



Photo Credits: Gail Carriger

Q&A Gail Carriger - LepreCon 2014 Author GoH

Who is Gail Carriger?

Gail: I was born in small town California to a British expat gardener with a tea habit and a woodworking Dane who sidelined as a philosophical scribbler. I spent my summers in Devonshire, and matured with a burning need to investigate the past and escape to other small towns all around the world. Hence archaeology. I ended up back in California with too many advanced degrees, a tea habit inherited from my mother, a scribbling habit inherited from my father, and a dreadful penchant for gadding off to foreign countries in hot pursuit of fascinating ancient artifacts - dragging both habits ruthlessly in my wake.

Gail Carriger seems to more of an alter ego than a pseudonym, would you like to share with us how that came to be?

Gail: You know, my friends do find it a bit creepy

sometimes because I refer to her as separate from myself. As in, "Gail has her own wardrobe but we share shoes." To which one of them will say, "You do realize you are the same person, right?" Often, these days, I wonder if she is more real than I am. She is certainly very demanding.

What similarities do you and Gail Carriger share?

Gail: Well, to give my friends credence, we really are the same person, so . . . all of them. It's just some qualities and quirks she has in moderation and I have in spades and the others are vice versa.

What direction do you see Gail Carriger's career taking?

Gail: I wouldn't say no to writing more books set in the same world, but there are other worlds out there

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Wrapping Up a Decade of the International Horror & Sci-Fi Film Festival

by Hal C. Astell

The International Horror and Sci-Fi Film Festival will celebrate its tenth year at the Harkins Scottsdale 101 this April. Films begin on Friday the 4th and run until Thursday the 10th. The wider Phoenix Film Festival, of which it is now part, starts a day earlier with an opening night movie.

It hardly seems like eight years since I stumbled upon an advert for the International Horror & Sci-Fi Film Festival and decided to check it out. My life and that of my better half and family changed massively because of that decision, because it was our introduction to the local film scene, the local festival scene and a whole slew of our favourite



people.

We weren't there from the beginning, when comic book legend Brian Pulido, creator of Lady Death, got permission from the Phoenix Film Foundation to set up the event.

That first event was huge, sprawling across two venues, the Harkins Centerpoint and the Valley Art theatres in Tempe. It included fifteen feature films, three sets of horror short films, two of sci-fi shorts and a set of Star Wars fan films to boot.

Pulido also brought out a trio of special guests: Lloyd Kaufman, cinematic renegade and

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Third Time's the Charm for Wild Wild West Con

by Hal C. Astell



All WWWC3 Photo credits: Dee Astell

The gloriously anachronistic spectacle that is Wild Wild West Con is over for another year, with the third annual event taking over Old Tucson Studios from the 7th to the 9th of March.

Roughly 4,000 steampunks from around the country, and indeed around the world, descended on Old Tucson for the event. The number who drove to this historic movie studio, nestled in the hills just to the west of Tucson, from New Mexico, Texas and even the other side of the mighty Mississippi, ought to have made for an interesting convoy along I-20 and I-10. Visitors from as far afield as Ohio commented that they can't wait for next year and the contingent of attendees from Germany seems to grow with each event.

The new owners of Wild Wild West Con, Jason Drotman and Diana Given, otherwise known as the directors of the Arizona Steampunk Society, took the reins firmly and succeeded in making this year the biggest and best convention yet. The event's three days were filled with 154 hours of programming, including 83 panels and a slew of make and take workshops.

There were also two notable events that weren't on the program. The Steam Family, who decorated

some of the marketing releases, spiced up the Steampunk Ball on Friday night when Tyler Brunette proposed to Ashley Genrose. Not to be outdone, on Saturday, Ken 'Sharky' Braden proposed to Erin Crowley, both of them part of the League of Gears, on the saloon stage in between programmed shows. Both ladies said yes, in case you're wondering.

The Steampunk Ball is one of the key events at Wild Wild West Con. Another is the Saturday night concert, which featured a line up so varied that it could only be possible in the characterful world of steampunk.

Appearing at their first Wild Wild West Con, eccentric Florida rockers The Cog is Dead are led by a 19th century clockmaker who, with a trusted mechanic and a stowaway, travelled into the future, our present, to see what a world would be like with digital timepieces. They now dedicate their lives to bringing back the magic of clockwork.

Performance artists and musicians Steam Powered Giraffe have played at every Wild Wild West Con and their mix of music, comedy and offbeat drama are a firm favourite with fans. It's not often you can see a troupe comprised of a set of robots created in San Diego in 1896. Unless you're at Wild Wild West Con.

Headlining was British chap hop artist Professor Elemental, also returning from the last event, who was all over Old Tucson this year shooting a new music video during the convention.

It's a tribute to the quality and atmosphere

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Krysta Crawford-LepreCon Guest

by Song River



LepreCon 2014, (May 8-11th), is ecstatic this year to announce the multi-talented, Krysta Crawford, as our local industry Guest of Honor at the Phoenix Marriott Mesa, Arizona location.

Ms Crawford is well-known in the industry for her costuming/cosplay talents, recently at the Amazing Arizona Comic Con 2014, she portrayed herself as Harley Quinn and Scarlet Witch. She is also a clothing designer, creating mermaid dresses (specially designed prints with well-known comic industry illustrators- such as, Shelby Robertson, and her own works printed onto the fabric), along with shorts, and leggings. In addition, she illustrates My Little Pony creations into fabric designs, and has her own store on Etsy. Finally to top this off, she is very involved in their family run business, with husband Stephen Crawford, as together they have built a graphic arts/printing business. Bringing all of these talents under their business name, Hero and Villain Designs.

In her spare time, Krysta Crawford, also volunteers with the Arizona Avengers group, plays

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waiting to be explored. Then again perhaps I could retire and take up shoe shopping. I am on a one woman quest to improve the fashion sense of genre readers. It's an uphill battle that could take the rest of my natural life.

Questions provided by Michael Bradley

You have a unique educational background as an archaeologist and anthropologist. Do you still work in those fields?

Gail: I like to say that I used to moonlight as an archaeologist. Periodically I would poodle off to the Peruvian Highlands where I was analyzing the pottery from a fascinating long-occupation site (Wari - Inca - Colonial). Sadly the project is now on hold, as are my archaeological endeavors.

How long did it take for you to get your writing picked up by a traditional publisher?

Gail: Soulless is the third book I've tried to sell. It took me ten years to give up on the last one, but this one got a nibble within two months. It then took two years to wend its way through the publishing process.

Were you surprised how popular the Parasol Protectorate series became?

Gail: Absolutely, I always thought these were the kind of books that would only appeal to me, because they were such an odd mix of different genres: comedy, steampunk, urban fantasy, historical fantasy, romance, etc...

You have a unique, captivating style that mixes wit, fashion, adventure and humor. Have you had critics of that style



or people who tried to change it?

Gail: No one has tried to change it but it certainly isn't for everyone. Readers have to be willing to commit to flippancy, irreverence, and silliness. Not every reader wants to go there with me.

What are your words of wisdom for others who wish to see their characters come to life?

Gail: There is no secret. You have to write, all the time, every day. Just write.

Any words of wisdom on building a readership?

Gail: Here are a few quick tips: It took me over ten years to get my first novel published.

There is help on the internet, there are also scams.

The first thing you must do is finish the book. Don't approach anyone until it is complete. You need to prove you can finish it, very few writers get that far.

Then edit the hell out of it and be brutal.

Then give it to people to critique (friends, relations, teachers). People who will give honest feedback. The more red pen marks the better. Get used to criticism, revel in it, learn love it.

After that, do whatever you can to learn about finding an agent and a publisher. Research using SFWA, Predators & Editors, go to writer's workshops, haunt the writer's tracks at SF/F conventions, read agent blogs, author websites.

Remember: money flows to the author.

Most of us published authors put the hard time in and did the research, spent hours working online, collected hundreds of rejections. I could paper my room with rejection slips.

There are no easy answers. You can't repeat someone else's path. Every author's road to publication is different.

Be stubborn.
Good luck!

What authors do you personally love to read? Has any particular author inspired you to write?

Gail: Many, many authors have influenced me, but I was raised by an expat on British YA (that's all the YA there was, back then) like Tom's Midnight Garden, The Water Babies, Wind in the Willows, The Borrowers, The Railway Children, and so forth. I wonder sometimes if my mum knew what she was doing, and that it would all end in a Parasol Protectorate and a Finishing School.

Is the writing lifestyle more difficult than you expected, considering, promoting past books, appearances, deadlines, creating more stories, edits and all that goes into it?

Gail: Yes. I wouldn't change what I have for the world, but it isn't easy. Once your passion becomes your job, it's still hard work. It's often hard and unpleasant, and all too often I wake up and writign is the last think I want to do that day - but it is my job.

If you have a choice, would you live in Victorian times, now, some other time

Photo Credits: Mike Syfritt



in the past, or sometime in the future?

Gail: Now is treating me pretty well, so I'll take it.

What is the best moment of your career?

Gail: I was out shopping with a couple of girlfriends shortly before Soulless (my first book) was supposed to hit shelves. We were consuming those Vietnamese beverages with the black tapioca in them, affectionately referred to by me as "Drinks with Stuff!" This process, three shopping females plus drinkies, involves much chattering and slurping and sideways perambulations. And thus engaged, we wandered by a Borders.

"Ooo," says I, "can we go in and see if they have my book?"

And so we do. And there it was! The chattering and the slurping became more enthusiastic as a result, which attracted the attention of one of the green t-shirted staff.

"Can I help you?" says she.

"That's my book!" I crow.

"Would you like to sign it?" says she. Crazy authors, she's thinking.

"Really? Sign? Of course! I'd love to."

And so she disappears and returns with a whole stack for me to sign, right there: Drink with Stuff! in one hand, cheap pen in the other.

As we leave the store one of my friends keeps saying. "I can't believe they didn't ask you for ID or anything."

"Oh, of course," says I, "because there's a mad plague of crooks masquerading as small time authors dashing into unsuspecting stores and demanding to sign books they haven't written."

"Well, fine. But it'd be pretty funny if there were."

And with that I leave you to ponder what is obviously a untapped criminal market.

WOD

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The DREAD Fleet is now seeking new members who are experienced combat fencers.

We have weekly fighter practice, occasional Fleet sponsored feast/tournaments, private "miniments" on practice days and we participate in tournaments sponsored by Arizona medieval groups.

Our fencing master will determine your abilities and qualify you.

Or, if you have always wanted to learn to rapier fence, this is your chance! Our fencing master will teach you everything you will need to know to become a competent addition to the Fleet!

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of Wild Wild West Con that most guests and artists who perform there return year after year. Almost all of this year's roster have already asked to come back for next year's event, which they tend to regard as their 'home convention', however far from Arizona they may happen to be based.

Non-musical special guests this year were just as varied as the musical ones. Author and maker Thomas Willeford, owner of Brute Force Studios and creator of the amazing steampunk arm worn by Nathan Fillion in the steampunk episode of 'Castle', is a returning favourite, as is John Strangeway, better known as Steampunk Boba Fett. Brand new to this year's event was steampunk model Kato of Steampunk Couture, who had an absolute blast at her very first convention as a special guest.

To blow my own horn, I was a lot more involved with this year's convention than last year's. In 2013, I enjoyed a day at the Loft Cinema, a day at Wild Wild West Con 2 and a day at the Tucson Festival of Books, a busy weekend indeed. With no clashes this year because of careful scheduling, I caught a movie at the Loft on the Thursday night before knuckling down to a busy weekend at Wild Wild West Con 3.

I programmed a set of international award-winning steampunk short films each day on the big saloon screen, which generated a lot of good feedback, especially as a steampunk film, 'Mr Hublot', had won an Academy Award only the weekend before. Friday was animation day, Saturday featured live action films and Sunday closed out with music and comedy.



I also MC'd my better half's fashion show, always a huge draw at local conventions but especially so at Wild Wild West Con with its wonderful saloon stage. Dee set up a Saturday show with over 30 models that rocked a full house, then returned for a costume contest on the Sunday. I may be biased but her shows get better and better as time goes by.

Wild Wild West Con has a reputation for treating its VIPs, known as Aristocrats, well and this year set the bar so high that other steampunk conventions will need to step up their game to compete. Many have mentioned that it was worth the price of the Aristocrat ticket just to sit in the reserved lounge for the weekend, which was full of dedicated

entertainment, including the infamous tea duelling of Madame Askew, the Director of Tea, absinthe tasting, faro games and live music, not to mention meet and greets with the special guests. No wonder co-owner Diana Given sees this as the biggest success of this year's convention.

