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SFRA Review

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SFRA thanks the University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire for its assistance in producing the *SFRA Review*.

SUBMISSIONS

The *SFRA Review* encourages submissions of reviews, review essays that cover several related texts, interviews, and feature articles. Submission guidelines are available at http://www.sfra.org/ or by inquiry to the appropriate editor. Contact the Editors for other submissions or for correspondence.
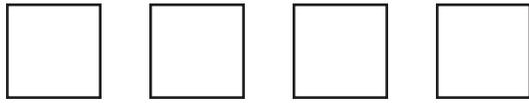
SFRA Review Business

The State of the Review

Karen Hellekson and Craig Jacobsen

Once again, we urge members to submit content to the *Review.* We are particularly interested in feature articles, such as One Course class analyses that include SF texts, and introductory 101s in any field. The *Review* is unique in its inclusion of teacher-specific practical texts, and we want to continue dominating this niche.
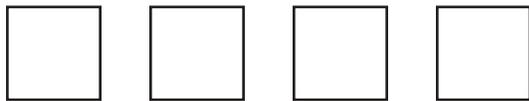
SFRA Business

The State of the Organization

Lisa Yaszek

In my first president's column, I noted that 2009 promised to be a year of many new beginnings. While the jury is still out on whether or not Barack Obama's administration will bring about significant national or global change, Doug and I can attest to the fact that our new son, Case Yaszek Davis, has already transformed our family in significant ways. As science fiction scholars and fans, we were fairly well prepared for this by all the "encounter with the alien other" stories we've read over the years. But we have to admit, none of these stories answers what has turned out to be the most pressing new question in our lives: just what do babies find so hilarious about floor lamps anyway?

Happily, there is much less mystery surrounding SFRA activities of the past few months. Our membership numbers remain the highest that they've been in nearly four decades, and SFRA vice president Ritch Calvin has already sent out 300 recruitment letters to further increase those numbers. Meanwhile, public relations director Jason Ellis has been working hard to do the same by distributing SFRA flyers, brochures, and wristbands at the annual SLSA and IAFA conferences. Such efforts are already paying off; as Doug notes in his report on the upcoming SFRA conference in Atlanta, we are seeing record numbers of first-time attendees, many of whom are coming to us from our sister organizations.

We are also working hard to raise the visibility of the SFRA through electronic initiatives. Leslie Swigert recently sent 120 back issues of the *SFRA Review* to Mark Greenberg at the University of South Florida for online archiving and will send out a call for missing issues to the SFRA listserv soon. Progress on the transformation of our organizational Web site is well underway, and as Web site director Matthew Holtmeier explains elsewhere in this issue of the *Review,* sfra.org will soon have a host of new features designed to help SFRA members connect with one another and the science fiction studies community at large. Matthew also continues to spearhead the SFRA Wikipedia Editing Project and reports that a number of SF scholars, including Darko Suvin, have volunteered to participate. If you'd like to get involved with either of these initiatives (and add an exciting new line to your vitae), be sure to contact Matthew (mholtmeier AT gmail.com).

Finally, we continue building the SF studies community in traditional ways as well. The SFRA executive committee has just awarded two of its new travel grants to Alfredo Luiz Paes de Olilveira Suppia and Andrew Ferguson; I hope you will join me in congratulating them at SFRA conference in June. Karen Hellekson, Craig Jacobsen, Patrick Sharp, and I are pleased to announce that we have received the readers' reports for the forthcoming SFRA 2008 conference proceedings and expect to send final copy to the publisher, McFarland, by the end of the year. And of course, as I've already mentioned several times in this column, plans for the SFRA 2009 conference are well underway. Be sure to check out Doug Davis's conference report elsewhere in this issue of the *Review;* as you'll see, this year's conference will feature a variety of exciting new events that we think you will enjoy.

See you in Atlanta this June!

The State of the 2009 Conference

Doug Davis

SFRA 2009 will be held at Hotel Midtown in Atlanta from June 11 to June 14. Our guest of honor is Michael Bishop and our special guest authors are F. Brett Cox, Paul di Filippo, Andy Duncan, Kathleen Ann Goonan, Jack McDevitt, and Warren Rochelle. The themes of the conference are "Engineering the Future," in honor of host institution Georgia Tech, and "Southern-Fried Science Fiction and Fantasy," in honor of the conference's location in Atlanta. Our guest authors will speak to both of these themes, as well as read from their own work, in our guest author panels. On a personal note, organizing a conference with a two-month-old in arms has been an interesting experience. Not surprisingly, our son, Case, has been very helpful with our programming, routinely meddling with our many conference accounts and databases while insisting on accepting as many papers as possible about William Gibson's *Neuromancer.*

Interest in the conference is high. Lisa Yaszek, Jason Ellis, and I solicited papers from both within and beyond the science fiction studies community, and our efforts have paid off. We are pleased to accept many papers this year from people who have never presented at SFRA before from the science and literary studies, southern literature and culture, popular culture, and utopian studies communities. One extremely encouraging sign both for this year's conference and the future of science fiction scholarship in general is the high percentage of paper proposals we have received from graduate students and even a few undergraduates. This year's papers take a broad view of the science fiction

field and represent a variety of scholarly approaches to material across media. Jason Ellis has agreed to be our program director and will have our conference schedule tentatively worked out in May. It promises to be an excitingly varied program.

In addition to our guest author presentations, we have many special events in the works for this year's conference. Ed Carmien, our SFWA liaison, is in the process of arranging a new event for the SFRA conference, an evening of readings (probably on Friday night) by SFWA authors in the Atlanta region, which we plan to open to the public. Georgia Tech will be videotaping the key conference events, which will then be available for viewing online. Radio station WREK's sci-fi lab podcast plans to conduct live interviews with our authors during the conference, which we hope to open to conference attendees. Those arriving to the conference early should have lots to do as well. On Thursday, before our panels begin, we are looking into the possibility of arranging lab tours of Georgia Tech's robotics labs, smart house, and new nanotechnology lab (contact us at sfra2009 AT gmail. com if you are interested in touring any of the facilities at Georgia Tech). Special Collections at Georgia Tech will organize an exhibit of first editions of Wells and Gilman from the Bud Foote Science Fiction collection (http://sf.lcc.gatech.edu/), which has also expressed interested in hosting a reception for conference attendees.

We will have a book room at this year's conference. Several local booksellers have expressed interest in exhibiting in our book room, as has McFarland. Joe Berlant has graciously agreed to coordinate the conference book room.

We are excited about our conference location at Hotel Midtown. The hotel is located in the heart of midtown Atlanta near dozens of fine restaurants, pubs, clubs, and Atlanta attractions, including the new Georgia Aquarium, High Museum of Art, Fox Theater, Piedmont Park, and the Atlanta botanical gardens. Conference attendees can take the Georgia Tech trolley around the city for free. A coffee shop, bookstore, sushi, Tex-Mex, and southern-style breakfast can be found within a block of the hotel. The hotel also features an excellent Cuban restaurant and bar called Mojito that has salsa lessons on Wednesday night—and it does indeed make a great mojito (http://www.mojitoatlanta.net/). All the rooms we initially reserved at the conference rate at Hotel Midtown for those arriving early (Wednesday evening) have already filled up; fortunately, we were able to negotiate with the hotel to reserve more rooms, so if you are planning on coming to Atlanta early, you can still stay at Hotel Midtown for the conference rate so long as you reserve your room soon. We have also reached an agreement with the hotel to extend the conference room rate to Sunday night for those who wish to extend their stay. The hotel also has a fitness room and lap pool.

Needless to say, funding for academic events and travel this year is tight, so we are especially pleased by the level of interest and enthusiasm in this year's SFRA, especially from those traditionally outside the field. We have also received funding from Georgia Tech and Gordon College to help us underwrite some of our guest author expenses and our incidental conference expenses, for which we are grateful.

We look forward to seeing you all in June.

The State of Scholarship and Service

Lisa Yaszek

I'm pleased to announce the 2008 SFRA award winners:

The **Pilgrim Award** for lifetime contributions to SF and fantasy scholarship goes to **Brian Attebery**.

The **Pioneer Award** for the best critical essay-length work of the year goes to **Neil Easterbrook** for "'Giving an account of oneself': Ethics, Alterity, *Air*" (*Extraplation* 49, no. 2 [Summer 2008]: 240–60; full text available at http://www.articlearchives.com/society-social-assistance-lifestyle/religion-spirituality/2304584-1.html)

The **Clareson Award** for distinguished service to SF and fantasy scholarship goes to Hal Hall.

The **Mary Kay Bray Award** for the best essay, interview, or extended review to appear in the *SFRA Review* in the past year goes to **Sandor Klapcsik** for his review of *Rewired* (SFRAR #284); and

The **Graduate Student Paper Award** for the best essay presented at the 2008 SFRA conference: **Dave Higgins** for "The Imperial Unconscious: Samuel R. Delany's *The Fall of the Towers*."

Thanks to all the SFRA award committee members for their hard work and excellent choices. I hope you will all join me in congratulating Brian, Neil, Hal, Sandor, and Dave on their accomplishments. I also hope you will join us at this year's SFRA conference to celebrate those accomplishments in person.

The State of the Web Site

Matthew Holtmeier

As you might have already heard through the pipeline (or SFRA listserv), the SFRA Web site is going through some big changes. We are transitioning from an old school HTML site to a Drupal-based site. Drupal is an open-source content management system, which boasts a great deal of features written by the community at drupal.org. As a result of being open source, the SFRA will be able to make use of many features that would normally be too costly to code and implement, or too complicated for the folks we have on hand.

What does this mean for you? The two big improvements that will come as a result of this change is that we will be able to move membership online—you will be able to purchase memberships via the Web site and immediately gain access to member features—and we will be able to establish a whole new level of interactivity between members. Once members log into the new site, they will be able to look up and contact other members, as well as build a profile of their own. Members interested in playing a larger role in the SFRA will be able to create content and take part in a new blog project. As a result, these improvements to sfra.org will make possible a more visible and engaged SFRA membership within the science fiction scholarship community and the Internet at large.

One last big difference about the Drupal site is that changes and new features are relatively easy to implement. If any of you have any ideas for the new site, don't hesitate to contact me! I hope to see you soon on the new sfra.org.

The State of the 2008 Proceedings

Karen Hellekson

The 2008 Proceedings volume, which I am coediting, along with Craig Jacobsen, Patrick Sharp, and Lisa Yaszek, is on schedule. This volume—the royalties of which are donated to SFRA—is currently being read by the second anonymous peer reviewer. The due date for receipt of the peer review is May 30, and a week or two after that date, contributors can expect an e-mail with the disposition of their submission.

The next step in the process is revision of the accepted essays according to criteria laid out by the peer reviewers and by the editors of each of the four sections that comprise the book: Reading and Writing (Sharp), Women and Writing (Yaszek), Science Fiction and Media (Hellekson), and Science Fiction as Teaching Tool (Jacobsen). After revisions have been received and any final details handled, the document will be copyedited and the final version forwarded to the press.

The publisher, McFarland, has sent the book contracts, and they are in the process of being signed by all the editors. The delivery date for the completed manuscript is in November 2009 for 2010 publication. The exact publication date (spring or fall) will be assigned at the pleasure of the press.

McFarland has expressed interest in doing a yearly proceedings with SFRA. I've forwarded this item to the SFRA Board to include on a future agenda for discussion.

Meeting Minutes

Shelley Rodrigo

Call to order: 4/30/09: 8:05pm; paused 8:36pm
Restarted 5/1/09: 8:59am; conclude 2:14pm

Attending:
Lisa Yaszek, President
Ritch Calvin, Vice President
Shelley Rodrigo, Secretary
Donald M. Hassler, Treasurer
Adam Frisch, Immediate Past President

I. Officers' Hopes, Dreams, and Plans for SFRA 2009-2010
  A. President—preserve SFRA, the oldest and most scholarly of SF studies organization, and move into the new millennium by trying to get media, science, and games studies communities to join. Survive parenthood and editing work at *Extrapolation*. Sleep, someday, again…

  B. Vice President—Stick with goal of 400 membership. Try to reach out to other organizations (ICFA, etc.). Try to develop a more methodically way to go through more conferences to get members (esp. where they have SF panels). Working to develop various digital and social networking projects.
  C. Treasurer—To stay alive! Wants to make a smooth transition to the new web-based membership system and to streamline the directory production process.
  D. Secretary—get Support-a-Scholar up and running; continue to digitize various processes (membership, etc.)
  E. Immediate Past President—find a couple people to run for treasurer (since Mack can no longer run for treasurer); need to collect plaques and trophies. May want to appoint someone to do plaques for the various awards. To give counsel: try to contribute what went wrong in Dublin so it won't go wrong in Poland.

II. Awards and Grants
  A. Suggestions for 2010 Award Committee Replacements—discussed openings on the various committees and developed a list of names for potential replacement members. The Immediate Past President will be continuing to recruit at the 2009 conference.
  B. New SFRA Grants (Shelley)
    1. Award "second round" applications to the two submissions (based on our extension of the deadline).
    2. Shelley developed rubrics (5 points scale) to continue more equitable ranking (before discussing).
    3. Adam discussed that members might ask "where is the money coming from" because we originally planned to invest some of our savings and now the interest on savings is the "best" amount we can currently. We will fund as many as we can based on the amount of money in hand.
    4. Shelley will email out revised calls for proposals and rubrics to the executive board so that we can officially open call for proposals at June conference.

III. SFRA Annual Meetings
  A. SFRA 2009: Atlanta, GA (Lisa)
    1. Accepted 65 people to present (with a few more possible presentations); a few less than in the past; however, given the economy it seems like a good number. We have a bunch of new people (especially regional). People from the original Black Arts movement from New Orleans, will be screening their new SF film. Looking to do some experimenting with programming and events (lots of roundtables and other things rather than "formal" papers). Doug got a grant from Gordan College to pay for various printing processes. Lisa got funding from Georgia Tech to cover author expenses. There are some book room people interested but we are having difficulty finding someone to organize it. Considering a proceedings volume (will be asking if McFarland wants to do it again). Georgia Tech is willing to record and archive major events. The library is offering to do a reception for the Bud Foote Collection. Free Georgia

Tech trolley system will work to transport people from the hotel to the conference location. Jason has taken over the programming of the conference. Jason has the presidential suite and will be doing events in the evening to recruit. Banking was the biggest issue and future conference organizers need to make sure to set up banking before getting checks.

2. Adam: suggest a "dessert" meeting for new members or at the panel. Notify Atlanta media (warn not a fan conference).

B. SFRA 2010: Phoenix, AZ (Shelley)

1. We are building a Ning social networking site that will be ready to roll out at the 2009 conference (Lisa and Doug said that we could have a few minutes on the end of the banquet program). We may also build a Facebook page to drive people to the other site.

2. We'll be starting to register people at the 2009 conference to get some working money. Tentative numbers (will be firmed up by the conference) are $175 registration (including one banquet ticket and one lunch), $150 for anyone who registers at the 2009 conference.

3. The hotel rooms at the Carefree Resort and Villas will run $85 per night for a resort room (normally $179), $110 per night for a villa (normally $229), and $175 per night for a deluxe villa (normally $279).

4. We are not planning to invite any big-name Guests of Honor, but instead will invite a number of local authors/scientists to do one-shot presentations.

5. We are considering subsidizing an international scholar's attendance by asking for proposals for the Friday lunchtime presentation. Best presentation proposal gets a room and full registration covered. This will encourage our international members to propose presentations and attend.

6. We'll be working hard to make this a 21st century SFRA conference, as technologized as we can manage/afford.

7. As per our agreement, we need to pay Carefree Resort and Villas another $500 advance payment by June 30th, and we'd like the Association to pay that ASAP out of our "seed money." (Treasurer cut a check for Shelley to take back to Arizona.)

8. Suggestion: Get Jason Ellis & Stacey Haines involved with social networking stuff.

9. Adam: suggest Joan Slonczewski and/or Jim Gunn as invited guests.

C. SFRA 2011: Poland

1. General update (Lisa)— Pawel Frelik is exactly where he was from last update; has some monetary commitments from institute.

2. Questions:
What kind of financial support from organization? How much autonomy have in organizing?

3. Adam asks: Should we buy Euros now to bankroll this conference? (Adam)
Send seed money as soon as Pawel has an account. We normally give $1,000 seed money and are willing to do double if he submits request/proposal to lock

in rates for rooms and banquet (because that is what hurt us in Dublin).

