Book Signing on Sunday, which was organized for the 2nd year in a row by Parsec member Diane Turnshek. I shared a table with Pittsburgh author Joshua Bellin. Peter Beagle's table was located a few feet away and the line for his books was very, very long. It moved slowly, and writer Brandon Ketchum mentioned one of the reasons was Mr. Beagle talked to everyone at length who wanted a book signed, which I

thought was great. He also attended the beer tasting event and seems like a very nice person. Next year, the awards will be held in Los Angeles.

If you're interested, here's the SFWA Youtube link to the recordings of the live streaming that was done during the weekend of panels, the banquet, award ceremony, etc.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EHpa-7-f6s>

Thanks to Karen Yun-Lutz for the great photos! She was the official Nebula photographer this year.

Larry



Martin Robinson



Peter Beagle



Jamie, Diane, Pete



Joe Haldeman and Connie Willis



Kate, Joe, Josh, and Me



Tom Sweterlitsch



Parsec Meeting Schedule
Sunday, July 15, 2018

A Talk with Josh Bellin

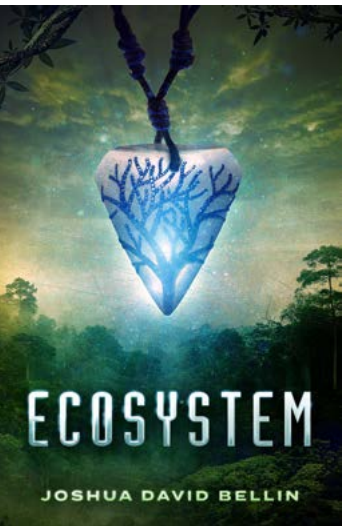
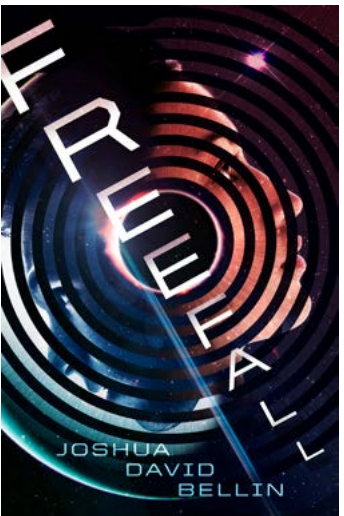
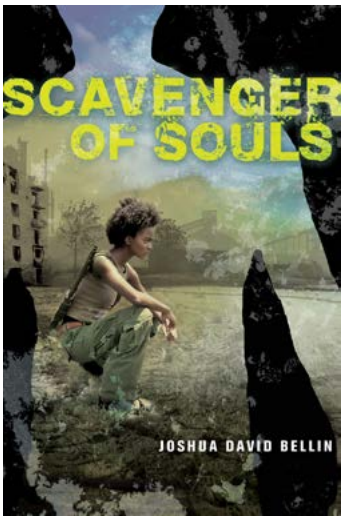
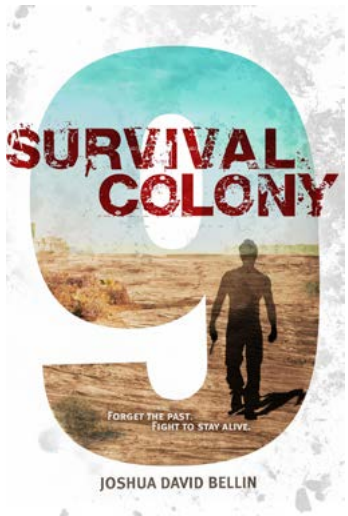


Joshua David Bellin writes YA science fiction (though by the time he's finished talking, he might have convinced himself otherwise).

To date, his novels include the two-part series SURVIVAL COLONY 9 (2014) and SCAVENGER OF SOULS (2016).

A deep-space adventure/romance FREEFALL.

Josh's latest novel Ecosystem is about a future Earth where the physical environment has evolved into a sentient being.