I've written about the Arizona steampunk scene for the WOD before because it's a thriving one, with two very active local groups, the Arizona Steampunk Society in the Phoenix area and the Tucson Steampunk Society, and many other folk who rock the aesthetic like the Brose Brothers and the cast of Mantecoza. As such many of the organisers and convention goers know each other well from a strong set of monthly events over the years.

While most of these Arizona steampunks see Wild Wild West Con as the centerpiece of the year's event calendar and turn out in force, it's also become the 'home convention' for a growing number of steampunks from out of state. One of the highlights for my better half and I was catching up with some of these folk whom we haven't seen (outside of Facebook) since last year's event. Dee even managed to cajole some of them into taking the stage as models in the fashion show.



It was this feeling of family that stood out to me most this year. While the owners, staff and volunteers hustled to keep everything in smooth motion, the plethora of diverse vendors sold their wares and the entertainers and guests did what they do best, the 4,000 people with tickets didn't just sit back and enjoy the show. Instead they took part in it, they showed off their personae, they reconnected with old friends and made new ones.

In short they made Wild Wild West Con feel like the world's biggest house party. Even the staff at Old Tucson joined in the fun, wearing their best steampunk attire while doing their jobs. Even a couple of weeks on, part of me is still there, unwilling to let go of that ambience quite yet. Next year is too far away.



WOD



guitar, designs chain mail, is a nurse, attends school, is an award winning chef, and a full time mother to little one that participates with mom and dad in cosplaying!

LepreCon will be showcasing Hero and Villain Designs, Krysta Crawford, all four days! Come meet, and talk with our Guest of Honor!

Links:

Amazing Arizona Comic Con:
<http://amazingarizonacomicon.com/>

Hero and Villain Design Etsy Store: <https://www.etsy.com/shop/HeroandVillainDesign>

Hero and Villain Design's Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/HeroAndVillainDesigns>

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WOD

From the Desk of the Publisher...

The WOD has entered its second year of publication and continues to see changes in the pop culture landscape almost daily. We have watched the comings and goings of fans, we have lost people who inspired us, and in it all, we must realize that times change - people change - and organizations change.

Connotations has been a publication fixture in the valley for nearly 23 years providing news, commentary, book reviews, and convention news to popular culture fans long before anyone knew about pop culture. Leadership changes sometimes bring good things, and sometimes not so good things. And sometimes it's just that times change.

Back in 2011, our managing editor, Patti Hultstrand took the reigns of Connotations for a resurgence that both startled and overjoyed it's fans. For nearly two years, she guided the publication to profitability and expanded content. When it came time to move on, Patti agreed to join the staff at the WOD, sadly saying goodbye to her position at Connotations.

This left Connotations without a managing editor, and the ability to produce the publication. In Jan, the WOD offered to carry the CASFS content in a 4 page section to help the organization continue its publication, and in May the inaugural section of Connotations appeared in our paper. After a year, however, it is clear that our service to CASFS must sadly come to an end.

In this issue, we feature the final appearance of the Connotations section in The WOD. May you enjoy and savor the memories it recalls.

WOD



Locke Your Sights on the Phoenix Film Festival

by Hal C. Astell

Photo credits: Phoenix Film Festival

The valley's largest film festival is back for its 14th year in April at the Harkins Scottsdale 101, running from Thursday to Thursday, the 3rd to the 10th.

It begins with the most enticing opening night feature in years, the thriller 'Locke' featuring the amazing Tom Hardy as a construction manager whose life unravels on his way home through an increasingly dramatic set of phone calls. I've been a fan of Hardy since I saw 'Bronson' and every film I've seen him in since reinforces his talent in my mind.



It's a good reason to upgrade your tickets to the Platinum level, which guarantees access to 'Locke' and includes the exclusive cocktail party in the Party Pavilion, catered by 20 different restaurants. It also opens all doors to the many events and parties that dot the festival, along with meet and greets with guests and priority seating to all films, not to mention a festival T-shirt to cap it all off. Platinum passes cost \$300 with a \$35 discount for students and seniors.

If you're willing to miss 'Locke' or can't get tickets in time, there are VIP passes available for \$250 (or \$225 with discount) or regular festival passes for \$120 (or \$100). Each allow you to pick up tickets for any film in the festival and get into theatres ahead of the majority of filmgoers, as well as entry to any events that don't take place on opening night. Cheaper options are also available.

There are many events and parties at the Phoenix Film Festival, from workshops for kids through educational outreach events for students to networking parties for members of the local film industry, from both sides of the camera. Saturday 5th is Kids' Day and ends with a variety of performers on stage in the Party Pavilion, running on until 1.00am. Sunday 6th is Geek Day, with special art and costume exhibits, and eventually awards night, as the Copper Wings are awarded to winning competition films.

And it's those films that are the heart of the festival. This year's event runs the same eight days but there are even more films crammed into that

timeframe over seven different screens. I counted 46 features and 84 shorts on the schedule, for a total of 130 films, not including those shown under the banner of the International Horror and Sci-Fi Film Festival, which became a part of the Phoenix Film Festival in 2011. By comparison, 'only' 36 features and 80 shorts screened at the 2013 event.

As always, there's something for everyone, from the new True Life Adventure from DisneyNature, 'Bears', through a revisit to the classic romcom 'Clueless' up to the cream of the crop in modern indie features. Even there, there's a substantial variety, including 'Belle', a period drama with Emily Watson; 'Frontera', a tough drama with Ed Harris as an Arizona sheriff whose wife is apparently killed by an illegal immigrant and 'The Longest Game', a documentary about three 87 year olds who have played paddle tennis every day at 1pm for years.

As I learned last year though, the most interesting films at the Phoenix Film Festival are the competition features, because the bar to get accepted is so high that the selections are all top notch. Many of my favourites last year weren't the higher budget movies starring major names, they were the lean and mean films made by hungry indie filmmakers with lower budgets. I enjoyed the Kickstarter-funded 'Down and Dangerous' so much that I saw it twice.

This year, I'm most eager to see 'The House That Jack Built', the new feature by Henry Barrial, whose last film 'Pig' won Best Sci-Fi Feature at the 2012 International Horror & Sci-Fi Film Festival. '45RPM' looks interesting too, a road movie following a painter obsessed with the memory of hearing her father's music on an obscure 45rpm single. How could anyone resist the premise of 'The King of Herrings', a black and white feature described as 'the bastard child of Woody Allen and Tom Waits'?

Perhaps the most fascinating competition feature this year is a documentary, 'The Joe Show', which looks at the 'most controversial sheriff in America', Maricopa County's own Joe Arpaio, with participation from celebrities as diverse as Larry King, Ted Nugent, Noam Chomsky and Steven Seagal. It could be a horrible mess and it would still be fascinating, especially given that I work in the same building as Sheriff Joe.

On the short film side of the festival, there are eleven sets of shorts to discover, all themed into categories; live action, animated, world, documentary etc. There's a set for short films made by high school students and another by college students. There are also a few dedicated to local film, including an ever fascinating Arizona Shorts selection, which features some excellent IFP Phoenix film challenge shorts.

There are three of these film challenges every year and the program wraps up with a final night at the Phoenix Film Festival where the winners and audience favourites of each challenge go up against each other for the Best of Year award. I've covered each of these challenges and helped judge two of them, so I've seen the six films screening and, while I



know which my least favourite is, I have a three way tie for my favourite. It's going to be really interesting to see which one comes out on top.

Whatever your thirst in film, there's something at the Phoenix Film Festival to quench it. The real beauty isn't just that you'll be able to see some amazing films that you may not get another chance to find, but you'll be able to see them along with many of the people who made them, who will introduce their films and answer questions afterwards. The Phoenix Film Festival is amazingly down to earth for something so large; it's closing in on 30,000 attendees.

If you're new to the festival, grab a schedule and map out what you want to see, but leave gaps where you can to grab a bite to eat or talk to the filmmakers in the lobby between screenings. Just don't clog up the hallways; the noise can make it into the theatres. Also make sure to get your tickets early; films are known to sell out and with more on the schedule this year in the same timeframe, that may be more likely.

Most importantly, don't count on sleep. You have the other 51 weeks in the year for that.

Hal C F Astell writes reviews of films from the 1900s to the 2010s at Apocalypse Later, with a focus on what most critics don't cover. He is the author of two books, Huh? An A-Z of Why Classic American Bad Movies Were Made and Velvet Glove Cast in Iron: The Films of Tura Satana. Both are available at Amazon.

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

WOD



president of Troma Entertainment; Peter Mayhew, the man inside Chewbacca's fur suit; and Tobe Hooper, director of 'The Texas Chain Saw Massacre', the original one, of course.

To say that over the years this festival has had its ups and downs is a real understatement and its first nine years are easily broken down into three sets of three.

The first three festivals, from 2005 to 2007, were focused around the Harkins Centerpoint and saw the event find its feet and build a strong and loyal audience. These could be seen as the Early Years.

The second three are the Classic Years, as the festival moved to independent venues, flying free with a real indie spirit. 2008 was held at Chandler Cinemas, while 2009 and 2010 were spent at MADCAPTheatres, ironically the former Centerpoint.

Perhaps mostly because of organisational difficulties in 2010, the festival was subsumed by the Phoenix Film Festival in 2011, which has been its home for the last three years. This was a traumatic change and the 2011 event, with only six months to plan, was undoubtedly its weakest year. However these Transition Years have seen it refuse to die and, in fact, grow consistently.

2014 is the tenth year for the International Horror & Sci-Fi Film Festival and it's set to be the best year in a long time, perhaps the best year of its entire run. The line up of films and the number of slots made available to the festival suggest that it will begin a new set of three years, perhaps the Renaissance or Resurgence Years. Join us at the Harkins Scottsdale 101 to find out.

Andrea Beesley, known to local film fans as the Midnite Movie Mamacita, joined the event in its second year, bringing out Heather Langenkamp for a special screening of 'A Nightmare on Elm Street', and she's been involved ever since, responsible for a large chunk of the programming, including the showcase features, which she handled this year with Monte Yazzie.

There are no less than eleven showcase features

this year, three up on last year's numbers. Ten of them are brand new, some ahead of upcoming theatrical releases. She can't wait to see 'Oculus', which is surely the must see picture of this year's event. It's currently listed as only having one screening, but that will surely sell out quickly. This film has an amazing buzz and writer/director Mike Flanagan, whose magnificent low budget shocker 'Absentia' won Best Horror Feature at the 2011 festival, will be at this year's event in person to introduce his film and do a Q&A.

Beesley is also looking forward to 'Witching and Bitching', from legendary Spanish director Álex de la Iglesia, and believes that the crowd will LOVE 'Discopath'. Other key showcase features include 'Queen of Blood', directed by Fangoria editor Chris Alexander, Ti West's 'The Sacrament' and Sion Soto's 'Why Don't You Play in Hell?' which beat 'Oculus' out for top honours at the Midnight Madness track at the last Toronto International Film Festival. It's going to be great to see them play another festival together and it highlights how strong this year's selection really is.

There's only one classic film screening this year, but it's a good one: Stephen King's 'Cujo', with actress Dee Wallace the festival's special guest. This is the film that both horror programmers are looking forward to most. Danny Marianino and Brandon Kinchen have been involved with the festival since 2007 when their 'I Can Smell Your Brains' radio show was a sponsor and they handled the Q&A with actor Ken Foree, present to support a screening of the original 'Dawn of the Dead'. They came back a year later to program the horror side and have done that every year since.

Last year's festival saw three horror features in competition, along with a set of short films. This year adds a long overdue second set of shorts, which I'm very happy to see, while retaining three features. While feature films are the attention grabbers, it's the short films that are the true lifeblood of film festivals because, in many instances, they're the only place you can see them and certainly are the best place to meet many of the people who created them.

On the sci-fi side, prolific author Mike Stackpole has handled programming from day one at the very first festival in 2005. Ten years has shown a huge improvement in the quality of low budget sci-fi films, which aren't made in the sort of numbers that the horror genre sees. This quality is especially reflected in the short films, which were astounding at last year's event. This year the sci-fi side also has three features in competition and two sets of short films.

The International Horror & Sci-Fi Film Festival is my favourite film festival, not only because it's the first one I ever attended and not only because it's the one I've been most closely associated with over the last eight events. It's a real character, thriving in those classic years and stubbornly holding on during the later transition ones. I'm only one of many diehards who will be at this year's event with bells on and much of its success may be due to the fact that its programmers are also its biggest fans.