D. SFRA 2012: Detroit, MI?

1. Possible Steve Berman hosting; asked for proposal in time for the June EB meeting.

2. Brainstorming: We've heard a desire to go to Seattle, esp. SF Hall of Fame. We could ask Patrick Sharp to host the conference in LA.

3. Status of the SFRA Conference Bible—Ritch offered to scan it; Lisa and Doug will add comments.

IV. Financial Report: Mack gave full financial report in meeting in early 2009; published in Winter 2009 issue (#287) of *SFRA Review*.

V. Membership, Promotions, and Recruitment

A. Current members: Mack likes the current cycle of membership renewal (starting to remind folks in September). We are up to 332 members for 2009; significant percentage pay through PayPal. Very difficult to change any of the parameters and identification stuff for PayPal; let's wait until the new treasurer to institute switch w/PayPal for the new website.

B. SFRA Promotion and Recruitment

1. Review recent VP efforts, explore new VP's future plans
Ritch sent out 290 letters to ICFA members (his department paid for mailing).
Issue of snail versus electronic recruitment—getting the letter in the mail is still useful; needing to make streamlined process to follow a certain set of conferences to recruit members from. We've had people report that they didn't like receiving membership requests based on the "who might you recruit" aspect of the membership form. On webpage membership add a question of "how did you find us?"
We need to try recruiting people trying to publish in SF (esp. in *SFS* and *Extrap*).
Look at people attending the conference (Lisa seems to feel there are a lot of new people).

2. Review work of current SFRA PR director (Jason Ellis); he's a dynamo! Tireless about recruitment at conferences and his own blog.

3. Review work of current SFRA Web Editor (Matt Holtmeier); he is doing well.

C. Increasing Current Member Involvement

1. Lisa: "Engineering the Future of SFRA: How old and new members can get involved" conference panel to recruit members. Get involved through online projects, service, *Review*, and conference organization.

2. Jason and Ritch set up the SFRA Online Conference Storefront and then ordered SFRA keychains from the store.
What should be the products? T-shirts, caps
The logo?—ask Dave Mead for higher quality image of logo/icon.

3. Wikipedia SF Editing Project: Jason does not want to offer us up to media as credible sources without having a streamlined web presence. We should be

blogging about SF stuff and making it obvious that the author is an SFRA member. Matt has taken over the project.

4. Need to add *SFRA Review* to the Internet Speculative Fiction Database.

5. Can we provide translators for foreign language SF materials? Scenario: SF scholarship in other languages, need to translate to English. Ask Hal Hall if he has any idea. Possibly bring foreign language, librarian, and archivist folks back into the membership pool. What about Jim Gunn and About SF? Bring issue out at the business meeting and listserv. Ask the person who contacted us to give us a few ideas, especially article length (are there journals that specialize in SF).

D. Suggestion from Adam: During registration processes (esp. online) have the ability to see a list of authors so that members could select and associate themselves with an author they study as a way to build connections within the organization.

VI. Publications, Website, and Listserve

A. *Website*: Need to check costs (seems to be costing more than we first understood it would).

1. This EC is to break the site in preparation for a full running process for the next EC.

B. *SFRA Review* (Lisa)

1. Craig asks us to develop a contingency plan, should the Review lose its institutional funding
We currently spend 4,000-5,000 a year to print & mail; what are we saving?
Need to find out from Jan Bogstad about her scenario; she is retiring soon and what will happen to printing/mailing process.
Research going with a digital/web-based print house (like *FemSpec* does)

2. Karen asks us to consider if the above would be the time for us to go fully electronic—Executive committee decided not at this point; however, that may be the case based on scenario and cost.

3. Open Publications—Are we willing to publish good written work by anyone who submits to *SFRA Review*, not just members? Bring up this question at the business meeting in Atlanta.

A. Adding *SFFTV* to our list of endorsed publications— Put off until we finish revamping the whole membership system. We are willing to do "one-time" announcements (with paper advertisements at the conference and one time announcement in "news" section of SFRA Review). *SFFTV* folks are willing to give SFRA members a 40% discount for $37.50 a year (2 issues a year).

B. Listserve—Although we had some typical occasional listserv problems, the previous policy and statements appear to be working well. We also discussed that it is neither the board's nor the organizations' role to play a role in negotiating any disputes between members.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Feature: One Course
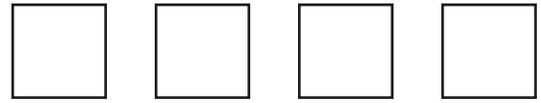
Teaching the Zombie Renaissance

Craig B. Jacobsen

The Course

A couple of years ago I created a genre studies course, ENH 277, that can be taught in any of eleven flavors. The class is designed to help students understand how a genre forms and evolves over time, in multiple media, across cultural boundaries and within cultural contexts. It's an ambitious course definition, but it allows for a wide range of approaches, and the subject genre is important only in generating student interest. I wanted a course that allowed me to combine literature, film, television, games, and whatever other narrative texts I wanted to use, and to not be constrained by a particular time period, medium, or nationality. Too many courses are defined by artificial boundaries. For the past two spring semesters I've taught the "Horror" version of the class themed on zombie narratives.

The Context

I teach at a community college, so I'm dealing with students in the first half of their college careers. Because of the nature of curriculum creation in a district of ten colleges, this course has only First Year Composition as a prerequisite. It would be nice if students were also required to take our Critical Reading and Writing about Literature (for English majors/minors) or Introduction to Literature (for non-majors) courses, so that everyone in the class would share a basic conceptual framework for talking about narrative. The lack of this prerequisite means that I have to teach basic ideas about narrative while introducing genre theory. That's neither necessarily good nor bad, just the reality of the class.

While I could have taught the class in any genre, I chose to offer the horror class themed on zombie narratives for practical reasons. I wanted a subgenre that was small enough that we could cover a meaningful percentage of it. Zombie narratives in mass media have a fairly defined history, and, until recently, a manageable number of texts. I also wanted a course that would appeal to students, as our college has become more firm on enrollment numbers required to avoid class cancellation. Finally, zombie narratives have experienced a 21st century renaissance, an explosion of films (some big budget), graphic novels, games, and even the beginnings of a meaningful literary tradition. In the last few months there have been articles in major national publications about the resurgence of zombie films. Clearly there is something in the zeitgeist that makes zombies attractive, so getting students to see genres as culturally situated ought to be easy.

The Philosophy

My approach to this class grew out of the way I taught my Literature of Science Fiction class, which I taught as an exploration of genre definition. I operate the course on the assumption that studying the genre means accumulating a critical mass of texts for analysis. The individual texts matter less than the examination of the features shared amongst them. Accordingly, I provide the course's foundation by presenting texts considered to be central to the genre. Students then flesh out their understanding by accumulating and sharing additional texts, collaboratively expanding their collective understanding of the genre.

In practice that means I teach a number of pivotal texts, mostly films, and our class discussions of them give students a starting point for their own explorations of additional texts. I encourage them to look in media outside of film, as zombie narratives have been popular in computer and board games, comics and graphic novels, and television. Zombie literature is fairly sparse, but that is changing. Students give presentations on their texts to the class, and write entries for a course wiki, a sort of zombie encyclopedia, where all students can consult their entries, and texts are placed on a genre timeline.

The Texts

The required texts are meant to do two things: provide examples generally considered as central or pivotal to the genre, and provide examples of the genre's expression in other cultures. The history text is excellent, as it provides cultural context for the films.

Films

Burial Ground [*Le notti del terrore*]. Dir. Andrea Bianchi. Esteban Cinematografica, 1981.

Dawn of the Dead. Dir. George A. Romero. Laurel Group, 1978.

Dawn of the Dead. Dir. Zack Snyder. Universal, 2004.

Diary of the Dead. Dir. George A. Romero. Artfire, 2007.

King of the Zombies. Dir. Jean Yarbrough. Monogram, 1941.

Last Man on Earth [*L'ultimo uomo della terra*]. Dir. Ubaldo Ragona and Sidney Salkow. American International, 1964.

Night of the Living Dead. Dir. George A. Romero. Image Ten, 1968.

Resident Evil. Dir. Paul W. S. Anderson. Constantin Film Produktion, 2002.

Santo Contra los Zombis. Dir. Benito Alazraki. Filmadora Panamericana, 1962.

Shaun of the Dead. Dir. Edgar Wright. Studio Canal, 2004.

28 Days Later. Dir. Danny Boyle. DNA Films, 2002.

Versus. Dir. Ryuhei Kitamura. KSS, 2000.

White Zombie. Dir. Victor Halperin. Edward Halperin Productions, 1932.

Books

Brooks, Max. *World War Z*. New York: Three Rivers, 2006.

Russell, Jamie. *Book of the Dead: the Complete History of Zombie Cinema*. Surrey, FAB Press, 2005.

The Assignments

Brief quizzes for every text give students incentive to keep up with the reading and viewing.

Students are required to write at least three wiki entries on texts of their choice, and to contribute to the wiki by helping expand and revise the entries of other students (and their own earlier entries), and by creating organizational structures within the wiki (adding keywords to entries, creating pages that group texts by nationality, or by theme, or other organizing principle). At the end of the semester they compile a portfolio of their work on the wiki.

Each student gives a brief multimedia presentation on one genre text, linking it to our in-class discussions of the required texts.

Each student writes a term paper. The first two times that I've taught the class, I asked students to write about how the film *28 Days Later* relates to the genre. It's a film that doesn't fit neatly into the genre as it was understood before the film, but is now old enough that its influence on the genre can be seen in subsequent texts. It's a narrow-seeming assignment that allows students to take their argument in any number of directions.

The Calendar

The course is structured as a kind of flashback. We start with *28 Days Later* (2002), the film that will be central to our discussion of how genres work. After that we jump back to *White Zombie* (1932) to see the start of zombies in film. We then work chronologically back toward *28 Days Later*, and then beyond it to the present, accumulating examples and integrating them into our individual understandings of the genre. The chronological loop helps students to understand where the class is heading, and they can begin looking in *White Zombie* for things they saw in *28 Days Later*, something that simply beginning with the 1932 film wouldn't help them do. Because we go beyond the 2002 film to see whether and how *28 Days Later* influences other genre narratives, students can contextualize the film within the genre's tradition.

The Results

The course's first goal, to get enough students to avoid cancellation, has been successful both times it has been offered. This has, though, been a mixed blessing. Students who sign up to take a course on zombies (I advertise it as "Zombie Studies 101") are, logically enough, fans of the genre. That's good. They're interested and engaged, so I don't have to convince them to be. It's also bad, because it takes some work to pry them away from the desire to simply evaluate and get them doing some serious analysis. It can be done, but it takes some discussion of the difference between consumption and analysis of narrative texts.

The course's primary goal, to get students thinking about how genres work, has also been successful. By the end of the semester students are talking about the texts more analytically, and able to discuss not only zombie narratives, but how genres function within narrative traditions and cultural contexts. Focusing on a genre that so often lacks subtlety is actually helpful with undergraduates, so even the supposed artistic shortcomings of the texts can be useful. Students learn to see how movies, novels, games, and other narrative texts can reflect and influence audiences' hopes and fears, and how genre conventions affect both production and reception of the texts.
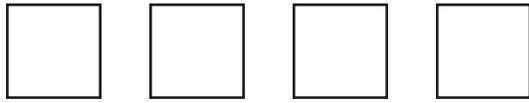
Digital Culture, Play, and Identity

Jason W. Ellis

World of Warcraft (WoW) is the insanely successful fantasy and science fictional massively multiplayer online role-playing game launched by Blizzard Entertainment in 2004. It continues to break sales records with its expansion packs *The Burning Crusade* (2007) and *Wrath of the Lich King* (2008), and it currently supports a worldwide subscribership of 11.5 million players. The game, already lush with history and lore, has spawned a collectible card game, books, collectable figurines, manga, and comic books. Furthermore, it has seeped into the cultural archive. For example, it inspired an Emmy Award–winning episode of *South Park* titled "Make Love, Not Warcraft," and it was featured in a *Jeopardy!* question. Also, the game's fantasy origins do not prohibit it from being a postmodern mash-up of real world history and popular culture. Obviously, there is something to the *World of Warcraft* phenomenon that deserves further investigation and critique, but who has the time to study such an extensive and socially demanding rich text?

Enter The Truants. The members of The Truants guild are academics who study and play *World of Warcraft. Digital Culture, Play, and Identity: A World of Warcraft Reader,* an anthology of essays edited by Hilde G. Corneliussen and Jill Walker Rettberg, is the end result of their in-game and online collaboration as players and scholars. They simultaneously studied the game and its participants, played the game themselves, and used the game as a place in which to meet and talk (in addition to other online and in-person collaboration work). Their gamer intensity is tempered by the rigor and attentiveness found in each of the chapters in this collection.

Digital Culture, Play, and Identity: A World of Warcraft Reader is a balanced, cross-referenced, and captivating anthology of essays. It is divided thematically into four sections including: Culture (4 essays), World (4 essays), Play (3 essays), and Identity (2 essays). Each section has a strong representation of essays, and I cannot say that any particular essay stands above the others. There is an abundance of material from ethnographic, anthropological, sociological, psychological, cultural theory, and games studies perspectives that engage and provoke further discussion. In the following section, I will examine some of the essays as representative of the four thematic divisions.

One representative from the Culture section includes Scott Rettberg's "Corporate Ideology in *World of Warcraft.*" In this chapter, he argues that WoW is as wildly successful as it is, because it provides players a "capitalist fairytale" that inculcates and teaches principles of capitalism (20). He demonstrates that while WoW "is itself a form of escapism from the demands of life in the real world, it is somewhat paradoxically a kind of escapism into a second professional life, a world of work" (26). It is this "world of work" that places the burdens of performance metrics, repetitive operations, commodity trading, and corporate leadership and logistical skills on "players." Another essay from the Culture section is Jessica Langer's "The Familiar and the Foreign: Playing (Post)Colonialism in *World of Warcraft.*" In her chapter, she literally tackles WoW with postcolonial theories in order to raise serious questions about the colonized stereotypes that appear in the game. She argues that the popularity of player-versus-player servers coupled with what she sees as the familiar/Alliance and other/Horde faction divide dangerously reinscribes colonial attitudes and racism against postcolonial subjects.

The World section begins with Espen Aarseth's essay, "A Hollow World: *World of Warcraft* as Spatial Practice." In this chapter, he establishes that Azeroth, the *World of Warcraft* game world, is about as long as Manhattan and roughly the same area as another well-known magical kingdom, Walt Disney World. Furthermore, the theme park-like design, which results from a combination of playability and developmental concerns, is at the root of the game's widespread success. As he writes, "Azeroth has been constructed to withstand the pressure and tampering of millions of visiting players, who are allowed to see, but not touch—let along build or destroy" (Aarseth 121), which raises questions about what kind of immersion is occurring in a place where the physical remains of history are divorced from the players/characters inhabiting that world. Another interesting chapter from the World section is Lisbeth Klastrup's essay, "What Makes *World of Warcraft* a World? A Note on Death and Dying." In her chapter, she develops a fascinating sociological study on the function and subjective experience of WoW game death. Through an analysis of the mechanics of game death and surveys of game players through her Web site, death-stories.org, she argues that death is an important part of social and individual game playing education, and it provides a narrative bond between life and death in the game and the real world.

A provocative piece for WoW players in particular from the Play section is Esther MacCallum-Stewart and Justin Parsler's essay, "Role-play vs. Gameplay: The Difficulties of Playing a Role in *World of Warcraft.*" They argue that WoW game design is antithetical to a traditional role-playing approaching. Instead, the burden of role-play immersion is placed on the gamers with little assistance and no rewards from the game for doing so. Additionally, role-playing in WoW*,* a game described by its creators as a massively multiplayer online role-playing game, impedes your character development progress and places you at odds with the most popular activity in the game: raiding.

And finally, Charlotte Hagström's chapter, "Playing with Names: Gaming and Naming in *World of Warcraft,*" originates in the Identity section and closes out the volume. She asserts that character naming is an essential and integral element of playing in Azeroth. However, there are problems and debates concerning the appropriateness of certain names, and the loss of identity, character history, and social networks when it is determined by Blizzard game administrators that one must change his or her character's name. This is a growing concern for online players as evidenced by the recent reports of Xbox LIVE participants

who asserted their sexual orientation only to have their accounts closed.