Squirrel Hill Branch of the Carnegie Library
Room B - Next to the Rear Entrance
1:30 - 4:30 PM
Come in and introduce yourself
The room is open at noon.

KUMORI AND THE LUCKY CAT by Wendelin Gray

Review by Larry Ivkovich

The first volume in *The Lucky Cat Series*, Wendelin Gray's 2016 adult dystopian novella, takes its cues from several sources, including George Orwell's *1984*, Mikhail Bulgakov's *Heart of a Dog*, noir mysteries, magical girl fantasies, and Japanese *Kaiju* monster movies. A disparate mix, to be sure, but one which Gray pulls together very well.

A futuristic, repressive dictatorship has won World War III and created a triad of superstates that control the world and continually spy on and brainwash its citizens. Any infraction of the superstate rules are swiftly punished, including death.

Kumori Ando, a young office worker in the southern district's capital city of New Caledonia, discovers her coworker and friend, Belinda, has been spirited away by the secret police. At the same time, she discovers the young man Chen, a member of the resistance group known as the Movement, hiding from the authorities in her apartment building's dumpster. These two events propel Kumori into a series of adventures and dangerous situations that completely upend her life and all those she knows and loves, including that of her brother, who harbors a deadly secret about their parents.

But Kumori has a secret weapon - Lucky Cat, a supernatural talisman.

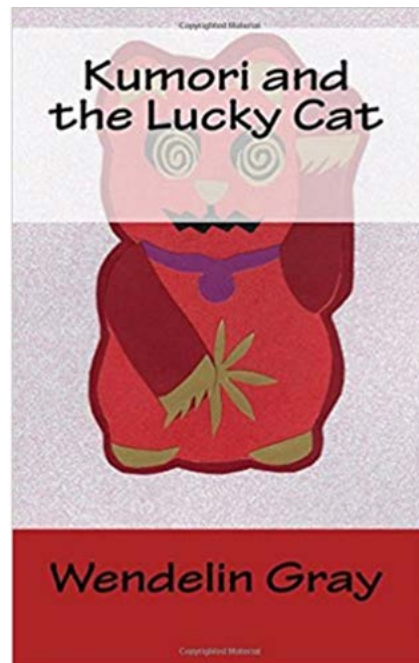
Lucky Cat is not just a small figurine of a red cat, but a living, breathing, magical entity who can morph into a real cat (and more!) when the situation requires it. Given to Kumori by her beloved Aunt Suna, Lucky Cat can talk and hides in Kumori's purse, advising her and helping her out of sticky situations. Extraordinarily appealing, Lucky Cat will get under your skin instantly, but in a good way. Just don't make her mad!

Gray's storytelling is based on her education in Asian studies and Russian language as well as visits to Japan and Korea. Her writing style is very unique, tied to contemporary Asian writing styles as well as presenting page-turning mysteries. Her chapters/flashbacks about World War III are very convincing and frightening. "It can't happen here" is an expression that's proven false at every turn of the page.

You'll be cheering for Kumori and Lucky Cat throughout their adventure, which will be continued in the upcoming volume 2. This is a very good story, well-written with a combination of genres that will appeal to a variety of readers' tastes.

Highly recommended.

Larry



Two Alpha book signings

alpha.spellcaster.org

Sunday, July 29, 2 - 4 pm

Mary Robinette Kowal



[The Calculating Stars, the Fated Sky]

<http://maryrobinettekowal.com/>

Wednesday, Aug 1, 7 - 9 pm

Maggie Stiefvater



[Scorpio Races]

<https://www.maggiestiefvater.com/>

N.K. Jemisin



[The Stone Sky, The Killing Moon, The Shadowed Sun]

<http://nkjemisin.com/>

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5155 Route 30

Greensburg, PA 15601

724-832-0622

<https://stores.barnesandnoble.com/event/9780061941065-0>

<https://stores.barnesandnoble.com/event/9780061941066-0>

Also reading will be staff and students from Alpha, the SF/F/H Workshop for Young Writers (alpha.spellcaster.org).