They deserve the final words. Andrea Beesley feels 'fortunate to have so many amazing moments with the festival, getting to meet some of the hardest working and genuine people working in genre film.' Danny Marianino has 'so much fun working with a group of people that admire and respect movies like I do. I'm proud to be a member of such an amazing staff and its an honor to work on one of the best film festivals in America.'

Come and join me and them at the Harkins Scottsdale 101 from Friday, 4th April to Thursday, 10th April to help make this tenth year the very best yet.

Hal C F Astell writes reviews of films from the 1900s to the 2010s at *Apocalypse Later*, with a focus on what most critics don't cover. He is the author of two books, *Huh? An A-Z of Why Classic American Bad Movies Were Made* and *Velvet Glove Cast in Iron: The Films of Tura Satana*. Both are available at Amazon.

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

WOD

Art, Wine and Cheese Party: Gilead's Open House

Photo Credits: Jason Youngdale



Mirabella
 & the Faded Phantom

"Something hissed and a wet chill wrapped around Mirabella's wrist and crawled toward her shoulder. She whipped around and glimpsed the outline of someone sitting on the edge of her bed. But as she stared, the image faded to a blur."

When twelve-year old Mirabella and her mother move into Great Aunt Clovinia's old house, Mirabella discovers they aren't the only ones living there. A mysterious faded specter haunts the place.

When the house is scheduled for demolition, Mirabella must unravel the mystery of the ghost's identity, and free it from the old house before it's too late..

ISBN: 1938190165
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SHARON SKINNER
 Illustrations by Ketch Decesare



ARIZONA ARTIST ALLEY

ARTIST COLUMNIST -
Alfred Trujillo

Conventions

I just KNOW AZ Powergirl is writing about conventions! I got a thing or two to say about dem goings on-- Now, this is for YOU, artists and art fans alike. Listen up!

I have been doing a bit of thinking and I really just want to just sing praises for conventions and their organizers. Because, let's face it, conventions are great! My first convention, my very very first, was San Diego Comicon on or about 1993. And let me tell you, it was awesome! Now, that particular convention may not have the same kind of feel that it did back in the day but there are a lot of options for comic and art fans that are available during the year where you can enjoy being an aficionado.

I exhibit at over 20 conventions a year and, let me tell ya, the vibe alone from fans is worth it. It always feels incredible to be at cons amongst a group of very passionate and dedicated people who share a love for something that I myself am very passionate and dedicated about! And as an artist, there is NEVER anywhere better to be than at a gathering of professionals with whom you may develop relationships with and learn trade secrets from.



One of my first convention experiences was portfolio review! Showing my work to seasoned professionals and other artists exhibiting was a great way to both bond and to get much needed information on how to improve. Pro tip: when you show your art to

people, don't defend it or explain it. Just listen, have a good attitude and learn something!

Another great thing about conventions is the huge amount of art available.

You can find prints (that's artist talk for posters and other art pieces) by your favorite artists of your favorite characters or discover new talent at the ground floor. You can get sketches and other original pieces from the artists you grew up with or from rising talent before they get discovered.



Conventions are the perfect place to find new books and meet some very excited creators. I have discovered many awesome titles and was able to interact with writers and artists from the big 2, from fully independent creations and everything in between.



Do keep in mind that artists spend a substantial amount of time, and most likely the majority of their resources, to bring their art and vision to you. If you are passionate about comics, art, the geek scene, and you want to keep it going, vote with your wallet and support the

artists. That being said, I'm going on the road! See you at this 2014's Con-Nichiwa, Emerald City Comicon, Salt Lake City Fanexpo, C2E2 in Chicago, Nerds Assemble in Juarez Mexico, Dallas Comicon, Phoenix Comicon, Denver Comicon, Smallville Comicon, Albuquerque Comic Expo, Capitol City in Austin and MORE!

alfredtrujillo.com

facebook.com/alfred183



COSPLAY CORNER

Cosplay Columnist - Cara Nicole/Az Powergirl



With Comic Book Convention season creeping up on us I felt it imperative to give you the do's and don'ts of cosplayer interactions at cons. You might think "just point and shoot," right? Wrong! Conventions aren't just for picking up that missed issue of Spiderman from 1995 or attempting to catch Wil Wheaton in an elevator. They are an experience, a sleep depriving smorgasbord of parties, cosplay, educational panels, celebrities, writers, artists, collectables, and more. As a cosplayer I am going to give you a few pointers on what to do and not to do with all these "crazy" people dressed up like they should be knocking on your door begging for candy.

DO - take pictures WITH cosplayers. Have a friend take the pic, ask a stranger, or shoot a selfie with them. I guarantee that when you look back on these pics you will enjoy them more if you are in them.

DON'T -demand they pose for you or take pics with you. Cosplayers are not required to take pics with or for anyone. Ask nicely and they will almost always give you a shot worthy of your scrapbook.

DO- maintain proper hygiene. It gets quite crowded in there and body odor can easily consume the environment.

DON'T-rest your arm pit on a cosplayer's shoulder. Once SEEMS ok but when it's done by 300 people it can leave pit stains on a costume. It smells bad and stains the fabric.

DO- engage in conversation. It's always fun to know about the cosplayer and costume. Most cosplayers are eager to share their knowledge and excited that others take interest.

DON'T- ask for a phone number. If it's offered or they ask then feel free. But a business card, web12
ALWAYS appreciated.

DON'T- Photobomb. Wait patiently for someone's picture to be taken or go around. Respect others memories as you want yours respected.

DO- have fun! That's what you're there for right!
And most importantly!

DO-Follow ME at Azpowergirl.com and on Facebook at Az Powergirl Cara Nicole or on Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram and more. I am AzPowergirl EVERYWHERE!

facebook.com/azpowergirl
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MICKEY CHANEY: CGC BEST OF THE BEST ZOMBIE SKETCH



by Michael Fett

If you have been scrolling online through Facebook fan pages or maybe heard the news at a local comic shop, then you may have heard Mickey Chaney has been crowned the Zombie King by the people of CGC (Certified Guaranty Company) in their Best of the Best Zombie sketch contest. You might be asking yourself after hearing this news what is the CGC Best of the Best Sketch competition and what does a win mean for the artist and owner of the comic?

CGC Best of the Best competition originated on the Certified Guaranty Company's forum a few years back in the signature room. With the popularity of original art done on sketch covers on the rise and the amount of people submitting their art right when they pick it up with a CGC witness on hand, the members of the forum started arguing over who has the best Signature Series certified sketch done by an artist. The solution to the problem was creating a poll in which people could nominate their sketches in a certain category in which the CGC SS sketch fits. The nominated sketches were then put into a poll in which the members of the forum voted on. The top two vote getters then face off each other in sudden death to where the winner is crowned Best of the Best of that category. The owner and artist get bragging rights on the forum along with a special trophy in their signature. Heck, even Mickey felt it was great beating an art piece done by Chadwick Haverlund, because he feels Chadwick's work is on another level.

What started off as some friendly competition between the members of the forum, turned into a war amongst the CGC forum members. The losers of their favorite category would seek artists to do commissions in which they could submit to CGC and later try to take away for the trophy from the winners or in some cases prepare themselves for an upcoming category in which they could win. The members looking to enter the competition sometimes even tried to commission legendary artists like Neal Adams to win or sometimes they tried with lesser known talents. Either way a commission they entered that could have cost thousands to under a hundred dollars. Let me be the first guy to warn everybody spending large amounts of money on a commission does not always guarantee you a win sometimes going with a lesser known artist who is the way to go. Since the start of the competition Nei Ruffino, Natali Sanders, and Mickey Chaney from the Phoenix Metro area have all won. Other notable names include Andy Carreon and Alfred Trujillo who has come very close on several occasions to winning a category.

Coming close to winning and winning for a lesser known artist on the boards in that competition can mean a lot of things. Even in a loss, an artist's work can now be seen around the world and gain respect. It is not just people in the United States entering this competition, I can confirm people from China, England, Norway, and Australia have entered their CGC SS sketches into this competition in hopes of winning. So in the case of these artists a whole new group of fans has opened up to them. Facilitators on these boards will contact these artists to arrange sketch opportunities so that members of the forum can commission them for to do original pieces usually in the amount of 10 commissions per sketch

opportunity. Let me tell you these sketch opportunities usually sell out within minutes of going up on the boards just ask Alfred Trujillo, Andy Carreon, and Natali Sanders.

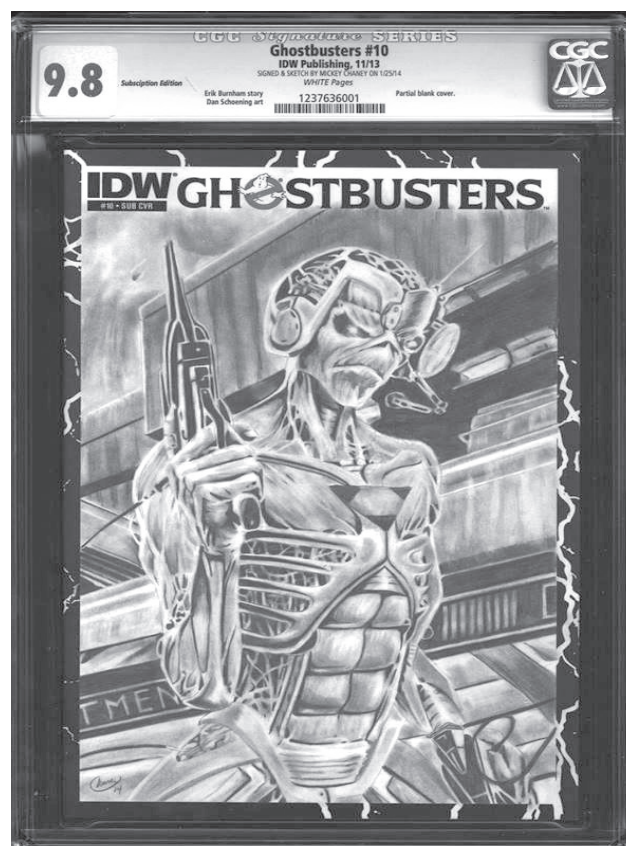
Chaney's win actually came from a piece I commissioned him for pick up at Amazing Arizona Comic Con and submitted at that con for CGC SS certification. At the time leading up to the con I actually wanted to commission Mickey's partner Rob Hix to do a Daredevil on a blank cover for submission later, but as luck had it Spiral Ink sent out Mickey to help

out with a Doctor Who 50th Anniversary party by the WOD Media. I looked through Mickey's portfolio that day he had the most amazing sketches of famous actors, cars, and more. I knew at that time some point in the future I wanted to commission him for something.

Leading up to Amazing Arizona I wanted to commission a few big name artists to do a couple of sketch covers for me, but ultimately decided to only go with Livio Ramondelli the main artist on IDW's Transformers comics for a commission. This decision led me to go through my list of local artists to see who I wanted to commission for something. I made a decision to go with Mickey Chaney after seeing a convention photo in which he was wearing an Iron Maiden shirt. I stopped right there and said the one thing missing from my original artwork collection was a sketch of Eddie the Head. Mickey was the perfect person to choose for this commission because I knew he had a love for the band as much as I did. First rule of commissioning somebody to do a character make sure they love the character as much as you do.

I contacted Mickey and the moment I said I wanted recreation of Eddie from Iron Maiden's Somewhere in Time cover, he wanted to do the commission because of his love of the character and band. A few things were discussed about whether to go with colors or high detailed pencils for this commission and I ultimately asked the question which way you think it would look better Mickey said high detailed pencils. I handed over the comic to Mickey to let him do the commission in his own time for pick up later.

I started seeing Facebook updates on the work he was doing on the commission little by little throughout the process. I knew right then I was getting something more than I expected for what I paid. I also knew then that this was artistically the best commission somebody has ever done for me. I



had no intentions of entering into the CGC Best of the Best competition at that time, but when I went to pick it up at Amazing Arizona with the head of the CGC SS department, Michael Balent, with me from Mickey I changed my mind based on Balent's comments.