As a sampling of the anthology, these essays reveal the different yet interrelated topics that a single "text" like *World of Warcraft* brings together. Obviously, if you study WoW or are considering a pause to your raiding schedule to think about all of the time and enjoyment you have devoted to the Alliance or Horde, you have to order your copy of *Digital Culture, Play, and Identity: A World of Warcraft Reader* right now. Furthermore, I unquestionably recommend this anthology to you if you study games, new media, online social interaction, and rich interactive texts. This collection should also find its way into library collections so that its individual essays may find a wider audience, and as a collection with a reasonable price tag attached, it could be integrated into a games study or even a next-generation new media fantasy course. For the Horde!

American Exorcist

Christopher Basnett

Benjamin Szumskyj, ed. *American Exorcist: Critical Essays on William Peter Blatty.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008. Paperback, viii + 196 pages, $35.00, ISBN 978-0-7864-3597-5.

This collection of 13 critical essays is a pioneering effort. It is the first collection of essays exploring the entire body of William Peter Blatty's work. Most of the previous studies have focused primarily on *The Exorcist,* the book and/or the film version, its symbolism, cinematography, etc. as though this were Blatty's only contribution to world literature.

The attempt is well-intended, but occasionally uneven in delivery. The book goes to some effort to explore some of the lesser-known of Blatty's writings without allowing their seemingly inevitable overshadowing by *The Exorcist,* but the book's title and most of its essays refer continually to *The Exorcist,* tending to reinforce the impression that Blatty is a 'one-book wonder.' This is unfortunate, because he is a skillful author and screenplay writer with numerous works to his credit in various genres.

For many unfamiliar with his other writings, it may seem hard to believe that Blatty started out as a comedy writer. In addition to his own productions, featuring such Hollywood stars as Danny Kaye, Richard Crenna, and Shirley MacLaine, he also worked on such varied projects as *A Shot in the Dark* (one installment of the Inspector Clouseau series) and the screenplay for *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest,* among many others. As Szumskyj points out, "only two of the author's novels have anything to do with the supernatural" (10).

John Goodrich, in his essay "Lebanon, the Fightin' Irish, and Billy Shakespeare: The Comic Novels of William Peter Blatty," discusses some of the themes from his comic novels, particularly the clash of culture, as in *Which Way to Mecca, Jack?* (Blatty is Lebanese-American, Roman Catholic, educated in Jesuit schools.)

The essay "Fear of the Assimilation of the Foreign Other in *The Exorcist*" by Philip L. Simpson is a bit over the top, comparing plot elements of *The Exorcist* to the "shared national horror of 9/11." It makes for interesting reading, but I take issue with

many of Simpson's conclusions. Stating that "In a way, then, the American publication thirty years before of a novel about a demon from Arabian mythology, on the eve of another prolonged period of Middle Eastern crisis (such as the terrorist murder of Israeli athletes at the 1972 Olympics in Munich or the oil embargo of 1973), is equivalent to the rapping noises in Regan's bedroom late at night: a portent of a[*sic*] geopolitical hostilities to come" (28), was a bit extreme. Most of those who read *The Exorcist* or saw the movie remember the shocking sexuality or the controversial portrayal of the Roman Catholic Church, but never make the Arab/Assyrian connection. In fact, most viewers questioned are likely to respond: "What Arab demon?" The essay was compelling, but ultimately unconvincing, and seemingly out-of-place.

After these preliminaries, the book settles into a series of essays discussing *The Exorcist, Legion,* and *The Ninth Configuration,* viewed by many as a trilogy. Fully one-quarter of the book deals with The Ninth Configuration, the novel in which Blatty turns the age-old question of evil in the world on its head, asking instead, 'If there is no God, how do you explain Good? How do you explain self-sacrifice?' Several essays explore the philosophical and theological themes of this trilogy, as well as Blatty's technique of development of horror. In this latter topic, Blatty is perhaps unsurpassed. As Szumskyj summarizes: "For a reader to be entertained is one thing, but to have him revaluate [*sic*] his very existence is something few of the current bestseller list authors will ever achieve" (3). These essays are interesting if not exhaustive and offer valuable contributions to critical review of Blatty's work.

This pricey paperback might be best suggested for a university research library. This reviewer recommends the services of a proofreader before the next edition. Numerous misspellings, punctuation mistakes, and partial sentences mar the text in places, leading to some confusion on close reading, which is unfortunate. Overall, it is a valuable contribution to the work of a remarkable writer.

Investigating Firefly and Serenity

Jason W. Ellis

Wilcox, Rhonda V., and Tanya R. Cochran, eds. *Investigating Firefly and Serenity: Science Fiction on the Frontier.* New York: I. B. Tauris, 2008. Paperback, 290 pages, $22.50, ISBN 978-1-84511-654-5.

Rhonda V. Wilcox and Tanya R. Cochran have assembled an amazing collection of superlative essays in I.B. Tauris' latest offering in the Investigating Cult TV book series titled *Investigating Firefly and Serenity: Science Fiction on the Frontier.* Unlike the series' earlier SF offering, *Investigating Farscape: Unchartered Territories of Sex and Science Fiction* written by Jes Battis and published in 2007, *Investigating Firefly* is an anthology of essays by an interdisciplinary group of contributors focused on the unifying object of study: Joss Whedon's *Firefly* and *Serenity* 'verse. However, this is not to say that the volume's chapters are isolated works. In fact, they are intimately engaged in conversation about *Firefly* and *Serenity.* Furthermore, the essays taken as a whole form an interconnected and cross-referenced unity

that many collections cannot attain. Also, each writer brings an enthusiastic voice to his or her work that reveals how dedicated they are to the source material, while lovingly critiquing, questioning, and challenging that same work.

The collection is very well laid out for a volume encompassing so many fields of study and areas of interest. In addition to the introduction and film guide, the anthology contains nineteen chapters distributed among eight sections, which include: Language and Rhetoric; Gender; Genre; Social and Cultural Themes; Religion and Morality; Music; Visuals; and Fans, Transitions, and the World Outside. It is impracticable to summarize all of the great work in the anthology, but I will describe a few pairs of essays that I found particularly interesting.

Two essays in *Investigating Firefly and Serenity* that evaluate the ethical possibilities of the 'verse are Rhonda V. Wilcox's "'I Do Not Hold to That': Joss Whedon and Original Sin," and Gregory Erickson's "Humanity in a 'Place of Nuthin'': Morality, Religion, Atheism, and Possibility in *Firefly*." Wilcox reveals how Whedon inverts the myth of Original Sin on the world of Miranda in order to demonstrate the dependence of free will on sin in the 'verse and our world. Erickson's slightly different trajectory engages the tension between faith and moral codes in the expansion between characters and planets, which is populated with the potential for better understanding the here-and-now.

The most provocative chapters in the collection are J. Douglas Rabb and J. Michael Richardson's "Reavers and Redskins: Creating the Frontier Savage," and Susan Mandala's "Representing the Future: Chinese and Codeswitching in *Firefly*." Rabb and Richardson dissolve the apparent connection between Reavers in the 'verse and Native Americans. Despite somewhat racist statements by Whedon and others associated with creation of the 'verse, they argue that the Reavers, as creations of the hegemonic Alliance, are representations of Anglo-European projection of Native Americans as "savages." Mandala engages the Other, but through the representation of bilingual characters that code switch between English and Chinese. Also, she makes a compelling argument that language may have played a significant part in *Firefly's* cancellation.

Finally, the concluding two essays of the collection are concerned with what is arguably the most significant aspect of *Firefly* and *Serenity*—the fans. These essays are Stacy Abbott's "Can't Stop the Signal: The Resurrection/Regeneration of *Serenity*," and Tanya R. Cochran's "The Browncoats are Coming! *Firefly, Serenity,* and Fan Activism." Abbott charts the development of the 'verse from television to the big screen, and argues that the 'verse is actually a representation of fandom (read: Browncoats) and big media (read: the Alliance). Cochran, a self-proclaimed Browncoat or *Firefly* fan, blasts off from common ground with Abbott and problematizes the fandom–big media relationship through an anthropological discussion of the heterogeneous Firefly fan base.

I believe that it is safe to say that all of the contributors to this collection are Browncoats, because their enthusiasm leaps off the page with each essay. There are many more insightful essays in *Investigating Firefly and Serenity* that the limitations of space prohibit my discussing. However, some of the themes include love and rhetoric; conflicting feminisms in the 'verse, ancient Greek hetaeras or educated courtesan; masculinity; 9/11 studies; retrofuturism; pharmaceuticals and geopolitics; race and music;

and affect and the death mise-en-scène. The collection's breadth of material demands that it receive a special place in the library stacks for SF scholars and popular culture researchers to easily find and make use of the work that it contains. Another special audience for this collection is undergraduate students. I can imagine this anthology's inclusion in a SF studies, film studies, or fan studies course that in some way engages the Whedonverse (in whole or in part), because it contains so many good ideas at a really terrific price. And, I assume that scholarly Browncoats are curled up in their hidden berth aboard *Serenity* reading their own copy of *Investigating Firefly and Serenity* that they bought last week.
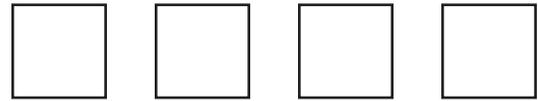
Fiction Reviews

The Man with the Strange Head

Alfred E. Guy Jr.

I had always considered the Miles Breuer short story "The Gostak and the Doshes" somewhat sui generis. A brilliant political satire that's also deeply, uncomfortably funny, I had never read anything like it before. I could also never find a novel by Breuer, and in the days before the Internet, I knew of no simple way to look for other short stories by him. I often wondered how someone could produce such a unique and shining text in his only published story!

As you may know, but as I learned only when reviewing this collection, Breuer was actually somewhat prolific, with two novels and more than 40 published stories and several poems, most appearing in Hugo Gernsback's *Amazing Stories* between 1927 and 1942. And even so, he was hardly a full-time writer, keeping a thriving medical practice in his home of Lincoln, Nebraska, where he also contributed regularly to medical journals and was a prominent member of the local community. I learned this and much more of interest in Michael Page's excellent, thirty-five page introduction to Breuer's work. Page gives a very strong account of Gernsback's foundational role in sf publishing, and especially of the influence of H.G. Wells on Breuer both through *Amazing Stories* (which reprinted twenty-five texts by Wells through 1928) and through Breuer's personal library of Wells's work. In fact, one problem for the reviewer is that Page's attention to Breuer and his context is so sensible, insightful, and well written.

The collection itself gathers ten of Breuer's stories and the novel *Paradise and Iron*. These are presented chronologically to enhance the sense of Breuer's developing themes and talents. An Appendix includes Breuer's 1929 essay about sf called "The Future of Scientifiction." Page describes this as a "significant editorial essay"; it did not strike me as particularly insightful,

although it captures a familiar, important boosterism about the genre and its expected flowering. More poignant and intriguing were the three Letters to the Editor collected in Appendix 2, which show Breuer's response to particular stories and his efforts to push *Amazing Stories* to value literary merit more highly. The letter from July 1928 manages to be both humble and forceful, and its assessment of how to balance science and literary interest is still timely.

What's best about the stories is how quickly they leap into action. There's exposition in a Breuer story, but it always comes after the hook, after you're given a human mystery to ponder. In the title story, for instance, we eventually learn that the man with the strange head is a cyborg, which requires backstory and scientific rationalization. But we begin with the narrator noticing a disruption in his home: "A man in a gray hat stood halfway down the corridor, smoking a cigar and apparently interested in my knocking and waiting." These stories reminded me of reading A.E. Van Vogt's *Slan,* which I discovered late in life, and whose protagonists are already running from the government in the book's first line. I can enjoy an elaborately-built world and even the mythic backstory that serves as prologue to many sf texts, but my preference is to be dropped in on my head and forced to catch up as we go along.

Breuer does not always handle the payoff as elegantly as the opening. In many stories, the narrator struggles along making minor discoveries until, late in the story, he encounters someone who explains everything in retrospect. This structure owes a debt to medical narratives (mysterious symptoms eventually reconciled by correct diagnosis), which makes sense given Breuer's profession. Page points out in the introduction that this structure mirrors many of Wells's stories; they reminded me, too, of Sherlock Holmes stories.

In Breuer's work, the exposition is sometimes so novel and fascinating that it overcomes this relatively clumsy device. Almost nothing happens during "A Problem in Communication," for instance, and the characters are unmemorable, but Breuer's enthusiasm for semiology and his illustration of a cipher based on ants and leaves (the character's writing is being monitored and censored) convey sufficient wonder to enthrall. Then there are other instances where clumsy exposition is redramatized by a subsequent arc of action. It's in this category that I'd put *Paradise and Iron,* a dystopian novel that warns against the coming prosperity of technological ease. The hero of this novel is a man from "our" world who travels to a mysterious island where all toil has been taken over by machines. Initially seen as something of an uncivilized brute, the hero winds up being the only person who can fight the machines' increasing tyranny, because he does not take their superiority for granted. This characterization recalls, somewhat, the figure of John Carter from *A Princess of Mars* and subsequent novels by Edgar Rice Burroughs. The type was of enormous importance to subsequent sf, and it accounts for Captain Kirk's behavior in nearly every first-contact episode of *Star Trek*.

Paradise and Iron's dystopian elements are echoed in several other stories in the collection, notably "Mechanocracy," "Mars Colonizes," and "The Oversight." Like James Blish, Breuer located human dignity in our capacity for overcoming difficulty, and he seemed worried about any technology or social organization that might reduce our need to struggle. The stories don't condemn technology *per se,* and men of science are the heroes of stories like "The Appendix and the Spectacles," "The Finger of the Past," and "Millions for Defense." But in these instances it's a lone hero fighting against some larger organization or bullying cultural force.

Which brings us back to "The Gostak and the Doshes." Although written early in his career, the 1930 story seems to raise every quality at which Breuer excelled to its highest point and also to blend them more successfully. The story combines then-recent linguistic insights with an interest in the fourth dimension (also a topic of "The Appendix and the Spectator") to tell the story of a physicist who wanders into an alternate dimension where all around him are incensed by headlines that read "The Gostak Distims the Doshes!" Although never penetrating the literal meaning, the narrator understands it to be a patriotic slogan that condemns an enemy—the Gostaks—for some atrocity. The story becomes a brilliant study in how nonsense repeated is enough to whip the rabble into fervor, and—more chillingly—in how failing to join in bloodlust is itself interpreted as treason. I found this story both funnier and much more terrifying after years of flag pins and yellow ribbons.

As part of U Nebraska's "Bison Frontiers of Imagination Series," this collection is an invaluable resource for critics interested in the early development of the genre. Breuer experimented with many motifs that became staples of the genre, and "The Gostak and the Doshes" deserves recognition as one of the best stories of sf's early years. I'm not sure I would teach the book in an introductory course on sf; too few of the other stories reach this level of excellence. But I would recommend it to students interested in the Gernsback era, and might very well teach it in an advanced course. Page's introduction adds greatly to the book's value, and we should be on the lookout for more critical work from him to share with our students and each other.

Mind over Ship

Pawel Frelik

Mind over Ship is David Marusek's second full-length offering and a sequel to the 2005 novelistic debut *Counting Heads,* on which it is an improvement in all possible ways. It can also serve as a handbook example of how a genre science fiction text works and what best it has to offer both in terms of the story and the vision of the future.

In the novel this future is decidedly more nano and bio than cyber or space—although all these preoccupations are deeply imprinted in the text. By 2135, humanity has practically achieved if not immortality then at least extreme longevity—with rejuvenation, augmentation and restoration technologies, any bodily wear and tear, with the possible exception of major cranial trauma, can be reversed. Cloning has become widespread—not only of one's children, licenses for whom are given very rarely (this is precisely what happens at the very beginning of *Counting Heads*), but of entire clone types named after their original donors. Russes, evangelines, jennys, and many other lines may constitute sole workforce for specialized services and industries,

the arrangement which invites a more extended economic reading of the novel, but as individuals they are fully autonomous and independent and their presentation does not bring to mind the mindless sameness of clones in *Brave New World* or their oppression in *Cyteen*. Most inter-human relations are conducted through holopresence or proxies. Artificial intelligences, here called mentars, are ubiquitous and some may even pass the test of autonomy, which grants them personhood. While singularity has not happened yet in the world of *Mind over Ship*, there are some mentars that conspire to merge with the human and surreptitiously enter the public sphere. The international space program designed to seed the galaxy with human presence is also under way. For all these novelties, the same stimuli propel the world as today—power and money—and most of the new developments are harnessed by the market forces. In fact, the main threads of the plot of *Mind over Ship* are ultimately wrapped around internecine corporate feuds and fierce competition for resources and markets.

The plot of the novel picks up soon after the conclusion of *Counting Heads*. Salvaged from the wreck of her mother's sabotaged space yacht, Ellen Starke's head is slowly recovering attached to a cloned body of an infant although Ellen still experiences psychological problems The girl is at the centre of the big political and corporate intrigue aimed at dismantling her mother's position and influence—her companies that are being taken over by the competition and her pet project of Oships, a fleet of spacecraft carrying thousands of colonists to settle other earths, which are threatened to be commercialized and turned into a space-condo enterprise. Ultimately, all major characters of the novel—Fred Londenstane, Mary Skarland, and Merrill Meewee—are tied to that major thread narrating the struggle to make Ellen capable of inheriting the crumbling financial empire but also, from the certain point on, to bring back her mother Eleanor Starke from the dead. Parallel to that thread runs another of the russ Fred Londenstane and his partner evangeline Mary Skarland. Already appearing in the previous novel, Fred finds himself increasingly wondering about the identity and individuality of his russ germline, derived from the Secret Service agent who died defending the president and thus characterized by loyalty and commitment. His soul-searching leads to ostracism by other brothers but also to revelations concerning the origin of all russes.

The intricacies of corporate infighting, amount of world-building details and extended inroads into imaginative constructions of identity and biophysiology make Marusek's fiction a very head read, which led the *New York Times*' reviewer to claim that his previous novel was too geeky for any mainstream appeal and that even with his educational experience in sciences the reviewer in question had problems with following the conclusion. He also added that in order to succeed Marusek only needs to "avoid the temptation to turn *Counting Heads* into a franchise of increasingly disappointing sequels, and remember to populate his next work of fiction not only with clones and mentars, but also with some actual people."

A disappointing sequel *Mind over Ship* definitely is not—although not necessarily for the reason the reviewer suggested. The assumption that a good work of (science) fiction has to feature "actual people" is, naturally, a fallacy of someone brought up on Updike (with all due respect to this recently deceased mas-

ter's fiction). In fact, the only relatively "old-style" human who receives some attention here is Bishop Meewee, whose desperate struggle to save the Starke empire in the face of overwhelming odds evokes subconscious applause but also sympathy fueled by his helplessness. On the other hand, to my mind the most psychologically interesting and involved sub-plot of the novel is Fred's, thus—a clone's, coming to terms with his subjectivity and reconciliation with what it means to be determined by one's own genes but also probing of where such determination ends. While this may sound like the futuristic rehashing of the naturalist dilemma from a century ago, Fred's reactions are not always predictable. The fact that they are framed in the world in which human agency is severely exposed to nanotechnological manipulation, including zombie-like susceptibility to suggestions by operators of such viral intrusions, also makes them less unnatural and more "actual."

However, where I think Marusek succeeds best is precisely the Updikian panorama of the world. In science fiction, posthuman futures have frequently been fragmented and clinically alienating, which made them simultaneously imaginatively stimulating and difficult to mentally inhabit. In *Mind over Ship*, even more so than in its predecessor, Marusek manages to convey both mind-boggling advances in virtually all technologies and radical novelties in the social sphere in a manner which feels completely natural. The reader is continuously bombarded with nova but they seem to come and cognitively sink in without much problem, slowly but inevitably contributing to the crisp and clear vision of the twenty-second-century world (although most of the action takes place in Chicago) emerging from the initial information noise.

This makes *Mind over Ship* not only an excellent read but also potentially a good classroom text. True, the readers not familiar with *Counting Heads* may find it somewhat problematic to orient themselves in the anti-Starke intrigue although ultimately all pieces fall into place, also as a result of the *deus* not so much *ex machina* as *ex animalia*. Still, despite the complexity of the plot, even parts of the novel (very much like the author's short stories, recently collected in *Getting to Know You*) could serve as perfect course material for the strategies of estrangement and cognition. This supreme world-building evenly balanced with the non-trivial plot make *Mind over Ship* a perfect candidate for one of the 2009 awards. In the meantime—strongly recommended.

The January Dancer

Janice M. Bogstad

With his usual talent for the story within a story, Flynn executes yet another convoluted progression of brother- (and sister-) hood, betrayal, loyalty and higher purpose. The *January Dancer* is narrated through multiple voices, but principally through a conversation between a scarred, half-mad wreck of a man, simply called the scarred man by his interlocutor, the other person in the conversation and a young woman called simply the Harper. They meet in what is by now the tropic SF location, a bar, a sad little place located on a planet called Jehovah's Crossing, where

the harper slowly extracts the story of the Twisting Stone, a pre-human artifact, one amongst many, which was recently (in galactic terms) rediscovered by the eponymous Captain January and his crew. The Twisting Stone is of mysterious use, variously described by legend. The most known by many who lust after it (except, in the end, one Fudir/Donnovan) is that they want it and it probably will give them unusual power to dominate others. While one is able to follow the many violent acts caused by its rediscovery through the intermittent narration of the scarred man, neither he nor the story itself intimates what it is wholly true about the stone. The scarred man and the harper are no more transparent in their motives than are the many groups who try to possess, or repossess, the Twisting Stone for their own purposes. Fortunately, as Flynn plays with character-names (sometimes two people have the same name and often several people have more than one name), he also provides a character-list after the table of contents/chapter headings. For example, one principal player, Little Hugh O'Corroll, erstwhile savior of the planet New Eireann has also been known as The Ghost of Ardow, Ringbao della Costa, and Esp'ranzo. In fact, even the list of characters adds to the mystery—ending with "Barflies, pirates, merchants, traders, rebels, 'Cockers, Sliders, servants, thieves, Terrans, and sundry lowlife." If not already apparent, one should note that the author as well as several of his characters, the scarred man in the forefront, are toying with our perceptions of evil, heroism, power, conquest and saving the galaxy, all conventions of the classic space opera, while weaving character exposition around a somewhat classical quest story.

A girl comes into a bar, meets a drunken man, and asks for his story of the twisting stone. Her ability with the harp (the classical Celtic lap harp or Clairsach) is chronicled as she plays to entertain the bar's denizens and gradually transforms the scarred man's story into a series of related musical compositions. But theirs is only one of the beginnings to one of the stories. While we end with some idea of the harper's identity, we can only speculate on several possibilities for the scarred man, especially on how he would know about conversations between several of the players and sometimes only one other individual.

I will leave the true nature of the Twisting Stone for the reader to discover (you almost have to read the story to see why that identity is significant anyway) and move on to the intergalactic milieu which Flynn creates along the way to telling the story. The fact that humans (most are humans, anyway) live a diasporic existence on multiple planets where they fled, in successive waves, after they were driven off earth, creates historic depth for this far future. That they settled first on Old 'Saken, then on a few other planets, and from there to a myriad of others, along the South Central Spiral Arm, and along specific pathways that intimate wormholes and transit points (see chart provided after the list of characters) provides the breadth within which the story is enacted. And a number of unusual cultural and additional mysteries are only intimated through snap-shot references. Take for example Peacock, a world which seems to be totally casual and sensual but which is ruled by customs and punishments to which all sorts of inhabitants and their visitors are subject (inhabitants of Peacock tended through their history towards an androgynous appearance and change sex as they wish so they are also known as elfs). Yet the authorial voice interjects that "'custom is more forceful and more enforced than laws on anyone's books." Or

the Cynthian pirates, not really Klingon-like just because they'd rather a good battle than a long life, but at once fiercer and less ruled by heroic battle-customs by comparison. Oh, and let's not forget the systems for describing the passage of time (see translation chart between Metric (dodeca) and Terran Time following the chart of "The Rift").

Again with this story, Flynn proves his talent is as much for creating interesting settings as for introducing characters and story. But the structure also deserves attention. Chapters on the conversations between the harper and the scarred man, entitled An Craic (from the Celtic/Irish), alternate with those telling the stories, and each of these are named both for a musical type (Geantrrai, Goltrai, Suantrai, and repeat) and for the content of the section (Sand and Iron, Wearing out the Green, Breaking on the Peripheral…etc.). In fact, one can look up in an Irish historical dictionary the meaning and origin of these terms, the three noble strains of Ireland that also describe three moods, lovely (graceful and expressive), sorrowful (melancholy) and soothing (sleepy, composing) (http://www.earlygaelicharp.info/Iris-terms/56.htm). But the story-teller's comments can also intrude into the story-chapters, and the characters in the story-chapters either include or are related to the scarred man and the harper. Once again, Flynn fools us into making false divisions by the novel's structure as we, and characters, come to false conclusions about what kind of story this will turn out to be. In fact the scarred man's last words are "but it is a story for another day." Given Flynn's other work, we can be fairly sure he is not planning a sequel, but is rather undermining the concept of story itself. And as usual with Flynn, I highly recommend this work because it amply rewards any careful attention given to it by its reader.

The Graveyard Book

Sandor Klapcsik

Is *The Graveyard Book* a sequel to or spin-off of *Neverwhere?* Not in the strict sense, the way we can interpret *Anansi Boys* and "The Monarch of the Glen" as significant additions to the storyline of *American Gods*. Yet there are numerous similarities between Gaiman's early novel *Neverwhere* and his recent young adult fiction *The Graveyard Book,* his latest work that, one should hasten to add, is perhaps "one of the *best* Neil Gaiman novels, and certainly the most characteristic" (Wolfe 19; original emphasis).

Both novels describe the supernatural domain as the Underworld. *Neverwhere* places Faerie in the underground system of London, while *The Graveyard Book* depicts the ghost world of an ancient cemetery in a small town in England. The theme of the Underworld, of course, is not a decisive similarity, as it is a frequently deployed device in fantasy and science fiction, in the diverse works of such celebrated authors as J. R. R. Tolkien, H. P. Lovecraft, Lewis Carroll, Jules Verne, Michael Moorcock, Rudy Rucker, and so on (see Jenkins 28–33). Yet this similarity explains many common elements in the two novels. The Under-

world encapsulates history, and juxtaposes numerous diverse spatial and temporal zones, including the realm of the dead. In *Neverwhere,* there are "baronies" and "fiefdoms" (29), micro-worlds that provide privileges and restrictions for their members. In *The Graveyard Book,* the protagonist Nobody Owens or Bod has to learn that "there are the living and the dead, there are day-folk and night-folk, there are ghouls and mist-walkers, there are the high hunters and the Hounds of God. Also, there are solitary types" (63).

Both novels take it for granted that the boundaries of micro-worlds and those of Faerie are reinforced by cognitive barriers: a member of a microworld frequently cannot see through the boundaries of their own zone. This inadequate perception is particularly restrictive for the characters that approach the fantasy world from reality, as quotidian people cannot notice the fantastic characters—for example, the ghosts living in the graveyard—even if they are right in front of their eyes.

Furthermore, in both novels the invisibility of the supernatural domains coincides with "social spaces in our actual world with which the majority of readers are unfamiliar" (Ekman 72). The subterranean places represent deliberately overlooked social spheres: while *Neverwhere* takes it literally that most people intend to neglect homeless citizens, *The Graveyard Book* takes it literally that we tend to forget and ignore our dead ancestors and relatives.

Because they evoke different social spaces and issues, the tone of the cultural or didactic message is noticeably different in the two novels. In *Neverwhere,* invisibility is an ordeal for the protagonist, who wants to free himself from this burden. The reader should realize that the social ignorance of homeless people is a habit to avoid. The cultural criticism is less tangible in *The Graveyard Book,* since for the deceased invisibility is almost a natural way of existence. As Bod's ghost-teacher stresses: "Slipping and Fading, boy, [is] the way of the dead. Slip though shadows. Fade from awareness" (96). Bod is a living character who receives "the Freedom of the Graveyard," and so he can "Fade" and disappear from the perception of everyday people. Social negligence becomes a useful phenomenon here that helps the protagonist throughout most of the novel. Invisibility is an essential skill that he has to learn, a skill which becomes particularly helpful for him—as it would be for everybody—when he starts to attend school. "No one noticed the boy, not at first. No one even noticed that they hadn't noticed him. He sat halfway back in class. He didn't answer much, not unless he was directly asked a question, and even then his answers were short and forgettable, colourless: he faded, in mind and in memory.…Bod was used to being ignored, to existing in the shadows" (168, 172).

A possible way to eschew social and magical blindness is to participate in ritualistic, carnivalesque events. The "Floating Markets" are such special events in *Neverwhere,* which bring together the various baronies, temporarily suspending the hierarchical distinctions between them. Analogously, the Danse Macabre in *The Graveyard Book* unites the poor and the rich, the dead and the living, the primary and secondary world. (It is an interesting feature of Gaiman's Danse Macabre though that one must be either alive or dead to dance it—the character Silas who is in-between the two states cannot participate). Another way to break through ignorance is via friendship or love: Richard Mayhew, the protagonist of *Neverwhere* recognizes Door at the

beginning of the novel, while Bod's real-world friend Scarlett finds the protagonist in her dream, and later in the graveyard even when he Fades.

The Graveyard Book portrays the maturation of the protagonist in great detail, recalling the conventions of the bildungsroman, a genre that foregrounds the education of the protagonist, frequently away from the family. Bod's maturation is manifested by a circular journey, since he eventually returns to the realm of the living, leaving behind the Underworld. Thus, as Maria Nikolajeva observes, the novel features a typical ending for children's fantasy (42). The supernatural domain, the magic of the ghostly Underworld is alluring, but Gaiman's novel rather celebrates "the infinite potential" of life (165), the possibility to change reality, and leave a footmark for further generations.

Similarly to the novel's most significant source text, Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book,* the guides and teachers of the protagonist also become complex characters, and highly likable ones. Baloo is transformed into Silas, "a liminal figure" (Wolfe 19) who guards the boundaries between primary and secondary world, the living and the dead, and who protects magic from a society that deploys it illegitimately, "Jacks of All Trades," the villains of the novel. Further character-correlations are less apparent, but the wolf-family is represented by the Owenses and the (Romanian?) Miss Lupescu, whose name evokes the Latin term for wolf (lupus).

The Graveyard Book has been published in Great Britain in two formats with different illustrations, those of Chris Riddell and Dave McKean, which candidly demonstrates that it is a novel marketed for various age groups: the former version is intended for children and young adults, while the latter is for the adult audience. In the United States, merely the McKean edition is circulated, but it is marketed in two formats, one for children and one for adults. The novel has won The John Newbery Medal for the most outstanding contribution to children's literature. The young age of the protagonist and the relatively straightforward but highly fascinating style of storytelling—customary elements of many Gaiman stories—can explain why the text can be interpreted as young adult fiction. Nevertheless, the complex nature of the characters and the supernatural domain makes the book a joyful read for adults as well—perhaps even qualifies the book to become a canonized text in fantasy literature

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Five Novels by Jamil Nasir: An Introduction

Ritch Calvin

Quasar. New York: Bantam, 1995. ISBN 0-553-56886-8.
The Higher Space. New York: Bantam, 1996. ISBN 0-553-56887-6.
Tower of Dreams. New York: Bantam, 1999. ISBN 0-553-58089-2.
Distance Haze. New York: Bantam, 2000. ISBN 0-553-57995-9.
The Houses of Time. New York: Tor, 2008. ISBN 0-7653-0610-7.

According to Nasir's Web site (http://www.jamilnasir.com/), he was born in Chicago to a father who was a Palestinian refugee and to a mother who was an American. However, he spent a large portion of his childhood living in the Middle East during the time of "two major wars." When he returned to the United States, he entered college at age 14, eventually graduating from the University of Michigan. Like the protagonist in several of his novels, Nasir works part-time for a law firm.

In Nasir's debut novel, *Quasar,* the narrative is set in a indeterminate future and centers around the protagonist Ted Karmade, a "tech-grade psych operator" (9). Neuropsychology has developed to the point that human behavior is modified and controlled via technology and chemistry. The novel begins *en media res,* as Karmade is whisked away to assist an unnamed and unknown patient in a life-and-death crisis. He soon discovers that his patient is Quasar Zant, the daughter of the two richest (and presumed deceased) people on the planet. Quasar seems psychologically unbalanced and self-destructive. Although Karmade helps her through her immediate crisis, he is drawn into her life and her psychosis, and he discovers both the underlying cause and extent of her psychological troubles. When she was only four years old, her own mother began the process of splitting Quasar's mind into six distinct personalities. Nevertheless, Quasar is not as ill as her handlers would believe, and she is also certain that her parents are still alive. She "recruits" (read: "coerces") Karmade into her quest to find her parents.