Balent's first comments to me were how much did I pay for that commission, it is easily the best of the show he has seen so far. I knew then I should enter it into a CGC Best of the Best competition just as a thanks to Mickey for his hard work, but which one. After I looked through the categories it dawned on me Eddie is described as a zombie like creature why not CGC Best of the Best Zombie Sketch category. The rest is history Mickey Chaney won the competition and is now known as the Zombie King and is now getting ready hopefully with the next few months to have his very own CGC sketch opportunity on the boards. However, if you want to meet Mickey Chaney in person stop by the Leprecon Dealers Room this year May 8th-11th and visit the Spiral Ink Comics booths in which both Mickey and the winning comic will be on hand.

For more info on CGC Best of the Best visit www.cgsketch.com

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The 24-Yr old Science Fiction, Fantasy, Horror & Convention Newszine
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AZ FILM COMPANY: SQUISHY STUDIOS WINNER OF 48 HOUR FILM CHALLENGE

by Jacob Thomas

In light of recent events, I caught up with Nathan Blackwell of indie film company Squishy Studios to discuss their winning short film of the annual 48 Hour Film challenge. The winning short film, "Logan Must Make Star Wars", follows Nathan's brother Logan as he mysteriously traverses back in time; eventually, but sadly, landing on top of George Lucas thus killing him before he could set out to create the iconic science fiction adventure Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope. Logan must now take it upon himself to recreate the life-changing adventure in order to balance out the time-space continuum.

Hilarity ensues throughout as this meant-to-be-a-parody style of comedy. Logan attempts to attract investors but his fan-boyish nature suffocates any attempt for a deal to be reached.

Determined, Logan uses all means and materials he knows how to recreate the film. To save spoiling the short film, you must see it for yourself.

Official Short Film Synopsis:

Logan, thrown back to the year 1974, accidentally kills George Lucas. To ensure that the greatest sci-fi trilogy is made he must now impersonate Lucas and make Star Wars himself.

-----Interview

Q: Tell us about yourself and your background in film-making:

A: Well I started making Star Wars and Indiana Jones fan films on Super 8 when I was a little kid. My Mom really encouraged us to play and have fun from the beginning. But it wasn't until a VHS camcorder showed up in the neighborhood, from my friend Craig, that we really started to do a lot of crazy short films and skits.

Eventually it became our hobby and I went to South Mountain High School for video production, and later Scottsdale Community College for film. I've always been lousy at making a living with my filmmaking, unlike a lot of my peers who ended up working in local TV.

Instead I just wanted to tell my strange stories. But now I do work in corporate video to pay the bills, as a freelancer. But yeah I've made over 40 short films, 2 web series, and two no-budget features.

Q: Squishy Studios recently won an award for the 48 hour film challenge with your new comedy/pardy "Logan Must Make Star Wars" -- Tell us a bit about the film and the process everyone went through. It seems like with your background in film-making and the time flow throughout the short film, not much budget went into the film but still kept to the high level of parody-comedy style.

A: Yeah, when I realized that if we could make the "cheapness" of it part of the story, since we could actually replicate any of the actual Star Wars locations properly, that's when it all clicked. The whole movie was made for about \$150, \$70 of which was food for the cast and crew.

Forty-eight hour movies are always nutty. There's a lot of stress involved and you really have to shoot from your hip. But you're always best off if you have a general plan ahead of time.

With our short "Zombie Team Building" we knew we wanted to make a zombie comedy so we started to assemble cast along those lines and collect a ton of guns and survival props. But we didn't have any of the script written for that or "Logan Must Make Star Wars", because we knew the guidelines of the competition would really have to dictate the script.

For "Logan Must Make Star Wars" we were basically praying that the guidelines (the theme, line of dialogue, prop) wouldn't sink us. But on these 48 hour movies we have a pretty established tradition of writing the movie the night before, after the guidelines are released. Then shooting from about 9am to about 7pm, and then getting four or so hours of sleep and getting into editing for the final delivery at 7pm on Sunday. I had forgotten how quickly these 48 hour shoots were ... I really could only do one or two takes and then shout "moving on!" It was just nuts.

But you do them because you want to be challenged. It's like Iron Chef.

Q: I noticed in "Logan Must Make Star Wars" comes close at potentially stepping on some toes of copyright and trademark. Furthermore, the execution of the aluminum props used while covering the facts behind George Lucas's trials and tribulations faced when finalizing the first movie, Episode IV - was absolutely genius. What was the struggle like, if any, when attempting to make the parody-comedy without stepping onto the toes of others in the corporate film world?

That is to include the dialogue throughout the short film.

A: Well we actually could get away I think with using props and dialogue from the moving since we're a parody, like fan films, but that was something on our minds.

I looked at other parodies, fan films, and productions and we're probably the most conservative when it comes to using things from the movies.

But yeah, I think we're in the clear.

If "George Lucas In Love" could get by we felt we were okay.

Q: It's no secret you and Squishy Studios will be at LepreCon in May -- What can we expect from the team this year?



A: If there's a film festival we'll probably be screening Logan Must Make Star Wars! You may want to nudge whoever is running that to my direction, if you know. Squishy Studios is going to continue the adventures of Voyage Trekkers

We were really happy with how the web series has been developing and we feel there's more stories we want to tell with the characters

We are, however, considering the idea of doing an independent Voyage Trekkers feature film instead of Season 3! Independent, meaning "indie." It would be a continuation of the web series, but accessible for people just discovering it for the first time

Q: For either the feature film and/or a possible Season 3 - Could we expect same cast members from the first two seasons or perhaps new allied characters or enemies?

A: Same cast members, plus new ones and new villains!

Video Sources: "Logan Must Make Star Wars" YouTube Video - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=56u8n9c9IbI>

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CASFS Bookclub and Social, Samurai comics, 1051 E. Camelback (Turn in at 11th St. And park behind) 7:00 PM on the third Tuesday of each month - In September we discussed the graphic novels Daredevil: Man Without Fear and Daredevil: Born Again both by Frank Miller. In October Randall Whitlock Discussed Garth Nix's Sabriel with himself. In November it was We discussed Sandman 1 & 2 Graphic Novels. In January Four people discussed Asimov's Foundation and didn't like it. Terry Goodkind's Law of Nines was dismissed as a hack fantasy in February. March's book will be Written in Red by Ann Bishop.

Discussion is always lively and we usually digressed into general discussion of SF and Fantasy.

CopperCon 33 Revolution- Michael Fett Chairman. Work on closing out is almost complete with only a couple of small bills remaining.

CopperCon 34 - Mark Boniece Chairman-- We are finalizing the Hotel Contract and talking to guests. Mark has gotten a lower price on the hotel contract and great efforts are being made to keep costs down.

Webmaster-- We have no Webmaster. Mark Boniece is handling routine updates to the CASFS site.

ConNotations - Patti Hultstrand has resigned as ConNotations Editor. WOD has unilaterally terminated the ConNotations section effective with the issue going to print at the end of March 2014. The previous report on this matter is left in Brackets for your information. { For at least the next three years ConNotations will appear Monthly as a four page section in WOD, a widely circulated Science Fiction and Fantasy Review publication. It will no longer be mailed. Review Books continue to be available. Patti needs more reviewers so the work load can be spread out. }

Database - Mark Boniece (Acting) Data assistance is needed. The names from CopperCon 31, 32 and 33 need to be integrated into the Database.

Audit Committee - No change - The Audit Committee report is still in process. A preliminary report was presented to the Board. The membership will receive the Final Report when it is finished.

WOD

THIRD THURSDAYS POP CULTURE MEET-UP

by Song River

Creative minds - some may think they are a danger, and perhaps they are. However, when they come together they are explosive! Third Thursday Pop Culture Creatives came together for our first Third Thursday in March for some comics, cola and pizza. Utilizing their time to collectively network, share information, help answer questions, and work as a co-op team to share like-minded passions.

The elements that make this meet up group entirely different is that it is open literally to all within the creative community, and to kick it up a notch, its circle extends to everyone from beginner to well-seasoned professionals. The Phoenix valley holds a great deal of diverse, artistic talents, and those who come to Third Thursday Pop Culture all want to share, and be a part.

Queen's Pizzeria, located at 125 W Main St. Mesa AZ, 85201, has now become the location chosen to meet, as they offer WiFi, room for all who attend, and great food and excellent pricing. A bonus is that they are open until 10pm to meet the needs of the patrons who come. Parking is free at the front of the establishment after 5 pm and behind the buildings. For menu information visit their website: <http://www.queenspizzeria.com/>

We look forward to having Artists, Musicians, Writers, Cosplayers, Costumer Designers, Steampunkers, Sci-Fi, Gamers, all creatives come out and join us once a month at 6:30 pm. Please don't hesitate to contact us on facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/ThirdThursdayPopCulture/>

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Song River - CowGirlZen Photography

- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/CowGirlZen.Photography>

- Twitter: <https://twitter.com/cowgirlzenphoto>

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CASFS BOOK SOCIAL FOR 2014

Meetings are 7PM, the third Tuesday of the month at Samurai Comics, 1051 East Camelback Road, Phoenix. - Contact is Randall Whitlock.

April - Out of the Dark - David Weber

A master sergeant prowling the back country of the Balkans and a firearms instructor and former Marine find themselves at the center of a growing network of resistance against an invading force of alien, carnivorous Shongari intent on annihilating the human race.

May - Hexed - Kevin Hearne

With the help of his magical sword, his neighbor's rocket-propelled grenade launcher and his vampire attorney, Atticus O'Sullivan, the last of the Druids, must stop a fallen angel from feasting on local high school students and a coven of witches linked to the German side of World War II.

June - The Last Dragonslayer - Jasper Fforde

Fifteen-year-old Jennifer Strange runs an agency for underemployed magicians in a world where magic is fading away, but when visions of the death of the world's last dragon begin, all signs point to Jennifer--and Big Magic"-- Provided by publisher.

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Leave your information and we will be in touch with you!

Please visit us at www.thedreadfleet.com



MIDSOUTHCON REVIEW

By Michael D'Ambrosio

I recently attended MidsouthCon in Memphis for the second time in three years over the weekend of March 21st to the 23rd as one of their authors. This has to be one of the more relaxing conventions that I've been part of.

Starting with the Hilton East hotel, they provide free shuttle service from the airport, which is approximately ten miles away. The hotel is shaped like a large glass cylinder, lending to a futuristic atmosphere and the lobby, with its high ceilings and large glass panes made me feel like I was in a scene from the cartoon show, The Jetson's. The food at The Rook's Corner, the hotel restaurant, was exceptional and the bar, also located in the lobby, boasted a wide variety of interesting drinks including Ol' Smokey Tennessee Moonshine in several "flavors". The staff was quite friendly and really appreciated having the convention at their hotel. On Saturday, the hotel even provided free hotdogs for lunch and dinner to everyone.

With a top notch lineup of guests from the literary, science, film, comic, artist, music and costuming genres, including Weston Ochse, they assembled a very exciting program. I'm sure many of you probably remember Weston who hails from the Tucson area. He was a guest at LepreCon in 2012. My favorite panel was 'Time Travel in Literature' and we had quite an exuberant group join us for that discussion. You can visit their website at www.Midsouthcon.org for the names of the guests and the programming schedule. I'm so glad to see that the programming people at this and other conventions are looking for new topics for the discussion panels besides the usual ones. The volunteers from the Con Suite came around at regular intervals offering snacks and refreshments. The suite was located in the same area as the panels so one didn't have to walk far for a quick bite.



ENTER THE SCIENCE FICTION

The fan clubs, which were located adjacent to the lobby, had some outstanding displays from pirates to science and everything in between. The enthusiasm of the crowd was very impressive. When closing time in the dealers' room arrived on Sunday, the room was nearly full of people still looking to buy merchandise. That is a rarity from my experiences. Among them were many avid readers as well. I don't think any of the authors or publishers had difficulty selling books this weekend.

The art show, located in the next ballroom down from the dealers' room, was spectacular. I'm not a big art fan but, as I passed through, I was quite impressed with the number of pieces that were exhibited.

Like most other conventions, the highlight was the masquerade contest. The number of costumes worn by fans throughout the whole weekend was quite a scene.

For those of you who are writers, I highly recommend you try this convention. For those of you who are casual travelers and enjoy conventions, this is one you really want to see. You may want to go a few days earlier or stay a few later because there is a lot to do in the general area as well. Memphis has lots to offer.

My next review will be for a new convention near Harrisburg, Pa. called Central Pennsylvania Comicon on April 5th and 6th, organized by Alicia Lurye, who was featured in an earlier edition of the WOD. Until next time, enjoy life and keep on reading!

-- Reviewed by: Michael D'Ambrosio, author of *The Space Adventures Series*, *The Fractured Time Series*, *Night Creeps*, and *Princess Pain*. You can find Michael in the dealers' room or in panels at LepreCon 2014 in May.

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BOOK PRODUCTION AND MARKETING

Trusted Arizona small publisher will be sharing her experience in book production and marketing for print and eBooks. Patti Hultstrand has helped to publish over 60 books since 2009. She will be teaching Book Production, Marketing, and the Media Kit. Get on the invite list for upcoming classes at phultstrand@yahoo.com or contact her at www.facebook.com/pjhultstrand.

ARIZONA BOOK AUTHOR SIGNINGS

Christopher Moore at the Crescent Ballroom downtown (see Changing Hands bookstore website for preorders and directions.) April 24 at 6pm. Signing *The Serpent of Venice*, sequel to *Fool*.

Kevin Hearne is at the Poisoned Pen bookstore on June 17, 2014 at 7pm.

Diana Gabaldon at Changing Hands bookstore on June 25 at 7pm signing *Written in My Own Heart's Blood*.

Time Travel Punk at the Renaissance Festival

Photo Credits: Dee Astell



WOD INTERVIEW WITH RENEE MEREDITH OF DRINK N' DRAW ART

By Song River - Picture credit for CowGirl Zen Photography



Song River: Describe what an artist is to you.

Renee: To me, in the most generic and encompassing term, an artist is someone who can produce a creation using any medium that portrays an idea, thought, or imagination. From there we could create an algorithm of additional definitions that could cover the Smithsonian museum of art!!

I consider myself a beginning freelance multimedia artist., and because I have a very creative mind, I don't believe I will ever have just one style.

Song: Are there artists in your family?

Renee: There are some creative people in my family, but not artists, per say.

Song: What are some of the various styles and types of art you've tried?

Renee: Such a variety of things strike my fancy! So far I have enjoyed art nouveau, vintage horror, sci-fi, comic fan art with lots of pin-up poses, whimsical steampunk, collage, sketch cards and three dimensional display heads art.

Song: Producing now multimedia art, attending Drink and Draws, Comic Cons, and Art walks- what brought you to this period in your artistic endeavors?

Renee: It was time to reinvent myself. Find my true self again. At the beginning of 2014, I was miserable in a very well paying career, bound by a soul sucking job that came to expect me to perform my job duties in an unethical way compromising others' safety. The conditions forced me to do something totally out of character. I just walked out after my shift one day and have never looked back. Since then my focus has been on simplifying my life and living (pauses) true happiness. I find much happiness in creating and sharing art, as well as spending time with fellow artists; making personal connections.

Song: How long have you been creating multimedia art?

Renee: I decided to begin drawing in July 2013. Then, I attended the CopperCon in Mesa, AZ. There was a focus on women in comics. Trina Robbins, the first woman creator in Comics and Liz Safian Berube, the first woman artist to work for DC comics were special guest speakers. I became so inspired by them and the local artists like Al Sparrow, Jolene Houser and especially April Reyna. She took time with me, looked at my art, gave me my first Micron pen and my first white Jelly-Roll pen. That attention really meant a lot and gave me the encouragement I needed to begin my artist career. It is so important for artists to mentor and pay it forward...

Song: How would you compare commissioned work to just sitting around and doodling? Are there special techniques or tips?

Renee: Commission work is usually all about working on an "assigned idea" that is due by a certain time. I personally enjoy the challenge of meeting the clients expectations and possibly exceeding them while presenting my personal interpretation. Drawing commissions at artist events has it's challenges. First, you will be asked to draw things, characters that are unfamiliar to you- that's where the smart phone comes in handy. I always am honest and refer them to another artist if I can't meet their request.

Also, time management is often an obstacle. For this one, I use a receipt book with carbon copies. I jot down the patron's first name, cell number, art subject, payment received and expected time of completion. Then if Im not able to complete the work I will write the patron's address down and if they haven't been back by to pick up their art, I can call and give them a reminder. I've actually had patrons pay and forget to come back by for their art.

For me, personally, I find as a beginning artist, it still takes me a bit to decide what Im in the mood to draw and to find references I like when just doodling.

Song: Do you have a favorite character that you enjoy drawing?

Renee: Wonder Woman!! She is a confident and powerful role model that has lived on and touched the lives of so many through the years.

Song: Have you created any original works? Are you working on one? Can you share it?

Renee: The majority of my works are originals. If I am completing a character fan art piece I usually create my own pose and background then reference the character's most identifiable features. I am currently working on some fun

portraits of steampunk cosplayers in their beautiful dress and "petraits."

Song: What in the art industry would you like to tackle next?

Renee: I will soon be releasing my line of display head art titled "Head-Liners" and hope to have it displayed in a local gallery. I plan to write, illustrate and print my own comic book. I am very detailed in most of my artwork and would like to create book cover illustrations and be part of a commissioned sketch card set.

Song: Just recently you decided to take on another persona and join the beauties of pinup lovelies. Why?

Renee: As part of my journey of self discovery. It's a way for me to reconnect with my fun, flirty side. The first photo I saw from my first photo shoot brought tears to my eyes. The very talented photographer captured the long lost barefoot and fancy free part of me I thought I might never find again....

Song: How comfortable were you preparing for this journey in being photographed in multiple outfits and stages of presentation?

Renee: My wonderful, loving, and supportive husband, friends, and family have encouraged me to model, but I never took it seriously. I am at a point in my life that I can finally say I know every inch of my physical being and I accept every one of those inches that make up the curvacious beautiful woman I have become. So without hesitation, or negativity I freed my fun-loving self, had a blast dressing up, and shared it all with the camera. I am so proud I did this for myself.

Song: Are you planning on tying the alter ego, Dixie Bellz, into your multimedia artwork? Or, are you looking to keep them separate?

Renee: Well "Dixie Bellz" might make a guest appearance or two with Drink N Draw Art, but for the most part, they will remain separate. They haven't liked each other's Face Book Pages yet! Lol!

Song: Renee, the world is your oyster... what do you wish?

Renee: I hope to be an inspirational role model as an artist and a confident classy woman. I wish for continued happiness and self discovery, whatever direction the rest of my life takes me! The blinders are off and I'm ready to go! I have a lot going on right now. I'm looking forward to every minute of it and the opportunity to meet lots of new folks! Please come by and say hey if you happen to be at any of my upcoming events:

-Second Fridays Downtown Mesa 6:00 p.m. - 10:00 p.m.

-Sat. March 22, 2014: Laughing Moon Con

-April 11, 2014: Second Friday Mesa 6:00 p.m.-10:00 p.m.

-Sat May 3, 2014: FREE COMIC BOOK DAY

Jessie James Comics Time TBA

-May 8-11, 2014: Lepre Con

-June 5-8, 2014: Phoenix Comic Con Phoenix Convention Center

Please like my pages on Facebook for the latest and greatest upcoming art events, learn a little bit more about me and to say hey!

Drink N Draw Art by Renee Meredith (Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Drink-N-Draw-Art-by-Renee-Meredith/179084145465593>)

Dixie Bellz: (Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/dixiebellzpinup>)

Song River - CowGirlZen Photography

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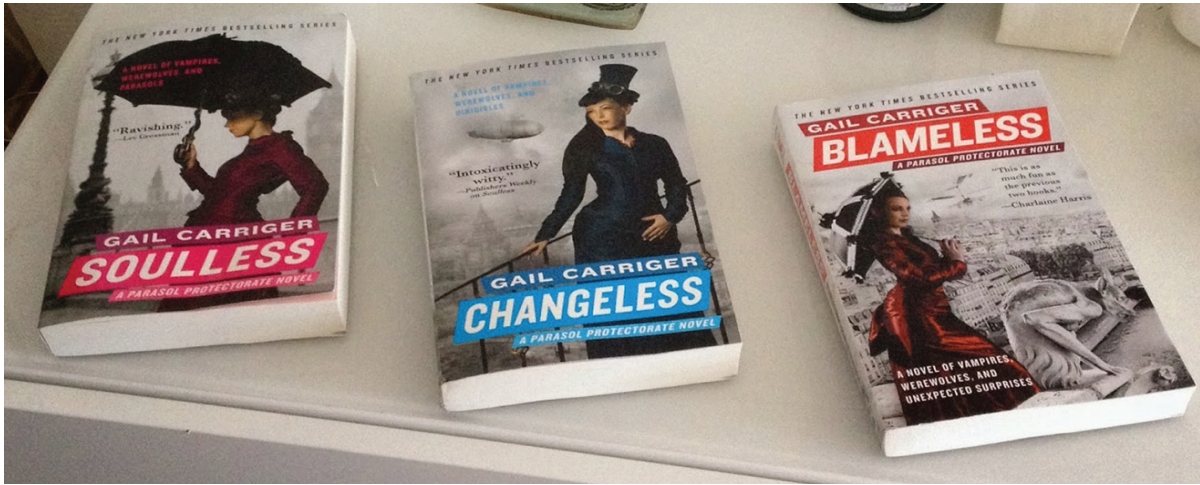


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THE PARASOL PROTECTORATE SERIES BY GAIL CARRIGER: BOOKS IN REVIEW



Book Reviews By Michael Bradley

The problem you face when writing about a five book series is that you will obviously have some degree of spoilers as you explain the plot twists. If you mention a character in book three, readers of book one obviously knows they survived books one and two. As a result, I will discuss the author, series and quality first, then will have a big bolded all caps spoiler alert before we get into those types of details.

As a steampunk author myself, I have always been a fan of the genre, even before I knew it was a genre. I grew up with Jules Verne and HG Wells stories, which at the time were simply science fiction written in the late 1800s. Today, if you write similar adventures that occur during the Age of Steam - roughly 1830 to 1900 - that have a science fiction component, they are referred to as Steampunk. The time period was thrilling because for the first time the labor of a man or a beast of burden such as an ox or horse were replaced by steam power. Factories, trains, urban pollution, cotton looms, steam ships and other devices were like landing on the Moon for the first time.

The map of Africa was still blank in the middle and we were looking for the source of the Nile. The sun never set on the British Empire, the major powers jockeyed for empires, magic and science were hard to distinguish, and the United States had the Wild West, the Civil War and Indian wars. It is in this time period in which Gail Carriger writes her fiction series, the Parasol Protectorate. Gail Carriger is the pen name of Tofa Borregaard who holds three degrees including a Masters in Archaeology and a Masters in Anthropology. She has lived in both the United States and England and traveled enough to have a cosmopolitan view of things. Her training and experiences definitely inspire her style of writing.

Gail Carriger has a very unique and clever idea in her first book Soulless, which introduces the main character, Alexia Tarabotti. Alexia is born

with no soul, hence the name of the book. People with too much soul in her world might end up as vampires or as werewolves or even linger about for a time as ghosts. To be soulless is very rare and basically makes her immune to those with the abundance of soul and even able to remove their power temporarily with her touch. This concept alone is rife with conflict, but don't expect the series to take you down the familiar path of vampires and werewolves seen in contemporary urban fantasy.

Instead, Gail Carriger is a master at weaving fashion, social morays, customs and humor into her novels. Her character development and whimsical narrative style are superlative, telling the story in such a charming and entertaining fashion that you have difficulty putting the books down. There is action, international intrigue, gadgetry and supernatural elements, but it is a world of fun, clothing choices and friendship, not a gory monster fest all too common in lesser literature.

I am a huge fan of Gail Carriger, and in limited correspondence through emails and her Facebook and blog site, I am a fan not only of her writing, but of her as a person as well. You can stop here with no spoilers and rush out to buy all five books and read them. You will have a great time and be sorry when they are done.

Gail will also be appearing at LepreCon 2014, May 8-11 in Mesa, Arizona. Be sure to come by if you are in the area and meet this outstanding author. Show your support if you are already a fan like me and queue up for the signatures for your books.

SPOILER ALERT - Released in just 2009, Soulless is the first in the five book series. Alexia Tarabotti faces the challenge of being too tan and curvy due to her half-Italian heritage and suffers the further problem of being a well-read intellectual and opinionated woman in an era that does not always appreciate those qualities. She

suffers her step family, focuses on fashion and spends time with Ivy Tunstell, the delightful but fashionably challenged best friend. Her soulless nature, though not well known, soon draws her into a world of intrigue with the werewolves, her friend the dapper vampire and the local hive, and even with Queen Victoria herself. As if that is not enough to deal with, she encounters a particularly annoying werewolf named Lord Maccon.