The secondary plot is that, during the biowars, powerful mutagenics were released, creating all kinds of mutations. While some political factions favored exterminating all mutants, more moderate factions argued that they should be allowed to live, but kept contained in underground warrens—and should be grateful for the favor. Now, a hundred years later, the confrontation between factions resurfaces. To complicate matters, Quasar believes that her parents are hiding in the warrens with the mutants. When Quasar disappears and Karmade escapes, Quasar's aunt creates the political and military pretense for the invasion and destruction of the mutants.

As the blurb on one of the back covers states regarding *Quasar,* Nasir "uses the themes of cyberpunk in fresh and innovative ways." And, indeed, the novel begins within the conventions of cp though it does, at times seem somewhat derivative. As many would argue, the moment for cp has come and gone. In this sense, Nasir seems to be searching for both for both a style and a central theme. However, midway through the novel, the style, tone, and setting shift dramatically, steering away from the cp conventions—another sign that he is searching for his own style. Furthermore, the *alien ex machina* resolution seems both out of step with the cp beginnings of the novel, and generally unsatisfying.

In his second novel, however, Nasir finds himself firmly on his own ground and within what will become the central narrative concern: apperception of reality and the means to occupy alternate realities or dimensions. The central protagonist of *The Higher Space* is Robert Wilson, a middle-aged corporate lawyer. He and his wife, Vicki, have settled into a comfortable—if stifling—suburban lifestyle. When a neighbor, Nora Esterbrook, requires legal assistance regarding her adopted daughter, Vicki volunteers her husband to help. The birth mother of their daughter, the 14-year old computer genius, Diana Esterbrook, has returned to challenge the adoption on technical grounds. Wilson reluctantly accepts out of neighborly kindness, but as the case becomes stranger and stranger, he finds himself fully drawn into it. The other primary characters are Wendell Thaxton, an eccentric old man, Zachary an autistic child, and Armilla Robinson, Diana's birth mother and recently-paroled murderer.

Diana is a devotee of Professor Mohammad al-Haq, the author of *The Principles of Thaumatomathematics* and primary proponent of the ideology. By means of his book, Diana has developed a computer program that maps the trajectory of an individual's life, including her drunken father and herself. Diana did not, however, come by her advanced computer or her computer skills accidentally. In fact, the eccentric Mr. Thaxton tutored her when she was young and watched over her as she grew older. One of the amulets he leaves behind as protection is a garlic clove that contains a miniaturized Native American artifact and an advanced surveillance device. When Bob and Vicki take the amulets to a nearby Native American shop, they discover their significance within Native American folklore. The Powhatan nation has a myth of the shaman Eagle. As a boy, Eagle had been taken into the underworld and cut into parts; upon his return to the surface, he was both changed and powerful. However, when the white man came and destroyed the Powhatan people, Eagle converted himself into a white man to avoid being placed on the reservation.

As a part of the legend, Eagle could travel in and out of space, into a higher plane of reality. Thaxton claims that he, Diana, Zachary, Armilla (and the boy she murdered and consumed) are actually the incarnations of Eagle, just waiting to be re-united, and thereby reclaim his access to the higher plane. But Diana, in a convergence of shamanism and technology, and through the teachings of Thaxton and al-Haq, has discovered the ability to move in and out of three-dimensional space with the assistance of her computer program. The novel's concluding battle takes place in and out of fourth-dimensional space. Once the mundane Wilson has experienced fourth-dimensional space, he becomes convinced of the possibility and of the legend.

Throughout the novel, Nasir examines the boundaries and common areas of science, mathematics, and computers with Native American shamanism. Both belief systems posit alternative or expanded possibilities, and the convergence of the two lift a stifled corporate lawyer into a higher space.

Nasir's third novel, *Tower of Dreams,* continues to develop the narrative concern with alternate space. In this novel, however, he shifts the location to the middle east. *Tower* centers upon Blaine Ramsey, a Senior Field Neurosocial Prospector for Icon, a company that develops neuro marketing techniques. The field

agents, who have some kind of tie or affiliation with a particular region, are sent to live in and become a part of a region or culture. Once there, with the aid of electronics and drugs, the field agents enter "lucid dreams," in which they tap into the psyche of the culture. The information is relayed to the home company, Icon, so that it can create targeted marketing. While in Kraima, a village in Jordan, Ramsey enters a lucid dream and witnesses the rape and beating of a beautiful woman, Buthaina. The dream is both unusual and haunting. When he discovers that the woman in the dream looks exactly like Aida, the most famous actress in the Arab world, he journeys to Cairo, Egpyt in order to track her down.

Ramsey, a fluent Arabic speaker, takes the bus to Jordan, and along the way, he observes the abject poverty of many individuals, and he also learns of the rapidly developing political crisis. Egypt has been subjected to a series of devastating earthquakes; the West and the United States has refused to help in recovery efforts unless and until Egypt engages in a serious program of population control. Ramsey spends part of his time among the everyday citizens and part of it among the wealthy elite who are above (literally and metaphorically) the poverty. The elite enjoy all the technological conveniences and extravagances of the West, while the disenfranchised have only the remnants that have trickled down. He also learns, however, that Aida has captured the attention and imagination of an entire region—though what she means to them is open to debate.

When Ramsey finally locates Aida, he finds that she is almost permanently drunk or high, controlled and manipulated by those around her. Eventually, though, Ramsey breaks through to her, and in the midst of total political collapse, they flee Cairo to return to Aida's home town. There, Ramsey learns that Buthaina/Aida was a closely guarded daughter of the well-to-do Omar Darwish. When rumors began to circulate that she had lost her virtue—which she denied—her father did not believe her and punished her. Buried up to her neck in sand, a great earthquake freed her, and she disappeared from sight. The question remains, however, whether she caused the earthquake herself, and whether she is responsible for the current (geo/political) instabilities. Nevertheless, her pain and anguish have radiated throughout the collective unconscious of the region.

In *Tower of Dreams,* Nasir demonstrates both the universality of the human condition and particularity of it. As the dream diggers tap into the collective unconscious, they uncover universal images and emotions. Those universals, however, take on very particular forms in the Arab world and in Egypt. Nasir neither demonizes nor romanticizes the Egyptians, nor does he appropriate their culture or iconography as does, say, *Neuromancer.* In this sense, I would suggest that *Tower of Dreams* is more akin to Maureen McHugh's *China Mountain Zhang* or *Nekropolis.* Nasir reinforces the argument against cultural and spiritual appropriation. In the conclusion, Ramsey is reunited with several other former "image diggers," all of whom have turned against Icon. Naseeb tells Ramsey, "'We can't just let it go at that. We can't let religion be just something they use to sell liquor to Third world teenagers. You get it?'" (228).

Nasir's fourth novel, *Distance Haze,* offers a slightly different take on his favorite theme. Once again, Nasir examines the nature of reality and the mind's ability to perceive it. The novel centers upon the third-rate science fiction writer, Wayne
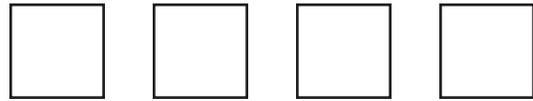
Dolan. He is down on his luck, recently divorced, missing his children, when he gets an offer—and a cash advance—to write a non-fiction book on the Deriwelle Institute, a center located in Michigan that investigates the nature of religion and God. The Deriwelle Institute has gathered theologians and scientists, including several Nobel Prize winners, to determine—once and for all—the nature and origin of belief. The Institute also happens to be located upon an ancient Native American site. As the skeptical Dolan interviews the various participants, he also begins to communicate while in a dream state with a Native American shaman, who encourages Dolan to explore the space where dreams and reality overlap. As Dolan's dream visions seem to become more tangible, he becomes uncertain about the "reality" of dreams and hallucinations.

Among the things that the visions lead Dolan to are the "silky girl" of his dreams, the daughter of Dr. Hall, one of the Nobel prize-winning scientists at the Institute, and a cottage overlooking the lake that does not seem to exist in "real" space. Hall, however, believes that he has created a vaccine that will destroy the mental capacity and desire for religious belief. According to Hall, the desire to believe stems from an evolutionary fluke in which the portion of the brain responsible for generalizations overlapped with the portion responsible for assigning meaning to things. The result of this overlap is a desire to attach meaning to everything, to look for higher meaning, purpose, and design in the randomness and meaninglessness of life. Hall had vaccinated his daughter, Gail, when she was only seven years old. Now a junky and a prostitute, she claims that the vaccination destroyed her ability to believe in anything, and therefore, her only relief is external, namely heroin. Wayne and Gail debate the "reality" of the altered state—whether through religion or drugs—and, in the end, Dolan opts to seek fulfillment in the space in between.

As in his second novel, Nasir incorporates Native American shamanism in his examination of both reality and belief. Dolan, a dealer in fantasies, was so distraught over his collapsed life that "reality" seems, ultimately, unfulfilling. Hall is steadfast in his belief that fantasy and the desire for external fulfillment are destructive to the extent that he is determined to inoculate everyone against them. Gail Hall, crippled (physically and metaphorically) by the drugs (licit and illicit) is incapable of religious belief; nevertheless, she denies that her escape from pain is any different from Dolan's. In *Higher Space,* Nasir examines the overlap between Native American beliefs and technological beliefs; in *Distance Haze,* he examines the overlap in Native American beliefs and Western religious and cultural beliefs.

His fifth novel, *The Houses of Time,* centers upon another middle-aged lawyer, David Grant. While trying to re-invent himself and get more out of his life, Grant stumbles upon the Trans-Humanist Institute. Through the THI, he undergoes the process of training himself with the ability for "lucid dreaming," a type of dreaming in which the subject is aware that s/he is dreaming, and can consciously control the shape of the dream—similar to the lucid dreams in *Tower of Dreams.* The THI, however, is really a front for Caucasus Synod of the Western Orthodox Church, which uses the THI in order to train candidates for its real purpose—approaching God and praying that he might protect the members of the Church.

As the THI and Dr. Thotmoses develop Grant as a candidate, they alter his brain in order to free him to travel between the

different alternate realities. Kat explains to David that, like the photon that appears to travel through two slots simultaneously, "reality" splits into every possible alternative at each moment. The members of the CSWOC believe that they are an advanced subspecies of humans, called *Homo sapiens emporos.* One of the defining characteristics of the subspecies *emporos* is the ability to travel between realities, which they call "houses." However, with training and surgical tweaking, *Homo sapiens sapiens* are capable, as well. Unfortunately for David Grant, the neurological tweaking produces a debilitating psychosis. Grant finds himself, in his "home" reality, institutionalized. Dr. Thotmoses and the CSWOC, however, believe that they have "liberated" him from the confines of a single reality. Initially, traveling requires his consciousness to inhabit and travel by "causal proxy," meaning into the body of the David Grant in whichever reality he currently occupies. Eventually, though, Grant develops the ability to travel by "ghost proxy," which means that his physical body travels to the alternate reality, which means that two bodily David Grants exist in the same reality. Grant finds himself trapped in a series of universes, of alternating between "dream" and "reality," and he is never quite certain which is which. Kat, the "dark-haired girl" who captivates him, argues that they are *all* real.

Although the novel raises questions of science and ethics, of religious fanaticism, and of competing theories of space-time dimensions, the real center of the novel is, much like it is in so many of Phil Dick's works, the question of reality and its apperception. By the end, Grant can no longer sort out which "houses" are real, and which proxies are causal and which are ghost. While one version of Grant seems to have found the Edenic peacefulness of his youthful fantasies, another version remains "a quadriplegic with severe trauma-related dementia… in a drugged stupor" who hallucinates "that he was married to a rich, beautiful girl who belonged to an exotic human subspecies, and that he had been picked out among all the men in the world to fly up to God and save the girl and her race" (301).

Certainly, the works of Jamil Nasir bears some resemblance to those of PKD. Little wonder, then, that he was runner-up for the PKD Award and won the Grand Prix de l'Imaginaire in France. His fascination with religion, spirituality, reality, and dark-haired beauties that motivate male protagonists all seem PKD-ish. His work also beings to mind that of Neal Stephenson or Neil Gaiman, primarily in the way in which Nasir draws upon and weaves together disparate mythologies and spiritualities and connects them to science and technology. And although I would not suggest that he's not quite the stylist that Maureen McHugh is, his work, nevertheless, shares some similar concerns.

For reading or for teaching, I would suggest beginning with *Tower of Dreams,* followed by *The Higher Space, Distance Haze, The Houses of Time,* and then *Quasar. Tower* is, perhaps, the most ambitious in that Nasir has to represent (mostly) Egyptian culture as both alien and familiar, as decaying but not decadent. And while most of the novels draw together different and differing belief systems, *Tower* is the most successful in not only showing these belief systems in contrast, but also strongly advocating the need to curtail the cultural imperialism of Western thought and practice.

Media Reviews

Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog [Web series]

Sharon Sharp and Patrick B. Sharp

Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog. Dir. Joss Whedon. Perf. Neil Patrick Harris, Nathan Fillion, and Felicia Day. Mutant Enemy, 2008.

As the title indicates, *Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog* revolves around the video blog of an aspiring evil scientist named Dr. Horrible (Harris) who is trying to make it into the super-villain team known as the Evil League of Evil (ELE). The series emerged from a collaboration between Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Firefly creator Joss Whedon and his family members Jed Whedon, Zack Whedon, and Maurissa Tancharoen. Like Joss Whedon's earlier work, Dr. Horrible tweaks genre conventions in humorous and innovative ways while providing a thoroughly entertaining SF fable about love, bullying, and the dangers of professional ambition.

As the series begins, Dr. Horrible's video blog establishes his quest and provides a glimpse into the comic-book world we have entered. In his blog, Dr. Horrible, directly addressing the viewer, responds to annoying e-mail questions from his audience, rails against the declining standards in super-villain laughter, and insults other wannabe super-villains. After several minutes, the series shifts to a Broadway-style song entitled "My Freeze Ray" where Dr. Horrible's mild-mannered alter ego, Billy, sings about how his new invention will allow him to "stop the world" and win the heart of a girl named Penny (Day), whom he sees regularly at the Laundromat. The series unfolds in three acts that alternate between musical numbers, dramatic action, and blog sequences.

Dr. Horrible's attempts to impress the ELE continually frustrate Billy's attempts to win Penny's affections. Though technically evil, viewers are positioned to identify with Dr. Horrible/Billy: he is a shy science nerd who is constantly beaten up by the jock-like superhero Captain Hammer (Fillian). In the first on-screen confrontation with Captain Hammer, it becomes clear that Dr. Horrible values innocent life much more than his reckless arch-nemesis. However, Penny witnesses only part of the confrontation and comes to a different conclusion: she sees Captain Hammer as a savior (like everyone else) and falls in love with him. The superhero thus becomes the real villain of the story, as he bullies Billy and romances Penny out of selfishness and spite.

The production and distribution of Dr. Horrible make it an interesting case study in genre and emerging forms of media. As a number of the contributors note in a DVD documentary, part of the purpose of the series was to demonstrate that there are other possibilities for creating and distributing media that do not include major entertainment corporations. The series was shot in seven days for less than six figures during the Writers Guild of America Strike of 2007–2008 and then marketed largely through

word of mouth. Dr. Horrible was originally released for free without advertising on the Internet in three live streamed, twenty-minute installments on July 15, 17, and 19 of 2008 at the Web site drhorrible.com. It was then sold as a DVD and the soundtrack was made available for download on iTunes. Installments of the series continue to circulate on YouTube—presumably with the blessing of the producers—and on advertiser supported Hulu. com. This alternative production and distribution process is important to consider in understanding convergence—or "the situation in which multiple media systems coexist and where media content flows fluidly across them" (Jenkins 282). As an "Internet mini-series event" in Whedon's terms, Dr. Horrible demonstrates the growing importance and acceptance of the Internet as a medium for storytelling. Moreover, the original event was structured much like traditional broadcast television, as a special event in which fans were encouraged to watch during a specific period of time in order to promote the ancillary products of the DVD and digital downloads, as Stacey Abbott has observed. The success of this production and distribution model is an important one for understanding the circulation of media outside of the domain of media conglomerates and what media narratives might become in the future.