In the second book, Changeless, we find Alexia married and now a noblewoman, the Lady Woolsey. Her husband is off on business while a pack of werewolf soldiers camps on her front lawn. Exorcised ghosts, an angry Queen Victoria and other dangers bring her all the way to Scotland to investigate matters and learn the truth about her own husband. There is a particular incident at the end of this book that is definitely a cliff hanger for the third in the series.

In the third book, Blameless, Alexia separates from her husband in a scandalous way, even though she herself is - blameless. Lacking her husband, she is back with her scornful family, the Queen fires her from her position, and someone begins to send deadly clockwork devices after her to kill her.

This is the one book I did not enjoy at first; neither did my wife who read along with me. The reason is that the first part of the book loses the whimsical style of the first two and creates a more real and tense situation. It almost had me put down the series, but having enjoyed the first two, I powered through this beginning.

About a third through the volume, it regained the usual more light-hearted style as Alexia travels, faces challenges, and her personal problems start to be repaired. In the end, the third book is definitely worth reading and leads you on to the next two, but if I had to find a fault, it would be the early tone of the middle book.

The fourth installment of the series is Heartless. Alexia must once again solve a sinister plot to kill Queen Victoria and delve even farther into the mysterious past of her husband. One of her sisters becomes heavily involved in the suffragette movement, while her cross-dressing friend Madame Lafoux is once again creating strange clockwork devices. This is one of the more intriguing books in the series because the characters are already strongly established, allowing the author to focus more on subtleties and interesting twists along the way.

The final book, Timeless serves as a capstone and rite of passage for all the characters in the series. Alexia is now relatively settled in to her new lifestyle, when a summons is received from an ancient vampire leader in Egypt. This takes the reader off to the distant sands of the Nile Delta for more adventures with their beloved characters.

In Egypt, when all is done, it brings a satisfying end to the series, having told Alexia's main story of life challenges and passing the torch to several other characters known to the reader. As a fan, you sometimes want story series to go on forever, however, experience shows that telling a story too long causes some series to become ridiculous or forced. As it is, the Parasol Protectorate thoroughly tells the start to end story of Alexia while leaving the reader with a sense of satisfied completion.

Congratulations to Gail Carriger for such excellent work in writing five such wonderful novels in this Steampunk series. When I first started reading Soulless, I was told it was a "woman's Steampunk novel" because it is from Alexia's view and deals with fashion. I would totally disagree. I think everyone can enjoy the series equally. I also appreciate how it is written with wit, an eye to history, great characters and action, but never descends to being tawdry or bloody in place of good storytelling. I wholeheartedly recommend this series.

Michael Bradley is author of *The Travelers' Club* and *The Ghost Ship, Fire & Ash, Twisted History, and Twisted Nightmares*
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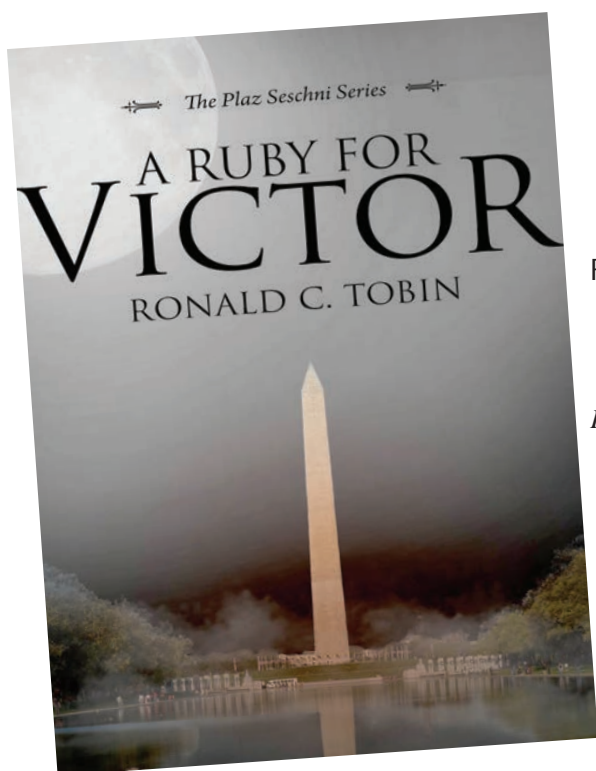
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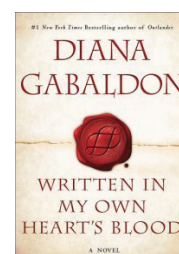
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 to the next book!*

*-- Reviewed by Jenn Czep
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Upcoming Signings / Events at The Poisoned Pen
 April 26th - Shona Patel-Teatime for the Firefly- 2pm
 May 1st - Daniel Palmer -Desperate - 7pm
 May 9th - Charlaine Harris- Midnight Crossroad - 7pm
 May 27th - Clive Cussler/Graham Brown - 7pm
 June 5th - Jim Butcher-Skin Game - 7pm
 June 6th - Hachette Book Party; with 3 authors - 7pm
 June 10th - Diana Gabaldon - Written in my Own Heart's Blood - 6pm at The Arizona Biltmore Resort
 June 17th - Kevin Hearne - Shattered - 7pm

Discussions for April - Check website for book title
 April 12th-10:30am-Coffee & Crime Discussion Group
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KEEPING THE BEAT: Local Music Review of Carol Pacey & the Honey Shakers

By Song River



Photo credits: Cow Girl Zen Photography

Recently, during a practice jam session, a few local scene musicians were discussing with me their local music scene. It seemed to them and others they played with that the energy we felt during the 90's has been missing, but they felt it was stirring again. All agreed it would be up to the heart of the local music scene to recreate this excitement, and the time was right. So with this in mind, I ran across a local band in the Phoenix Metro area that personifies this drive, to kick it up another notch higher and state their own unique 'buzz' to livin, lovin... and believe it or not... its fronted by a woman!

Today is the kicker, to be able to chat with Carol Pacey and the Honey Shakers. Carol is the front woman for the band and if honey is sweet, then its consistency is also a victorious Americana blitz of kick butt formulation, as Carol Pacey and the Honey Shakers give a raucous glow to the alt-country, folk, rock n roll mix.

Let's begin our confabulation with front woman Carol Pacey.



Song River: East coast girl goes on a journey and lands in the western dry tumbleweeds a blowing desert floor- what were you searching for when you came out west?

Carol Pacey: I usually say that I ended up in Arizona because I was chasing a man, which is true, but I was also looking for adventure, and as it turned out, I caught that man and every day since has definitely been an adventure!

Song: Did your visit first, or was it love at first sight with the, 'hasta manana' and the easy going scene of the southwest, better yet what were in the influences?

Carol: Yes, it was love at first sight! I fell in love with the wide-open spaces of the desert and the daily dosing of sunshine.

Song: I know many are transplants to the warmer/drier climates, and for some reason we all came to stay. Whether it was for the food, the ambiance... what were your reasons?

Carol: It's just good here and I have never thought about leaving. My husband's family and the beaches we love are in Sonora, Mexico so we can visit both relatively easily without a lot of travel time, win-win.

Song: Your bio stresses two things: returning to the roots of local music and that it should bring your audience to that all important connection of, "Music fans quickly pick up on our choruses and rhythms, and then sing and dance right along with us, which for a songwriter is a huge accomplishment and part

of my goal in this grand musical adventure!" And, that you are the front singer... female! With this said, it certainly comes across as being your key element to music in general 1) music has to connect. 2) women can do this very well. When you begin to write, are you bringing these two elements to mind and weaving them from the onset of the process?

Carol: When I first arrived in Tempe, Arizona in 1997, it was at the tail end of what seemed like quite an incredible local music love fest. In fact, when I drove into town on the first day, The Refreshment's, "Girly," played on my car radio. I picked up their album, Fizzy Fuzzy Big & Buzzy right away and that was it, I was a lifer fan! We saw them at Nita's Hideaway and a few other events around town, but then they were gone. Like I said, I missed most of the good times, but it sounded fantastic and seeing how (we) fans love to sing and dance along to this music even now after twenty years, whether it's played live by the them, cover bands or on the radio, I knew I wanted to create something like that too if I could.

When I write a song, the subject matter has to mean something to me first in order to write about it; I'm not very good at writing about subjects that aren't real in some way. Then I try to construct the song in a way that will hopefully connect to the listeners; a song can connect with me all it wants, but if I don't try to translate that into something useful for the listener, then I'm not doing a very good job. I am always pleased when a fan or a band mate talks to me about a particular song they like and sometimes it really surprises me which song or which part of a song grabbed their attention. It's a very humbling experience, every time. I think both men and women can write incredibly touching music. I often try to write without male or female references so either gender can feel the song is written for or about them, but sometimes I just can't fight it and it's clearly written from a female perspective.

Song: What do these two important components look, sound, feel like to you?

Carol: As far as music connecting to an audience, when we have a show, I watch people's reactions to the music, from toe-tapping to wiggling in their seats to full-on dancing. I don't know what part of the song they are reacting to, whether it's the tempo, the lyrics or the boys in the band, but they are reacting and that is awesome! Sometimes there is no reaction, it's just blank stares and that doesn't feel so good. When I know we've done it, that everything came together in a show, I get goose bumps and I can't stop smiling.

Song: Would you describe yourself more as a songwriter or performer or both? Why and how?

Carol: I would say that I am always working on both and that I am not really better at one or the other. When I first started, I wrote and performed the best I could. Then I wanted more out of the experience and that meant bringing in a band. And now, with this rocking band of very talented musicians, I am more solid in my writing including writing parts with their playing in mind and I'm definitely upping my performance. My philosophy is that there is enough bad stuff going on in most people's lives that I want

our music and our shows to be a respite, a happy place of good times for the band and fans alike, from the littlest kiddos at our age-appropriate shows on up the age ladder. Some of my songs touch on sadder or madder subjects, but hopefully they are disguised in something upbeat!

Song: What bands do you listen to, and what attracts you to them?

Carol: Vocals and a singer's attitude catch my ear first then the rest of the song for sure with its style, tempo and lyrics. Since moving to Arizona, I have been hooked on the Refreshments and Peacemakers. Before Arizona, the list is pretty endless with No Doubt, Violent Femmes, Counting Crows, REM, Cure, Elvis Costello, the Replacements, Material Issue, INXS, Pretenders, Presidents of the United States of America, and on and on...and not in order of most loved! Within this past year, I became a big fan of Frank Turner.

Song: When 'down time' does occur, what are some of the activities you pursue?

Carol: I love being with my family, some days more than others, and we seem to be in non-stop motion going here, going there. I try to garden when heat permits, ride my mint green cruiser and walk my scruffy dog.



Meet Andy Borunda, lead guitarist of his own developed sound and technique.

Song: Was the guitar the first instrument you picked out to learn and how old were you when you began lessons?

Andy Borunda: Although we had a piano in the house growing up, I was never really interested in learning how to play it. I'd tinker a bit and knew the notes because my older brother Rick was learning. So officially, the guitar was the first instrument I really began to learn. I was about 15 when I first picked it up and I took a guitar class in high school. Those were my initial proper lessons.

Song: Described as self taught, what were you thinking during those two week sessions you were taking guitar lessons? Was it a certainty that it just all made sense to you then and there?

Andy: Just prior to taking the guitar class, I was trying to learn "Stairway to Heaven" by Led Zeppelin by purchasing the tablature sheet music. Leading up to class, I was just excited that I'd eventually be able to play this epic tune. Day by day, the "sounds" I was making started to sound like actual music that people would be able to enjoy instead of just tolerate. I not only knew how to play in a short time, I recognized the importance of being able to identify what I was actually doing. I was learning instead of just trying to mimic. After two weeks, my instructor, who really only knew basic guitar techniques, chords, etc., told me to go ahead and learn by myself because he couldn't teach me anything else.

Song: Your list of favorite guitars make a strong statement of what you expect out of your chosen instrument (Gibson Les Pauls and a Taylor 614CE acoustic for live shows and includes a Fender Telecaster for studio work). Is there still one you prefer over another; and are you eying off any particular guitar you'd like to own still?

Andy: My style leans very heavily on a good Gibson Les Paul guitar. This comes from the music I'm most drawn to--blues based rock guitar. My main musical influences are notorious for using the Les Paul--Jimmy Page, Ace Frehley, Slash, etc. I very much prefer this live but in the studio

I use a Fender Telecaster a lot. It's a very common recording technique to record multiple electric tracks on a song and the Tele works very well with that. The Les Paul has a thick sound so I don't necessarily want to layer much with it--gets too thick! As far as acoustic guitars go, my Taylor is top notch. I need to know that an acoustic can feel and sound like butter with no help from effects or tricks. As far as eying another guitar, I would love another Les Paul. I come from more of a flashy sort of school of playing which I picked up from a lot of guitarists from the '80's so I'd love to have a glittery Les Paul!

Song: Are you currently doing any solo or co-writing of music?

Andy: Musically speaking, the band is my first priority. We are very busy so I don't have that much free time to work on any solo or outside projects. I do have a bit of a musical library file of ideas that do creep up though. Today's technology makes it very easy to capture and save your ideas.

Song: You walk into a local independent record store. First what genre of music with the fifty spot in your pocket would you be looking for? Why? And do you pursue collecting vinyl or CD or both?

Andy: I love taking my time at Zia's (Zia's is a record/DVD/games and more new/used shop in Arizona and Las Vegas). I love rock n roll! That covers a lot of territory which is why I take my time. There's great music all around so on any given day I can walk away with an array of music from Elvis, KISS, or the Replacements! Rock music is what gets me, it speaks to me--I get it. This can take on many forms. I think certain Beach Boys songs affect me the same way that maybe a Guns n Roses song does. Being that I mostly listen to music while driving, I buy Cd's.

Song: A professed musical sponge... are you one of those rare individuals that can listen to a tune and immediately pick it out?

Andy: I can't necessarily pick out notes per se when I'm listening to music. I usually listen to and recognize patterns and why it would make sense that a song is going here or there. I think that is very beneficial when learning songs too. I'm a musical sponge in that I like to learn about the music, the artist, and whatever I find interesting in relation. Then, I usually retain that information no matter how trivial it might be. I think one retains things that most interests them. I must confess that I am blessed and cursed with a great memory.

Pots and Pans- A beat. Meet drummer Ben DeLuca



Song: First of all advice from icons Jim Morrison and Horace Greeley? Really? We're not worthy, we're not worthy! Tell us Ben, the scenario surrounding this?

Ben DeLuca: All are worthy... especially those who have read my bio. This was more of a statement of what got me to come out west. My cousin, who I used to jam with as a kid, was a big Jim Morrison fan. Besides forcing me to read "American Prayer" cover to cover, he used to ask me if I thought the "West was the Best", or was Jim just always high? I wanted an answer to that question. One day I heard the quote, "Go west, young man" which led me to Horace Greeley's writings on the opportunities that were available in the west. So one day, I threw caution to the wind, and did what so many song writers have written about.... I packed up my bags and headed out west. Exciting times...

Song: For some people there are things that just come naturally. For you it seemed to be keeping a beat. Do you unconsciously hear a beat of timing in your surroundings or is it something you have to

focus on?

Ben: Yes, it's almost subconscious. Not only a beat... sometimes entire arrangements. That's why it's good to have friends like Carol, Andy & Dante to collaborate with.

Song: As a kid, were you ever told to, 'hey knock it off and stop hitting things!' or were you encouraged to fill this part of who you are?

Ben: My parents and the people around me growing up were very supportive. It was a very positive environment. I consider myself lucky.

Song: Are you able to play a variety of percussion style instruments? Do you have a favorite instrument? Is there a particular drum brand you like?

Ben: Yes. It's easy to bang out a rhythm on the drums and move to a djembe, cajon, or even the kitchen counter and continue the pattern. The musical style of the patterns can be challenging at times. The styles that I find a little more difficult are Latin and jazz. As for a favorite instrument I love the drums but I got to give a shout out to the sax. My first instrument ... still love to play.

Song: Music you feel is a universal language. A pattern given to evoke a wide range of emotions. Share some of those musical artists and arrangements that create strong diametrically opposed emotions within you.

Ben: Besides lyrically and rhythmically, I think music speaks to us in other ways. From the beginning of time people were picking up sticks and banging on trees to communicate. It's just in our DNA. At this point, I would refer anyone interested to String Theory. Way too deep for a drummer to go into...

Song: For some music comes as natural as breathing. For others it is very difficult. Do you encourage those who lack natural ability from pursuing a career in music or do you try to set them in a direction of working towards what fits them comfortably and encourage them to just pursue the enjoyment of music?

Ben: People should do what makes them happy. I believe if one person can do it anyone can. Some just may have to work a little harder.

Song: Favorite Saturday night, kick back food to eat? Pizza, wings, Greek, Hamburgers?

Ben: Beer.

From Lilith to Carol Meet. Jazz and rock bassist- Dante Fiorenza

Song: More often than not, bassists are thought to be the quiet ones, loners, a bit aloof... would this describe you?

Dante Fiorenza: I have to be very social for my career, so it's nice to have some time to be quiet. I have been told I am aloof though, and one of my co workers nicknamed me 'lupo solo' which means lone wolf

Song: How does alt-country fit your bass playing experiences?

Dante: Rhythmically it's straightforward and needs to be tight, so it keeps me in check, but sometimes you have to put the circle in the square

Song: Do you also write music?

Dante: A little bit, really only a couple songs.

Song: Any particular bass guitar brand you prefer?

Dante: My first favorite was Fender Jazz, but now using Musicman Stingray and love it. I'm left handed so options are limited

Song: Being raised in Boston, at what age did you come out to the west? Do you hear, or feel differences between bass players from one coast to the other? Is there something about the differences coastal that stand out or is a bass player not influenced by cultures and social surroundings?

Dante: I was 24 and came to finish college. There are great bass players coast to coast. I do believe any musician or any career for that matter is influenced by your upbringing and Boston has certainly shaped me, and I think musicians from Latin based countries are exciting, different rhythms, feels and attitudes

Song: I understand your father has been

largely influential on who you've become. Can you share some of the things he did with you while growing up that led you to become the person you are?

Dante: How much time do you have?!

My dad is special, I could write a book ha, ha. The things I did with dad (he worked nights so I was his daytime pal).....he took me to museums, parks, recording studios, record stores, camera shops, art stores, Harvard Square, ungodly amounts of Boston Bruin games, skating rinks... in fact I was born on skates, Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Canada. I thought I was Canadian growing up since I worshiped so many of them, plus I am huge Joni Mitchell fan. *[See song "Case of You"]

Song: Do you prefer playing bass with a jazz or rock influence? Who are some of those out of the jazz era that influenced you?

Dante: I prefer playing with both a rock and jazz feel. As a kid all I heard was jazz records playing in the house and my father practicing scales on his sax so it's burned in me, but I remember my dad gave me a Jaco Pastorius record when I was in high school and like all other bass players, my head EXPLODED. Game over, Jaco was not from this world!

Song: Pick a cartoon that you enjoy watching. What elements within the cartoon pull you in to become a fan? (yes it's a random question, but it lets the fans know you're human!)

Dante: I liked so many but a more recent one I liked was Kenny the Shark. Kenny was a pet shark and was always getting himself into hilarious predicaments and the family would have to come to the rescue. A lot like real life. And he ate everything in the house!



FIND THE REST OF THIS INTERVIEW ON THE WOD WEBSITE AT: www.thewod.net

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KEEPING THE BEAT: Local Music Review of Love Lost

By Song River

Interview with Frank Ippolito and Ixchel Del Castillo



The imagery of musical fusion- Rock, Latin, and Indie- is always so inviting. As I listened to The lovelost I am taken away to a warm summer's evening under the stars, and a gentle breeze just kissing the slightly glistening skin gently... leaving an opening for passion to be found.

Such is the tantalizing sounds The lovelost lead singer Ixchel illuminates the presence with an intoxicating breath, as an invitation to share just who The lovelost is.

Song River: Frank and Ixchel, thank you both for sharing your music with us. I know from the first time I listened to your music I was taken in o a story about who you were, and who The lovelost is. I look forward to sharing your enthusiasm and scintillating music with many others.

Song: Frank, what were you involved with musically, and non musically? What influences were surrounding you in Chicago musically? Did you begin with a ukulele or another instrument? Paint us a picture if you would regarding those early days and your interest in music.

Frank: Although I was born in Chicago, my family moved to Arizona during my formative teenage years, (thanks mom and dad), so I wasn't necessarily influenced by the "Chicago" sound - although I did teach myself the guitar on my father's electric hollow body Epiphone. I was however very influenced by Rush. I loved the idea of one guitar making so much music - the tones and the way they used pedals and delays was and is something I try to achieve and is prevalent in our music.

Song: Ixchel, as I understand you were a DJ living in Mexico City prior to coming to Arizona, correct? What musical influences surround you growing up in Mexico? Is music a predominant part of your central family? What was it like to DJ alternative music, and what style did it encompass in Mexico?

Ixchel: I was a radio DJ in Cuernavaca for about 9 years. (pauses) I started as a full time DJ for Factor 100, a local rock independent station that featured both English and Spanish rock and independent music from all sorts of genres. Later, I moved with most of the same great team to 106.9 FM Alterna, a public radio station that played classic, jazz, world music, independent rock and more - I hosted the alternative/independent rock show. It was a lot of fun to be surrounded by people who loved music regardless of labeled genres. Everyone simply loved music and that influenced the sounds in my head.

Growing up in Mexico, there was always music at my house. No one really played an instrument, but you would hear 50s rock and roll - and we were always dancing - The Beatles, mariachi, ballads and some Son Jarocho all in a couple of hours, (smiling). My parents still have music playing all the time, although you will never know what the next song will be.

In the late 80s and early 90s, a plethora of Mexican rock bands became a movement, along with grunge and alternative rock and I joined as a happy listener, always wishing I could play too. So I decided to learn.

Song: Frank and Ixchel, what brought both of you to Arizona and why the Phoenix area, or were there other stops along the way prior to Phoenix?

Frank: For me, it was either living on the streets in the suburbs of Chicago or moving out here with my family, (laughs). So, yes, I consider myself a native of Arizona.

Ixchel: I moved here from Mexico about 9 years ago. I said I would stay in Phoenix just for a bit (yeah, right). Although Phoenix wasn't my destination, it has become home. For now... (yeah, right).

Song: Where and what was going on when you both met? Did you both just say, "Hey...let's play some music..." or how was this passion and decision reached that gave birth to you not only becoming a couple, but also to perform together.

Frank: Funny story, we met on our first day of work - we both are in advertising. It was Halloween - and the entire office was dressed up in costumes - and if I remember correctly, there was a girl dancing for the office in an Arabian/Jasmine outfit. Kinda awkward.

And since we were the new guy and girl, we started hanging out and discovered we both were musicians - both loved to write - in fact, the park was our first rehearsal studio. The couple thing came much later - but it was always in the back of my mind..., (sly impish look and laughs) , I'm a guy, duh, and look at her!

Ixchel: We met at work and were sitting next to each other. I always had my headphones on, feeling not cool enough for the advertising crowd. One day Frank asked me what I was listening to - I can't remember what it was, but I am sure I was listening to something awesome. We started talking music and decided on an acoustic duo who played guitars on Steele Indian School Park, with homeless folks always sitting with us bouncing to our broken rhythm.

Years later, we were forming bands, and eventually took the step to become a duo outside music.

Song: How does living and working with music work for you both?

Frank: Let me tell you, it is a lot harder than people understand. I mean, it is a balancing act because on one hand you're couple, right, and there's all that stuff going on - the relationship, the stress of work and life - you know, normal stuff, then throw in creating music, and it sometimes can get a little feisty. But I think we handle it pretty well. I've had a lot of other musicians note that it's amazing we're still together.

Ixchel: It is fun and rough at times. We were music partners before being a couple and that changes the dynamics of our interactions. I am so OCD (some call it bossy, I call it dedication) is not even funny, but as music partners that seemed to work. Then we got together and balancing our personal relationship with our music relationship was tougher. But we have managed to work it out and to separate both aspects of our lives (sometimes it happens naturally, sometimes someone has to be the reminder of where we are)

Song: When the connection was made, and you decided it was time to take your passion for music a band was formed... what was the style of this first band? Band name? What influenced it to disband?

Frank: After our rehearsal sessions in the park, we had a handful of songs, and yes, we decided to take it to the next level. Amazingly enough it was the first band experience for me. And I had no idea of what I was getting into. But it was terrific fun. And we had a great run - we played like 80-some shows in less than two years. And actually got to open for some big performers like Michelle Branch and Sophie B. Hawkins. Our style was a lot more folk-y than it is now - especially since we featured a violin. And the people in the band were awesome - still are. Why we disbanded? Why does any band disband? No one really knows that answer, do they?