Dr. Horrible is a teachable SF series, and could launch a great classroom discussion about genre and new media. As Charles Bazerman demonstrates, recent theories of genre—from a number of disciplinary and interdisciplinary fields—emphasize that genres are not discrete: within a given culture, genres constitute a complex system of discursive frames that artists and audiences have at their disposal when producing and interpreting texts. Dr. Horrible invokes several clearly recognizable genre conventions from Internet video blogs, pulp fiction, comic books, and SF film and television. It also draws on classic conventions of comedy, drama, and tragedy as it charts Dr. Horrible's attempts to defeat Captain Hammer and get into the ELE. The songs in the show also draw from a variety of genres and styles. "Brand New Day," a

rock-heavy song that crystallizes Dr. Horrible's nebulous ambitions, is a particularly enjoyable meditation on SF conventions. Indeed, much of the pleasure of the show comes from the unexpected or unconventional recombination of familiar generic elements. A classroom discussion could focus on which genres are being evoked, what expectations these generic conventions create, and what kinds of pleasures and frustrations are created by the unconventional use of generic elements.

Dr. Horrible should also prove to be a rich source of analysis for SF scholars. Dr. Horrible has already proven to be incredibly successful, and those interested in fan studies will find much to say about the promotion, distribution, and response to this show (the DVD even includes fan-produced video "applications" for the ELE). All SF fans will want to give Dr. Horrible at least one viewing. The writing is inspired, the acting is crisp, and the music is toe-tappingly addictive. That is a rare combination for a SF text.

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Dollhouse [TV show]

Nolan Belk

Dollhouse: Season 1. Creator Joss Whedon. Prod. Eliza Dushku, Kelly Manners. Perf. Eliza Dushku, Harry Lenix, Miracle Laurie, Dichen Lachman, Enver Gjokaj, Olivia Williams, Tahmoh Penikett, Fran Kranz. Fox, 2009.

Marking creator Joss Whedon's return to FOX after a tumultuous break midway through season 1 of *Firefly*, the television show *Dollhouse* began airing after *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles* during the spring season of 2009 and is expected to complete a first season run of thirteen episodes in mid-May. *Dollhouse* follows the exploits of a group of programmable people called "dolls," who fulfill the desires of whoever buys their time, and also follows the intricate relationships of those who control, program, and aid the dolls. In addition, the show has also introduced an escaped doll, Alpha, a rogue FBI agent, Paul Ballard played by *Battlestar Galactica* alum Tahmoh Penikett, and a morally ambiguous pharmaceutical company which bankrolls the Dollhouses. Within its first nine episodes, *Dollhouse* has created an intricate and complicated set of plots and subplots focused on multiple levels of conspiracy, including the controversial idea that the dolls have all volunteered to have their memories wiped and to be slaves to others and the bold statement that although the audience may know what the Dollhouses do, we do not yet know the purpose of the Dollhouses—and it is a purpose the show suggests the audience may be willing to protect.

Although *Dollhouse*'s approach to doll programming involves fancy computer touch screens and lots of hardware, including a rather ominous chair, stories of programmable people have been around as long as there have been golems or demon possession. Where Whedon's take on the dolls becomes interesting is in motivation: whereas the wives in *The Stepford Wives* are replaced against their wills, these dolls (like the X-men's Wolverine) seem to have chosen identity annihilation rather than to face the truth of their lives. In the episode "Man on the Street," seemingly random citizens of Los Angeles are asked about the Dollhouse and while some respond with disgust at the mere idea of human slavery, more than a few support such an enterprise, including some who would be willing to join. Whedon is clearly asking his audience to repeatedly judge not the activities of the dolls, but the very morality of the Dollhouses. Such philosophical questions are the core of the best science fiction shows such as *Battlestar Galactica, Babylon 5,* and *Lost*, among others. And like these shows, *Dollhouse* couches such questions in compelling stories of drama and action focusing on beautiful people.

Although *Dollhouse* can and should be compared to its science fiction predecessors such as *The X-Files* (agent Ballard is certainly akin to agent Mulder, for instance), any show created by Whedon should probably best be compared to his other television work. Whereas in *Buffy* and *Angel*, Eliza Dushku

played a secondary character, here she springs to the forefront as Echo, the leader of the dolls, albeit a leader who does not have a clear identity. As in episodes of *Buffy* or *Angel* involving memory loss, Whedon uses Echo to investigate what is the core of humanity stripped of all the building blocks of memory and personality. Unlike in his other excursions into memory loss, however, Echo's memory loss is not humorous. She is a leader of the darker variety such as Buffy in season 6, and she is broken in a way resembling Mal from *Firefly* or Wesley from season 5 of *Angel*. And like Wesley's evolution as a character throughout *Angel*, it is already obvious that secondary characters such as the dolls November, Sierra, and Victor, along with agent Ballard and others, will carry as much of the emotional momentum and philosophical questioning as Echo. In fact, perhaps the most poignant moments of the show have so far involved November, played by newcomer Miracle Laurie, and Ballard. November is also notable because, while certainly beautiful, she is not the stereotypical hair-thin beauty but is more physically comparable to Tara from *Buffy*. In fact, according to iO9 contributor Alasdair Wilkins, Whedon claims that he wanted a range of ages and body types as dolls but that FOX insisted on stereotypical youth and beauty.

Although the story premise is different from his earlier work, *Dollhouse* fits solidly in the Whedon oeuvre through its focus on using not-quite-human characters to delve more deeply into philosophical questions of morality and responsibility than average television chooses to delve. (For more on Whedon's approach to such questions in his television work, view his Equality Now speech.) However, *Dollhouse* is not without flaws. Whedon himself has complained that not every episode has something to say. According to Wilkins, "He singled out the fifth episode, 'True Believer,' as one that fails to explore the motivations for why people join cults and how these reasons connect with why people end up in the Dollhouse." Such an exciting episode may make for good television, but fails to provide the deep questioning that Whedon followers expect. Herein lies a juxtaposed flaw: like *Buffy*, *Dollhouse* is not a show which is easy to merely pick up. The show asks for more dedication than most FOX viewers looking for beautiful women engaged in exciting action are willing to give. Although broadcast on Friday evenings, it is no more escapist television than *Battlestar Galactica* was. The questions *Dollhouse* raises make for excellent avenues of exploration on discussion boards and in journals dedicated to science fiction and to Joss Whedon, but an inability to catch and seize a FOX audience as well as the difference in vision between the creator and the studio do not bode well for the future of this promising show.

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Watchmen [film]

Ed Carmien

Watchmen. Dir. Zack Snyder. Perf. Malin Akerman, Billy Crudup, Matthew Goode. Warner Bros., 2009.

Watchmen, after a tortured journey to the big screen, was finally filmed by Zack Snyder. As with many works from outside the mainstream it was panned by some reviewers. The *Times* hammered it, noting it is "more curiosity than provocation," adding the original graphic novel possesses "shallow nihilism that has always lurked beneath the intellectual pretensions of 'Watchmen.'"

One might argue the film is shallow, though at two hours forty minutes running time, Snyder certainly aimed for depth, but the graphic novel? I first taught this work in the late 1980s, an era during which it paid to ask who watches the watchmen, and shallow it isn't. I returned the text to my science fiction classroom at the turn of the current century, when once again the essential theme of the novel gained contemporary relevance.

The story is not for children. It tells us about the United States by making real the costumed crime fighters of our real-life comics. Why do we glorify vigilantism—might makes right—in our comics? That glory is indeed childlike, the rhetorically shallow, seemingly obvious argument of a good ass-kicking as remedy for social rot.

Watchmen argues against the glory as it argues against what it implies is the real myth of the United States and its use of power. No matter the military adventure, be it Vietnam or the middle east, our use of power has always been blinkered by the myth that since we are just our acts are just. Hence our great confusion when after liberating Iraq our troops were not universally acclaimed as heroes.

Confusion can result if one confuses the attractive package for this possibly bitter pill. We laugh—no one harder than I—at the story of the unfortunate "villain" Captain Carnage, who likes being beaten up. One crime fighter takes the bait, another has heard of him and walks away—but Rorschach drops him down an elevator shaft. This amusement is natural but must not distract from the essential message of the movie, and the novel, which is contained in the Latin phrase from which the title is taken. Who, indeed, watches the watchmen?

We must. We must watch those who we give power over us, just as those in the alternate history of *Watchmen* do not. Of those who are least watched is Edward Blake, the Comedian. He gets the joke, a joke modernist novelists of the last century wrote a little about, over and over. Philip Roth's Rabbit knows the joke, the ennui of the 'burbs, the emptiness of consumerism. Beyond a few works that directly address the folly that follows the naked use of power, this is where the discussion always stops, well short of the mailed fist clenched and punching. *Watchmen* goes further into that dark continent of the human condition, a very real world, proof of which we need go no further than the "Security Council 2008 Round-up" briefing paper by the United Nations. It contains a chilling review of this world of ours, from genocide to warfare by systematic rape to child soldiers.

The Comedian, a dark, more real reflection of venerable Captain America is the key. Rapist, murderer, and (in the film)

Kennedy's assassin, he is beloved of Nixon and his humanoids. Yet even his dark heart breaks under the scale of Veidt's plan to slaughter millions to yank the world back from nuclear armageddon. In the novel Veidt terms the man a nazi while implicitly tarring Rorschach with the same brush—and paints himself into the same corner, at least for the discerning reader. He is clearly not to be emulated.

Yet the Real America has always been part villain all along. What country isn't? In World War II we firebombed Dresden for no great strategic aim, part of a war strategy historian Max Hastings argues as being needlessly cruel to German civilians in *Armageddon: The Battle for Germany, 1944–1945*. And of course we nuked Japan not once but twice, ostensibly to avoid Operation Olympic but probably (it has been suggested) to secure Japan under the post-war strategic umbrella of the USA.

This is reality. There are no utopias. Those who prefer a gentler version of the world should continue to do so. I'll help: Science Fiction is a useful vice for this endeavor. Things will never be better without idealism. But we must never forget to keep an eye on the watchmen, whoever they might be, wherever they might be, whatever they might be doing. Don't be distracted by the pretty myths in tights, like Captain America, who is neither rapist nor murderer and started his career fighting real nazis.

Watchmen—and *Watchmen*—has the pretty myths in tights, but as warning rather than guide. Snyder knows this and works against the pretty myth with an excess of gore. Anyone familiar with the text can see the filmmaker drew from it like a story board—but Snyder goes well beyond what is suggested on the page. There is blood, and broken bone, and worse, much in pornographic slow motion.

Snyder overdid this aspect of his revision of the text. Perhaps he felt the need to make the message obvious, even to the most jaded moviegoer. Whatever the case, bring a strong stomach or at least a good instinct for when to turn away from the screen.

Much has been said about Snyder's omission of the text-Veidt's "invading alien," using instead a Dr. Manhattan–esque effect to kill millions not just in New York City but in sundry metropolises around the world. The essential nature of the story remains the same, however, and this change allowed Snyder to bring the story in under three hours. The medium can only hold so much message, and in this case a sacrifice had to be made. In addition, an attack only on NYC would ring odd in these post 9/11 times, and in a strict cause and effect sense bringing about world peace by only attacking one country seems counterintuitive.

Watchmen may well be a film made for readers of the book. As a reviewer I am so entombed in the physical text—the words, the art, the arrangement of panels on the page—that it is impossible for me to imagine how the film appears to someone unfamiliar with the text. As a reader (and that word seems insufficient to the cause), I found the film a success. Not perfect, perhaps, but a riveting presentation in great part because of its utterly faithful portrayal of the graphic novel.

Can it be of use to us as teachers? Yes. Snyder has folded in much extra material that will yield insights to a studied viewing. For example, the film's presentation of gender issues reveals a weakness present in the original text. Moore and Gibbons, and hence Snyder, can be critiqued for good reason in this context.

Use of Scott McCloud and his *Understanding Comics* is extremely effective when studying the graphic novel, and far from useless when discussing the film. Both film and text offer ties not only to traditional avenues of literary exploration but a rich field of popular culture as well. As for the film, be wary of the mainstream—as always. The shallow nihilism it sees may be a harsh reflection of that mainstream…and those watchmen need watching, too.

Finding the Big Other and Making Him Pay [graphic novel series]

David M. Higgins

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Ennis, Garth (writer), Steve Dillon (artist), and Glen Fabry (cover art). *Preacher: Alamo*. New York: DC Comics, 2001.

Garth Ennis, the writer and creator of *Preacher*, is a discerning fan of American Westerns, and he begins the forward to *Preacher: Ancient History* by debunking many popular stereotypes about the West. If the classic myth of the West portrayed the American frontier as a place of heroism and new beginnings, the *real* West (in Ennis's view) was a gothic landscape of dirt, violence, and brutal injustice that is obscured by such mythic narratives. Ennis proposes, however, that Westerns can transcend their troubled ideological origins: "The modern western does not flinch from the horrors of the frontier. Its makers seek to understand what went before, to portray the men and women who made history, warts and all. What began as a whitewash of the past has become a tool to interrogate it" (3). Ennis distinguishes between classic (John Wayne era) Westerns, which upheld simple heroic values and ignored the dark historical realities of Western expansion, and later post-Vietnam (Clint Eastwood era) Westerns, where the dark ambiguity of the hero's morality gestures toward "something new…perhaps it was the first nod toward capturing the reality of the frontier" (3). Ennis sees the modern gothic Western as the return of the early mythic Western's repressed, and *Preacher* embodies his attempt to explore

this "realistic" dark side of the frontier while at the same time recuperating the ideals of the early mythic Western.

Preacher begins from the premise that an irresponsible and delinquent God is responsible for the degenerate state of the world, and the main character's central goal is to find God (who has abandoned his throne in heaven) and make him answer for his negligence. The central hero, Jesse Custer, is a small-town Texas preacher who becomes imbued with the power of God when Genesis (a celestial infant born from the illegitimate mating of an angel and a demon) escapes from Heaven, crashes to earth, and bonds with Custer's soul, annihilating his congregation in a devastating blast. Custer gains proof of God's existence and the power make the almighty responsible for creation's flaws, so he teams up with his ex-girlfriend Tulip (a tomboy hit woman) and a hard drinking Irish vampire named Cassidy to seek out God and exact vengeance upon him.

Preacher presumes that God has failed in his role as father and creator because the world is filled with meaningless tragedy; the underlying message of the series is that another, better, secular set of paternal figures should function as role models and ultimate guarantors of order and stability. The frontier may not have been as simple and heroic as it appears in John Wayne's films, but from *Preacher*'s perspective it *should* have been; the series holds God responsible for the gap between truth and fiction rather than the nation that was founded on the legacy of frontier injustices. Furthermore, the series imagines that the positive values of early Westerns can serve as a strong moral foundation as long as the horrors of the repressed history of the real American West are highlighted rather than swept under the rug.

Ennis's determination to reveal the ugly gothic truth of the West, "warts and all," produces a charged narrative; the powerful meaninglessness of Ennis' "real" gothic West is a meaninglessness pregnant with ideological meaning, because it naturalizes the idea that God (the bad father) should have been responsible for the injustices that were committed on the frontier and that the values of a *good* ideal father (John Wayne) are a naturally preferable alternative.

Preacher showcases countless gothic tropes, including demons, sexual perverts, rednecks, racist policemen, Global conspiracies, haunted houses, ghosts, spirits, live burials, inbreeding, mutilations, drug addicts, abject infants, uncanny puppet women built from bloody meat, nazis, dominatrices, nazi dominatrices, cannibals, pre-Oedipal mothers, Ku-Klux-Klansmen, Voodoo shamans, evil midgets, cybernetic implants, and vampires. The configuration of these gothic motifs reveals a constitutive anxiety within the series about masculine identity and heterosexuality; *Preacher* explores what makes a good father (and therefore a good man) by offering a showcase of perverse and monstrous negative models of masculinity and sexuality.

Almost all of the gothic images in the series draw power from the dislocation, mutilation, malfunction, or the freakish mislocation of genitals and bodily orifices. The most significant example of this is Arseface, the child of a racist police officer who crosses Jessie Custer and ends up puncturing his own colon with his penis when Jesse uses the Word of God to tell him to go fuck himself. Arseface is deformed because he shoots himself in the face with a shotgun in order to follow in the footsteps of his hero Kurt Cobain. At first he vows revenge against Jessie, but a peaceful resolution is reached when Custer and Cassidy help him sign a major record deal.

If Arseface embodies anxieties surrounding anal violation, Herr Starr exposes masculine fears about impotence and malfunctioning genitalia. Starr is a fascist control freak who is so insecure about his masculinity that he must degrade women (by urinating on their faces or cleavage) while having sex in order to compensate for the temporary loss of control he experiences during orgasm. Starr's genitals are eaten off by an angry dog and replaced by a horrific technological prosthetic; he also loses one eye and gets sliced across the scalp so that his head resembles the head of a giant penis. At one point it is revealed that Starr secretly enjoys to be the victim of violent anal sex, and he absolutely refuses any sort of normative heterosexual intercourse and instead takes his most powerful sexual thrills from the discharge of guns, tanks, and finally, from the launching of a nuclear missile.

While some villains, such as Arseface and Starr, dramatize heteornormative masculine anxieties, other villains in the series are presented as monstrous because of their associations with abject feminine embodiment and infantilism. *Preacher* is overflowing with images of infancy and abjection—Genesis itself is an infant who threatens to annihilate God's subjectivity—but the most potent abject images tend to be associated with *male* bodies, particularly the bodies of Allfather D'Aronique and Odin Quincannon.

D'Aronique is the leader of the Grail, an organization dedicated to the preservation of the secret bloodline of Christ, until Starr pushes him out of an airplane and he lands on the inbred grandchild of the Messiah (instantly killing them both). D'Aronique is bulimic; in every scene where he appears he is either consuming or vomiting massive quantities of food. Like the other villains in the series, he is characterized by a grotesque exaggeration and mislocation of bodily orifice, but while his image always evokes a strong negative visceral response, it is rarely due to a phallic or anal connotation. D'Aronique is constantly consuming and *abjecting*, and the matter he expels is never solid; it is always fluid, runny, and boundlessly unstable. D'Aronique is portrayed as a gruesome female man; he is unable to control his physical or emotional boundaries, and his all-consuming mouth is visually rendered to bear a disturbing resemblance to female genitalia.

Odin Quincannon is also associated with fluidity and abjection, but unlike D'Aronique, he represents a model of monstrous infantile masculinity. Quincannon appears in *Salvation*, a storyarc that retells the Wyatt Earp legend; he is a tiny, infantile runt who runs a meat processing plant near the town of Salvation. Like Ike Clanton from the Earp legend, Quincannon is in the cattle industry, but unlike Clanton, Quincannon is much closer to his meat: his secret is that he as a private slaughterhouse where he has constructed a *meat mommy*—a horrifying and uncanny giant meat woman whose toothy womb he can crawl into like a perverse carnivorous fetus. At points in the story we see Quincannon emerging from this slaughterhouse naked and covered in blood; he is literally portrayed as an abject man-fetus bathed in menstrual matter. Quincannon represents a form of unacceptable, undeveloped masculinity that the audience can take pleasure distancing itself from. As Custer says before he kills

Quincannon, "I've seen some fucked up things in my time, but that about takes the fucked up cookie" (*Salvation* 178).

If Quincannon represents an infantile and abject "bad father" who is submasculine and underdeveloped because he creates an uncanny meat-mother to love him, God himself is revealed to be an exact parallel to Quincannon. *Preacher* presents God as a boyish, adolescent, irresponsible entity who creates the universe because he is lonely and wants his creations to love him despite his flaws and insecurities. All of creation, Ennis suggests, is God's meat-mommy, and God is a selfish, boyish vampire who feeds upon the love of his creation. God and Cassidy (the Irish vampire) are also doubles in the series; they are well-intentioned characters, but their adolescent boyishness is the product of infantile addiction and over-dependence. Cassidy eventually learns to grow up and become a man (he decides to take responsibility for his actions and their consequences, and he is therefore cured of his addictive vampirism), but God, in contrast, has completely failed in his role as a father, and he must be shot dead by a good father (the ghostly Saint of Killers) who subsequently takes God's place on the Throne of Heaven.

If the bad fathers in the series (God, D'Aronique, Starr, Quincannon) are each representatives of failed masculinity and heterosexuality, the good fathers, in contrast, are ghosts (John Custer, the Saint of Killers, and John Wayne) who teach Jessie to either stand alone (or to stand with a safely heterosexual "pardner") and to escape from a dependence on the horrific wombs of overbearing matriarchs. Jessie meets John Wayne's ghost when his evil grandmother locks him in a dark coffin anchored to the bottom of the swamp in order to torture him until he "learns to love the Lord." After his first month in the coffin (a displacement of his grandmother's horrifying and all-encompassing womb) he learns to love God: "that's what God's there for," Jessie says, "When you're beaten, when you haven't an ounce of fight left in you, when you can't hack it by yourself anymore: you turn to Jesus or you stick a fuckin gun in your mouth" (*Until the End of the World* 78). Yet after his second visit to the coffin he learns not to depend on God; instead, he learns to listen to the ghostly voice of his "pardner" John Wayne, who teaches him to stand on his own and to rely on himself when things get rough.

If God is the bad father against whom the positive values of a good father like John Wayne can be established to make up for the meaningless voids, lacks, and absences in the symbolic order, the resulting order is built upon the foundation of a symptomatic anxiety about the loss of traditional masculinity and heterosexual stability. As Jane Tompkins suggests in *West of Everything*, "the Western doesn't have anything to do with the West as such…it's about men's fear of losing their mastery, and hence their identity, both of which the Western tirelessly reinvents" (45). *Preacher* may, to some degree, offer a return to some of the repressed violences of the historical frontier, but it does so in such a way that the classic boundaries of masculine and heterosexual identity are policed and reinforced. In the end, the cowboy rides off into the sunset with his girl, despite the fact that she swears to herself (and to him) that she will never forgive him for leaving her behind a second time to go off and "do what a man's gotta do" without her. Jessie Custer ("JC") dies and returns from the dead to redeem the sins of Western masculinity, and Ennis's

West emerges at last as a land of endless second chances for conservative masculinity and heteronormative sexuality.

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Twilight [film]

Catherine Coker

The *Twilight* phenomenon is in many ways the true heir to the *Harry Potter* phenomenon—midnight book-release parties, weeks on end on the bestseller lists, instigator of adult angst over what the children are reading. The film of the first book is almost an anticlimax: the violence minimal, the sexual metaphor of vampiric desire restrained. Indeed, any controversy that erupted was from the backseat of a minivan as a tween pouted that the film "left stuff out."

Generally the issue of adapting a five-hundred-page novel into a two-hour film is problematic—stuff does get left out, and the film is often the poorer for it. In the case of *Twilight*, the deletions give the film much of its charm. The romance of Bella Swan, a human teenager, and Edward Cullen, her vampire paramour, is sweeter and less purple when it is reduced to the longing looks and awkward dialogue of high schoolers. A short summary of the plot: boy meets girl, boy saves girl's life, girl discovers boy is vampire, girl and boy date and angst, boy saves girl from evil vampires, girl and boy go to prom. A typical high school romance, with fangs.

Most complaints over the series hinge on its retro flavor: Bella is the virtual opposite of the other heroine of the age, Buffy the Vampire Slayer. Whereas Buffy's struggles focused on saving the world and paying bills, Bella's only focus is being with Edward. Her human friends disappear into the background, her education is unimportant, and the series ultimately ends with domestic if paranormal bliss. It is, therefore, all the more interesting that the director of the film, Catherine Hardwicke, seems to take pains to make Bella both self-sufficient and a woman of the '00s. Early scenes focus on Bella as she makes new friends at school. In the books, Bella's observations of her fellow students are detached and often a bit contemptuous; in the film, this is translated to adolescent awkwardness that gradually warms to true friendliness. The first book also features a scene where Bella flirts and flatters the young Queilute Jacob Black into telling tribal stories about the vampires, or "Cold Ones." In the film, this is a comparatively sweet scene of two friends talking on a beach. A significant film departure occurs when Bella's father, Charlie, gives her a can of mace for protection after a string of mysterious deaths from "animal attacks"; Bella later uses the mace in her confrontation with the killer vampire James. Since he's a vampire, he is stalled rather than harmed, but the heroine's effort to save herself is notable.

The film perhaps takes a darker turn in spots. The villains are featured more prominently throughout the film, making their

eventual confrontation with the Cullens a necessity. There is also significant foreshadowing in place for the second film, which is already due for a November 2009 release. In the second book, the characters' relationship ends for a period of time, during which Bella describes herself as a zombie. Bella's dependence on Edward is touched upon toward the end of this film. When he thinks about leaving her for her own safety, Bella shakes and stutters, "No—you can't do that! You can't just say stuff like that! Not to me!" Though the scene played out is close to that on the page, seeing this quivering, damaged girl should make viewers question the "romance" despite what the books say.

The film is also funny in parts, though whether or not that was the intention is unclear. When Bella meets Edward in the novel, he turns away with hurtful disdain, though later he tells Bella it was her human scent so near to him that drove him wild with the dangerous desire for her blood. In the film, Edward begins coughing and presses his hand to his mouth desperately; homicidal and sexual desire looks a lot like intense nausea. Early scenes of Edward also involve an odd vocal performance by Pattinson—frankly, the hero sounds like he needs speech therapy—that disappears within the first third of the film. Likewise when Edward walks purposefully up to Bella and tells her she needs to stay away from him; the scene earned loud hoots from the theater audience I sat with.

There is a lush dream sequence in the middle of the film that perhaps sums up the whole of the experience. After staying up late researching vampires, Bella dreams of herself lying supine on a blood-red chaise lounge as a Tuxedoed Edward bites her neck and drinks her blood. The image is film shorthand for every vampire film and for every metaphorical penetration: the incipient sensuality of the teenaged protagonists is clear. That Edward is a "good boy who won't do that" only heightens the tension for the characters but also reinforces the moral message of the story: good guys wait until marriage for you-know-what.

Bender's Big Score and *The Beast with a Billion Backs* [film]

Chris Pak

Bender's Big Score. Dir. Dwayne Carey-Hill. Perf. Billy West. 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2007.
The Beast with a Billion Backs. Dir. Peter Avanzino. Perf. Billy West. 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2008.

Bender's Big Score and *The Beast with a Billion Backs* are the first two *Futurama* movies to be released straight to DVD and have been adapted, along with *Bender's Game* and *Into the Wild Green Yonder*, into four-part episodes for Season 5. They retain the series' carnivalesque "o'-rama" style, making use of unlikely visual and verbal juxtaposition, along with an outrageous sense of parody and satire that works especially well in the sf mode. They are built around a core of sf clichés and romance narratives within an extra length format that allows for some absurd and hilarious dovetailing of plot and subplot while parodying the conventions of the sf tradition.

Bender's Big Score returns to the theme of time travel that began the series. Aliens, known as "Scammers," take ownership of the Planet Express delivery service through an aggressive inter-net scamming campaign. They infect the robot Bender with an Obedience virus that puts him under their control; predisposed as he is towards immorality, it is much to his delight that they have him betray the crew. The Scammers' "sprunger," a sense organ that "engorges in the presence of information," allows them to detect and gain pleasure from the gathering of information and leads them to Fry and the legendary "level 87 code." They discover a tattoo of Bender's head on his ass that, under magnification, reveals a hidden binary code that Bender reads to call up a "time sphere"; they have discovered the "Universal Machine Language Timecode," the secret to time travel. The Scammers order Bender to raid the treasures of history and eventually even manage to scam Earth from the president—Nixon's head in a jar—and evict the population.

Parallel to this is the story of Fry's thwarted love for Leela. Fry returns to the twentieth century with the time code still on his ass and Bender is sent to follow him in a parody of *The Terminator*. They both create a series of time paradoxes that are eventually resolved at the film's end, but not before several "time paradox duplicates" fall victim to "the doom field"—a factor in the time travel equation that can be quantified and read with a "doom meter." The Professor is adamant that paradox free time travel is impossible despite the fact, as Leela reminds him, that he has time traveled in a previous episode. He learns of paradox free time travel with help from the Globetrotters; a characteristic strategy of *Futurama*, this playful sequence satirizes the logic underlying sf explanations and introduces a frankly ridiculous dimension that parodies the way in which language is used to explain away the operation of sf clichés such as time travel— in this case by recourse to a quasi-scientific doom factor that corrects paradoxes through violent freak accidents. Logic and consistency are paid lip service to and this is taken advantage of with great comic effect in both films. It is this satirizing of and disruption to narrative and sf logic that gives the movies its "o-rama" quality; one cannot help but feel in collusion with the film as sf stereotypes and events are paraded on screen and so parodied.

The Beast with a Billion Backs begins where *Bender's Big Score* ends. After defeating the scammers and their solid gold death stars in a *Star Trek* parody, Bender invites his time paradox duplicates into Planet Express. They have been waiting in a cavern underneath the building where, as robots, they have been able to hide for centuries with valuable stolen artefacts in order for them to reach the film's present and deliver these treasures to the Scammers. Their collective presence causes a rip in the universe to another dimension. While the Professor teams up with his nemesis Wurmstrum to investigate the phenomenon Fry, with the threat of the imminent destruction of the universe looming, meets Colleen and begins a relationship with her that develops quickly and just as quickly ends after he moves in with her and her four other boyfriends. Impatient with the lack of results provided by the Professor and Wurmstrum, Nixon sends Zapp Brannigan on a military mission to destroy the rift. Fry, heartbroken, stows away on the ship and crosses through to the other universe where he meets a Cthulhu-like creature called Yivo. It gains control of him in an interesting echo to Bender's subjection to the Obedience virus by inserting its tentacle into his spine, thus causing him to love it. It reaches into Fry's universe to invade it by spreading its love amongst the population.

This alien invasion is turned on its head when we find out in a shocking revelation that the tentacles are in fact Yivo's "genticles"—"schclee," the proper pronoun for the creature, has been mating with the human population. Yivo explains that, at first, schclee was motivated only by a desire to "bang out a quick cheap one with your universe." Since then schclee has developed genuine feelings for Fry's universe. Yivo and the universe begin dating and eventually depart on golden escalators for Yivo's realm, leaving a rejected Bender behind.

Alongside this thread of the plot is Bender's discovery of the secret organization known as The League of Robots. He becomes embroiled in a struggle with Calculon, the famous soap actor robot, to gain control of the League. This leads him to challenge and defeat Calculon in a duel with "planetary annihilators." As a robot he is unable to join Fry and the universe's population on the journey to Yivo's universe as only living beings can cross the rift. Bender, in a jealous rage, musters an army of the damned from robot hell to overthrow the human race but is thwarted when they leave permanently for Yivo's heaven-like universe. Bender eventually attacks Yivo and drags it into his universe, where it cannot breathe, and invades it in a parody of the *Pirates of the Carribean 2* kraken sequence. The peace that the universe enjoys in Yivo's dimension is disrupted at the end of the film as various conflicts resume themselves.

Bender's closing words, "there is no great love without great jealousy," could stand as a cynical analysis of the main theme of the first two movies: they are focussed on the theme of love, both romantic and platonic. *The Beast with a Billion Backs* alludes to *Othello* and sets the tone for the hyperbolic examination of multiple and interspecies love and betrayal. This is negotiated through the threatening and then starkly ridiculous Yivo, who combines Cthulhu like monstrosity with the demeanor of a love struck stereotype, as well as through Bender's war with humanity. Bender and Fry's friendship, that between a delinquent thirtieth-century robot and an Everyman from the twentieth century, is tested in the first film by Bender's compulsion to obey the scammers' orders to terminate Fry and in the second when Bender decides to punish the human race for their poor treatment of robots and as an attempt to deal with his own feelings of rejection. This betrayal parodies the sf cliché of the conflict between humanity as masters and robots as slaves by recasting it as a narrative of rejection and jealousy between friends.

Both films make much use of characteristic *Futurama* style juxtapositions where the sf setting is employed to combine startlingly funny combinations that work well on a visual and verbal level. Examples of such juxtapositions that work exceedingly well include a Stegosaurus on the White House lawn in the first and the fun poked at the expectation for debate amongst scientists to be resolved in a dignified and rational manner in the second; instead, we are treated to televised and elaborate matches of "Deathball" with representatives of the Professor (the Planet Express Crew) and Wurmstrum (his students) violently pitted against each other.

At times, the pace of both of the films suffers because this humour, so distinctive of the series' shorter format, slackens at key points of the plot's development. This is also certainly true of the song and dance sequence in *Bender's Big Score*. However, such moments are brief and these feature film adaptations of a Matt Groening animation designed for a shorter format compares extremely favorably to its counterparts (*The Simpsons*, *The Family Guy*). The bathetic dialogue that oscillates between absurdity of juxtaposition and the statement of the obvious works well to draw the audience's attention to the films' incongruities and humour. This humour itself comes across at times as grotesque and at others a pleasing blend of the traditional in the strangeness of a futuristic sf world. It handles stereotypes exceedingly well and lets us laugh at familiar re-formulations of sf's stock of images and narratives. For this reason *Bender's Big Score* and *The Beast with a Billion Backs* contribute significantly to the way in which comedy can be used in the sf mode to allow for works to play with, and in so doing reflect upon, the genre's traditional motifs.

Futurama: Bender's Game [film]

Jonathan R. Harvey

Futurama: Bender's Game. Dir. Dwayne Carey-Hill. Perf. John
    DiMaggio, Billy West, and Katey Sagal. Twentieth Century
    Fox, 2008.

When the title sequence of the third movie-length animated *Futurama* film spontaneously transforms into a parody of the Beatles' *Yellow Submarine* cartoon, it is a sign that the movie to follow will be a whimsical romp through many marvelous worlds. *Futurama: Bender's Game* is silly and far-fetched, even for a cartoon series known for its imaginative leaps; yet it manages to insightfully satirize the conventions of both science fiction and fantasy as two sides of the same coin, while also offering some timely critiques of contemporary American culture.

As the movie opens, four children of the Planet Express crew are sitting around a table playing Dungeons & Dragons, complete with a Dungeon Master's screen and polyhedral dice. Bender intrudes on their game but does not understand it because allegedly he has been programmed without an imagination. After a few attempts, however, Bender discovers the wonder of pretending to be "Titanius Inglesmith, Fancy Man of Cornwood," his D&D character. But Bender takes his role-playing too far and must be institutionalized after a delusional rampage. Meanwhile the other Planet Express crew members learn of a dark matter fuel shortage that is happening because a company called Mombil controls the only dark matter mine, as well as the crystal matrix that makes it into a viable fuel. Through their efforts to break this monopoly on the fuel source, and Bender's coincidental longing to save his imagination from lobotomy, the crew magically opens a rift into the fantasy realm of Cornwood, where the ongoing conflict with Mombil takes on the trappings of fantasy.

The movie is most provocative as a dual parody of the genres of fantasy and SF. The cartoon medium is, by design, a grotesque mockery of mimetic forms; and since the heavy-handed plot device of this portal between worlds allows the cartoon to transplant its characters and conflicts from the primary science-fictional world of *Futurama* to the fantastic Cornwood, the clichés and tropes of each genre are contrasted directly. Farah Mendlesohn claims that "a fantasy succeeds when the literary techniques employed are most appropriate to the reader expectations of that category of fantasy" (xiii), and the cartoon's version of a fantasy world achieves this by drawing heavily upon Tolkien

and Dungeons & Dragons, two icons of fantasy in pop culture. For example, Professor Farnesworth becomes the Gandalf-like Greyfarne; an "anti-backwards energy crystal" from 3000 A.D. becomes a "die of power" in Cornwood; Fry becomes Frydo and then degenerates into a Gollum-like persona; Mom (CEO of the Mombil corporation) becomes Momon, a medusa, and so forth. These are little more than obvious caricatures of well-established archetypes found in either genre; but there are other "insider" details, such as the red dragon's immunity to fire or the Geysers of Gygax, which suggest that the playful ridicule of these genre clichés is created by and for fans.

Some key quotes highlight the fundamental distinctions between the two genres. When Farnesworth pontificates on the complicated pseudo-science behind Mombil's "single non-local meta-particle," Amy exclaims, "Guh! Stop patronizing us!," as if articulating a tongue-in-cheek rejoinder to the info dumps found in some SF. Another subtle attack on SF occurs when Mom chides Hermes and Farnesworth for always "trying to explain everything" after they attempt to rationalize how the portal between worlds manifested. In contrast, when Greyfarne describes Cornwood as a real enough place, "but instead of science, we believe in crazy hocus-pocus. It's like Kansas," he's mocking fantasy and at the same time offering a blunt critique of American fundamentalism.

Such critical insights into American culture constitute another critical aspect of the movie. There's the obvious allegory between the fuel shortage of 3000 A.D. and the real oil crisis of the Bush era, though it's complicated from a gender studies perspective by the fact that the mastermind behind Mombil's monopoly is an abusive, authoritarian matriarch. A spaceship demolition derby (set in an arena that may be an homage to Mike Judge's 2006 film *Idiocracy*) satirizes the violent spectacles in American entertainment—one can't help but think of monster truck rallies, ice hockey, and hunting when a deer slams into the Plexiglas barrier protecting the audience, which roars with glee. The fact that some of the spaceships in the derby are made of Legos and other construction sets suggests that the appeal of the violent spectacle is engineered into the American psyche from childhood on.

By featuring both genres within a single text, the film raises some of the deeper questions that scholars of SF and fantasy literature will immediately recognize. Particularly, it draws attention to Arthur C. Clarke's famous assertion, "Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic" (qtd. in Mendlesohn 62) by converting elements of SF into their fantasy analogs. For example, as an ersatz fantasy buff, Bender refuses to acknowledge a "freeze ray," but he reacts to a "cone of coldness," a canonical D&D spell. Likewise, both the anti-backwards energy crystal and its fantasy cognate, the die of power, have outlandish powers that seem equally implausible from a mimetic standpoint. These distinctions posit that the primary differences between the genres are aesthetic and lexical, insinuating that rationales for the marvelous elements are secondary to such concerns.

Bender's Game is a rare text that conjoins the two major non-mimetic genres without blending them into a heterogeneous unity, but rather keeping their genre universes distinct and intact. Perhaps this is an uncommon feat because it requires a clunky device, like a spontaneous and unexplainable portal, to accomplish it. As an animated comedy, however, the movie can raise contentious questions about these genres without taking them, or itself, too seriously.

Work Cited

Mendlesohn, Farah. *Rhetorics of Fantasy*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2008.

Avatar: The Last Airbender. Seasons One through Three [TV series]

Lyndsey Raney

Avatar: The Last Airbender—Season One: Book of Water. Nickelodeon, 2005–2006.
Avatar: The Last Airbender—Season Two: Book of Earth. Nickelodeon, 2006–2007.
Avatar: The Last Airbender—Season Three: Book of Fire. Nickelodeon, 2007–2008. Perf. By Zach Tyler, Mae Whitman, Jack de Sena, Dante Basco, Jessie Flower, Grey DeLisle, Olivia Hack, Cricket Leigh, Jennie Kwan.

Avatar: The Last Airbender is an original Nickelodeon "Nicktoon" cartoon, created by Michael Dante DiMartino and Bryan Konietzko. Merging classic fantasy story elements with Asian culture, the show provides an easy to follow main storyline for its intended younger audience, but also have plenty to engage older audiences with a variety of engaging characters and subplots. It's a fresh coat of paint on the old "band of heroes travel the land to stop the evil overlord" tale. Fans of anime will enjoy the show's art style and animation, beautifully smooth for a television show, and detailed in design. People will also love the show's attention to detail; each of the Four Nations of Water, Earth, Fire and Air distinctly draw from Inuit, Korean, Chinese and Hindu cultures, in terms of outfits, architecture, even foods.

In *Avatar,* the people of the world are divided into four distinct nations; Earth, Water, Fire and Air. These nations are further broken up by different tribes (Water for instance has two, located on the North and South Poles), but what all members of the Nations have in common is a portion of each tribe's population are "benders," those who can manipulate one of the four elements to obey their whims. Thus, Earthbenders can move dirt and stone, Airbenders can manipulate the air around them, etc. Every generation, a person is born among them called the Avatar. Simply put, this is an individual who commands Mastery over all four elements. The Avatar also reincarnates, each time being reborn to a different tribe than it was a member of in the previous life. The current Avatar is Aang, a twelve-year-old member of the Air Nomad tribe. In reality, Aang is 112 years old. He ran away a century ago after learning he was the Avatar, unable to cope with the weight such a destiny carries at such a young age. He is discovered by two members of the Water Tribe, siblings Sokka and Katara, who inform him that since his time, the Fire Nation has declared war on the other three Nations.

From there, the three determined youngsters set off to learn the fate of Aang's people, to find Master Benders to train Aang, and figure out how to stop the Fire Nation from conquering the world. The seasons for the show are divided up into "books," with each book having a specific element it focuses on. The first

Season is Book 1: Water. Season Two is Book 2: Earth, and the final season is Book 3: Fire.

A good standard to judge the show by is Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*. Like *Avatar,* it has diverse cultures, a menacing, shadowy figure of a main villain, and a tight-knit group of protagonists, who all struggle both with the weight of their ordained destinies, or to forge a destiny for themselves. The three seasons of *Avatar* divide themselves the same way; Water is the introduction season; we learn about our heroes, and the world they inhabit. Earth is the middle, when the situation is at its bleakest, and Fire is the climactic final battle, when the heroes triumph over their greatest foes.

Because it's the show's *Fellowship of the Ring*, the first season of *Avatar* is also the slowest. The danger always feels fleeting, and while all three characters acknowledge a need to accomplish their immediate and long-term goals, the sense of urgency is generally minimal. Even with the presence of three high-ranking Fire Nation villains (Zuko, the exiled Crown Prince searching for redemption, his Uncle Iroh, a legendary Firebender, and Zhao, one of the Fire Nation's most bloodthirsty generals), the action never amps up until the first season's end. While this pace is perfect for the wee ones of the house, for the average teenage or adult viewer, the large number of filler episodes feels repetitious and stagnant. After all, when the characters don't act concerned, it's hard as a viewer to feel concerned, either.

Thankfully, the next two seasons pick up the pace, by introducing new characters and a number of clever plot twists. Zuko and Iroh flee the Fire Nation as traitors, blind Earthbending Master Toph Bei Fong joins Team Avatar as its newest member, and Fire Princess Azula embarks on a hunt for both her older brother and the Avatar, with plans to capture both for her personal gain.

Season Two drives to up the stakes, and to also better develop the show's characters, both protagonists and antagonists. Aang learns to cope with failure, Sokka tries to find his place as the single non-Bender of the group, Katara proves women can be strong warriors, and Toph learns to open up to others as a friend. The angry, obsessive Zuko is also scrutinized, as he struggles with disappointing his father again and hiding his lineage. For a middle season, Season Two stands out strongly from the previous by allowing the world to darken and the dangers to become real. It also dares to allow its characters to gain facets to their personalities through the conflicts and their successes and failures.

Season Three picks up months later, and ends with a gripping climax, as Aang wrestles with sacrificing his pacifist beliefs for victory, or doom the world to rule under the Fire Nation. Of course, since it is a children's show, it ends happily ever after. Regardless, *Avatar* presents good discussion for being a classic story in a whole new light. It provides a detailed world adult viewers want to spend more time in, but would then leave youngsters out of all the fun.

The Dresden Files: Welcome to the Jungle [graphic novel]

Nathan Rockwood

Butcher, Jim. *The Dresden Files: Welcome to the Jungle*. New York: Ballantine, 2008.

Jim Butcher's first foray into the territory of the graphic novel, *Welcome to the Jungle* is an adaptation of his popular *Dresden Files* series of more traditional text-based novels about a wizard-turned-detective in a shadowy and fantasized version of Chicago. In truth, this is the second alternate form in which the *Dresden Files* find themselves, as they were also adapted as a short-lived television series on the Sci-Fi channel. In an age when comic books—sorry, *graphic novels*—are being turned into movies right and left, a new one coming from the other direction is a breath of fresh air. Perhaps therein lies the value; this text can be profitably examined in its own right, and then again as a way to compare film, novels, and "graphic novels" more reliably than other adaptations allow.

Movie and TV adaptations of graphic novels are a hit-and-miss bunch, often drawing either blockbuster fame or pervasive ridicule (possibly in spite of box-office success), but there aren't nearly as many conversions in the other direction. This may be unsurprising given that comic books are seen by many as a lower form of media—even the alternate name "graphic novel" is a dead giveaway that no one wants to admit to studying comic books—but *Welcome to the Jungle* represents an unusual and highly intentional minority. In an author's preface, Jim Butcher not only explains that he has always envisioned the *Dresden Files* as a comic book, but he also obliquely compares the two terms for the medium and presents some of the challenges he faced during transference from text to comic panels.

His discussion reads with a pragmatic and casual tone; as he says, a "noob" at the format of the comic book has to learn the ins and outs of working with an art team, and he is comfortable with the term "comic book" because he always enjoyed them when he was younger. This pragmatism does, however, suggest that the reader should avoid worrying about the difference between a graphic novel and a comic book, as they both require the same artistic energy, and should accept both as equally valid and entertaining.

That in mind, reading *Welcome to the Jungle* is *fun*. The story itself (a short investigation into the death of a night watchman at the Lincoln Park Zoo) is engaging, fast-paced, and unashamedly rife with conventions of noir detective fiction and comic books alike. The villain is introduced early on and behaves in a suitably careless manner; the cowering female character shows heroic pluck at the right moment; the police don't get along too well with the hero.…Unfortunately, Butcher may have done his job too well. I can predict readily enough that some readers might spot all of those things and decide to put the book down. "Hah!" they say; "I've seen enough of these clichés; using them here is unimaginative." Even I might have been inclined to that, but that misses entirely the connection between the comic, the television show, and the novels.

Tracing the evolution of the *Dresden Files* novels since the first one hit the shelves in 2000, a consistent improvement in Butcher's writing can be picked out. In truth, the first one is an engaging story, but the writing is inconsistent and would probably not have stood out from the glut of half-cloned fantasy novels if it weren't for the fact that the book does one important thing:

it takes the conventions of noir detective fiction and staples on a big, gleaming "What if...?"

What if the detective was a wizard? What if the mobsters weren't the only game in town? What if the femme fatale wasn't just *figuratively* a blood-sucker? The vigor with which Butcher pursued some of the traditions of noir fiction make the book a gold mine for comparison with older works, and the fact that this zealous pursuit carries over into the graphic novel not only adds to the list of comparisons, but also provides a new angle from which to examine the effects that the medium of presentation has on the content of a text. The genre, the content, and the objective remain the same between novel, TV show, and comic book; as the media changes in isolation of those other variables, and does so between three different forms, we now have a vehicle with which to study the impact of the media to a much greater extent than other recent adaptations allow—and given that the text in this case began as a novel, and not as a comic (or even a graphic novel), it may be easier to persuade a reluctant readership that a comic really can be worth a look.
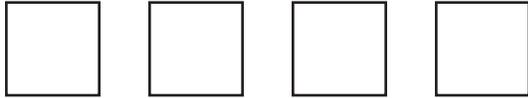
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Compiled by Sha LaBare

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Title: Culture and Crisis—Special Issue of *Cultural Logic*

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Due date: August 1, 2009. 200–300-word proposals.

Contact: Joseph G. Ramsey (jgramsey AT gmail.com).

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Due date: July 21, 2009, with proposals and abstracts.

Contact: Marc Ouellette (reconstruction.managing AT gmail.com).

URL: http://call-for-papers.sas.upenn.edu/node/32901

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Title: H. G. Wells: From Kent to Cosmopolis

Conference date: July 9–11, 2010

Conference site: University of Kent at Canterbury, England

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Due date: March 1, 2010. 250-word abstracts.

Contact: Andrew M. Butler and Patrick Parrinder (2010wellsconference AT gmail.com).

URL: http://dynamicsubspace.net/2009/04/06/cfp-hgwells-from-kent-to-cosmopolis/

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Title: Utopian Spaces of British Literature and Culture, 1890–1945

Conference date: September 18, 2009.

Conference site: University of Oxford, England.

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Due date: June 30, 2009. 250-word abstracts, with name, position, and institutional affiliation.

Contact: utopianspaces AT ell.ox.ac.uk

URL: http://www.utopianspaces.org/

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Title: Interdisciplinary Conference on Gender, Bodies, and Technology, sponsored by the Women's and Gender Studies program at Virginia Tech

Conference date: April 22–24, 2010

Conference site: Virginia Tech, Roanoke, Virginia

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Due date: September 15, 2009. Submit via Web site.

Contact: Sharon Elber (selber AT vt.edu)

URL: http://www.cpe.vt.edu/gbt/

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