Ixchel: We had a "storage room" band that lasted 6 months (maybe) and then met some random people at a bar on 7th St. and at a music shop. There! We have a band! We had lots of fun, developed relationships and even made a few bucks (spent more than that, but hey, who's counting?). We were all new at friendship and playing together but being married to 4 people is hard. Style-wise, I have no idea how to describe it. Eclectic indie (all over the place?) but we had fun. And we think people who saw us perform did, too. And then it was time for us to move on and find what worked for each of us.

Song: A reformation occurs, and reinventing is always a growth period that brings about many times the true heart of what something really is meant to be. Talk to us about this reinvention, its direction, why it was chosen, how has it been received?



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Frank: After “the break-up” we took a break - to recollect ourselves. It was pretty hard on both of us, you know? I mean, you put yourself out there and then one day it isn't there, that's tough. So we worked on totally reinventing our sound. And started working on the new album, “Foreign”. We also decided to concentrate on songs in Spanish. With Ixchel being a native of Mexico, it's a natural fit - and quite frankly, broadens our audience tremendously. And instead of having a “band” we recruited some of our talented friends to play on the record. The response has been better than we could have expected. People are really digging the new sound and our shows are well attended. And it's a very personal record for the both of us because it's just us now, you know, so when the music is received like it has been, it's pretty gratifying.

Ixchel: I was not in a good place after the previous band broke up, so I really needed a break. I was happy writing and playing music, as long as it was at my house, for myself. But the music bug always creeps in and I stopped being a baby and took a risk. I was petrified at fronting a band. I was very comfortable with playing bass, signing harmonies and being lead on a song here and there. Becoming The lovelost was a big step for me. I had to wear my big girl pants and I have always been better at being on the side of the stage, not worrying about anything. I still struggle with it, but enjoy every second of making music, performing and being myself while doing so. It is a blast (and I think I am getting a decent hang of it)

Song: With the style of music you create, how hard is it to ‘pigeon hole’ yourselves? Is that a good or a bad thing? Does it limit your audience, and where you play?

Frank: We've always tried to stay true to ourselves and obviously we are influenced by our favorite bands. But, when I talk to people after our shows, they always say that the style is something that isn't always heard and in my opinion is an awesome thing.

I think the style broadens our audience, because of the ‘melodic-sens’, (laughs) is that a word? And our writing style that hinges on dynamics, it's an easy listen for people. Thank goodness it's not easy listening.

We play at all the usual haunts - you know? My favorite is the Rogue Bar.

Ixchel: Like I said, I grew up around all sorts of music, and although I do have favorite genres, I am not sure I can place myself in just one of them, as my influences are all over the place. So we decided we play what we like. English, darker, happier... whatever suits the day and the tune. It can be hard to do that, but it is rewarding and somehow people seem to like it. I guess most of us like more than one musical style, and others seem to respond positively to what we do. We might not have “one” genre, but it appears most people don't either (or so I hope)

Song: How has developing this sound mix of instrumentation and Spanish influenced your worlds?

Frank: It forces us to be conscious of other sounds and we try to bring in as many different instruments as possible like the accordion, African drums, and the like. The challenge with that is recreating that sound live.

Ixchel: I wish I could play many more instruments (like the accordion, a cello or a trumpet). When I hear a song in my head, I also hear the instruments and their melodies. Being able to have talented musicians bring that to life is amazing (and each time they sound way better than the tune in my head).

As for the language, it is an interesting dynamic for me. My writing and singing

varies based on language and it impacts phrasing, wording and even themes for a song. Both Frank and I write lyrics in English, but it gets really interesting when I interpret what Frank has written (sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't). It gets even better when we speak to each other outside music and the words do not translate, (laughs).

Song: According to your bio, the main crux of the lovelost are the three of you, with Nick Kizer keeping the beat, yet there are multiple other instrumental influences and suggested musicians given. Who are some of the others you bring in? Describe the choosing of the bands name.

Frank: Like I said before, we are very fortunate to have such wildly talented musician friends - and Nick really has helped define the sound -I mean, we wanted the drums to be its own instrument rather than this beat machine and he brings it. Niki Kizer, Nick's wife plays lead guitar on the record. David Cosme plays trumpet, Chris Fiscus plays percussion, Robin Vinning played accordion, and for our shows, Chad Eisinger sits in on drums when Nick is busy and Lawrence Ross plays keyboards. So you can see, trying to get all those people together for a show, heck rehearsal, when they have they own gigs going, is crazy difficult.

The name “The lovelost” simply a description for life. You love, you lose. Or, you're simply lost or looking for something - and you can hear the struggle and journey of that idea in our words and in our music.

Song: What made you decide not to play live as often? Is the band driven to develop itself into a commercial market or is it more of a ‘hobby’ enjoyed as part of your musical persona?

Frank: Playing live, a lot, is great for some bands, but you know, we try to make our shows an event - no one, and I know I wouldn't want to hear the same set from any band. And honestly, we know we aren't going to be famous, I mean, we have day jobs - so playing out is quite fun for us but we do take our music seriously.

Ixchel: We love performing, and many times, we have to pull ourselves back not to over do it. We don't have 4 hours of material - yet - so playing every weekend and keep the show fresh as a relatively new band can be challenging.

Song: When the times come and you both are in that moment, who is writing the lyrics, the notes? Is what you create a draw from you both or sometimes is it coming from just one of you? Do any disagreements arise during writing and if so, how to you resolve them?

Frank: We have different writing styles, to be sure. I'm more of a “this happened, and then this happened, and then this is what happened”. Ixchel has this amazing talent to break that process down and turn it into more of an emotional story. Both styles have worked well for us and the record bears that out.

With day jobs, writing sessions are very infrequent. So basically, I'll come up with a hook on the guitar or ukulele, jot a few lyrics down and play it for Ixchel. From there it becomes a very collaborative process - exchanging ideas about verse and chorus, and structure of the songs.

Ixchel: Both Frank and I write lyrics. He will come with a hook and lyrics, and then I might keep them or change them. Or tell him I have a “wonderful” phrase I have been thinking about so we need to start all over again. Sometimes it works great, sometimes it doesn't. The main thing we need to remember is that this is a band, not a solo project. Unless one of us in the band has a strong feeling about this or that, let's give it a shot. You never know what will come out of a rehearsal if you didn't hear your partners' ideas.

Song: What early influences politically, socially, culturally continue to influence you both musically?

Frank: We really don't delve into that heavy stuff with our music - we're not Rage Against the Machine, or anything - and frankly, I think people have had enough that, we concentrate on the human condition, relationships and personal struggle. In that way, everyone can relate.

Ixchel: I write mostly from the heart and mind and I think lots of environment impact the lyrics, at least for me. However, I am not one that can write things directly, but write metaphors or stories around the issue that is in my head. I think the closest I have gotten to directly express those issues is with “Foreign”. I was made fun of for having an accent during a work conference call a few years back. It pissed me off, especially because I was making an important point yet giggling came in the way. All I could think of is “Really? You are going to laugh at my accent and the Spanish words I use, in front of the client, who is a Spanish speaker?” I had to say something. And I didn't. So I wrote a song about being foreign, not as in immigrant, but more as in different.

Song: Art leaves an indelible imprint on the time-line of humanities travels... what are you both wanting to leave?

Frank: For me, it's not about leaving a legacy, it's about creating.

Ixchel: Leaving an imprint on others would be amazing, but I am not sure I am leaving anything, except form my words and soul into something I love. Not sure they are good, but I had the nerve to put them down. I hardly doubt that they will make an imprint on anyone but me, and I am OK with that.

Song: What other artistic endeavors are you both involved in collectively and separately?

Frank: I'm a writer for a local music blog here in Phoenix and work on a few short films here and there, but mostly, it's about the music.

Ixchel: I don't really have another art outlet, per se, if anything, I am proud to support other local artists, not only bands, but actors, painters and the like.

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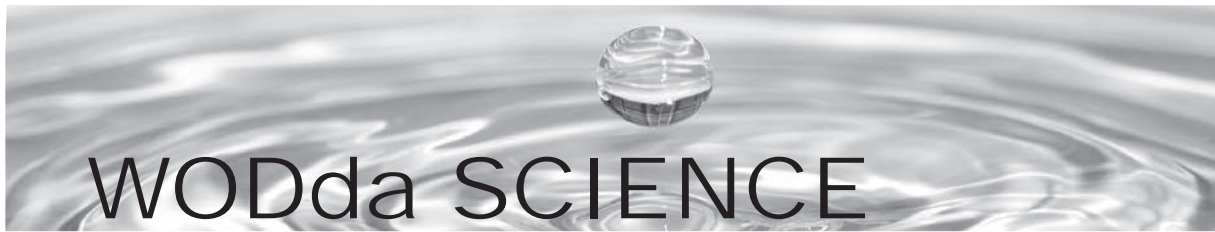
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The Oldest Star by Far Space

Science Columnist: Sean Ellis

The Oldest Star by Far Space, as The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy points out, is big. "Really big. You just won't believe how vastly hugely mindbogglingly big it is..." I love all things space related, whether it's space-opera sci-fi or real news from the final frontier, yet when I try to think about the vast distances in space--the distances between galaxies, and the realization that some of the stars we see in the night sky burned out or blew up millions of years ago, but the light from those stellar events hasn't reached us yet--well, my mind boggles. It's the little things that get me, like a recent announcement that a nearby star, HD 140283, nicknamed Methuselah, might be 14.5 billion (with a B) years old. Oh, by the way, the universe is only 13.8 billion years old.

Wait, what?

One way that we have determined the age of the universe is from measurements of background microwave radiation in space--a little like the way that the CSI detectives can determine time of death by measuring the change in body temperature. There are some other methods too, but suffice it to say, all the evidence supports the idea that about 13.8 billion years, give or take about 37 million, the universe and every single particle that comprises it, came into existence with a Big Bang.

All of the matter in the universe was originally in the form of hydrogen--the simplest element. When you have a lot of hydrogen collected together in one place, gravity supplies enough energy for the atoms to begin fusing together into new elements. Hydrogen atoms fuse into helium--that's what's going on in our sun. When there's no more hydrogen, the helium atoms will start fusing together to form carbon. All stars go through some form of this process, fusing hydrogen first, and in some cases, may go on to create even heavier elements before eventually going supernova, blowing up in a tremendous explosion that scatters elements across the universe. All of the elements that make up the earth and everything on it--including us-- were formed in distant stars long ago. As Carl Sagan once famously said, "We are all made of star stuff." But there's something else that's important to know about fusion. The fuel source--hydrogen, helium or whatever--determines the temperature, and therefore the color of the star and how bright it will be. That is one of the factors that helps us determine how old a star is.

Using the Hertzsprung-Russell diagram, which tells where a star is in its life cycle, we can use temperature and brightness to determine the age of a star.

We also have to know how far away the star is and how fast it's moving, and that isn't as hard as you might think, thanks to a fairly simple mathematical principle known as "parallax."

Parallax is what's happening when you're in a moving car. Things that are close to you seem to pass by quickly, while distant objects, such as mountains or clouds in the sky, may barely seem to move at all. Astronomers are able to calculate the distance to a star by measuring how fast it moves across the night sky in comparison to other objects. When you know how far away a star is, you can adjust the measure of its color and brightness, and adjust the calculation of its age to account for distance. It's true, there are a lot of variables and we are talking about objects that are so far away, it takes hundreds or even thousands of



years for their light to reach us, but there is enough information to make a good estimate.

Which brings us back to Methuselah, the star that is, if the calculations are right, conceivably older than the universe.

I asked my friend, professional astronomer and sci-fi/steampunk author David Lee Summers, if there's a good explanation for this apparent discrepancy.

"The problem is that the distance to this star is hard to determine because it's moving very fast... Using [parallax] measurement they came up with the most recent number of 190.1 light years. The problem is that there's still a large uncertainty in that distance, which translates to about 800 million years in age. The Methuselah Star's age as currently estimated is 14.5 billion years +/- 800 million years. If the star's real age is at the near end of the error bars, you have 13.7 [billion] years old, or younger than the universe, albeit still remarkably old."

Now, a couple words about 'uncertainty.' Scientists don't like to deal in absolutes, but they do like to be precise. Instead of saying: "We're pretty sure this is true" or "We're almost positive that this is what happened" they prefer to quantify the amount of uncertainty. The uncertainty about the age of Methuselah translates into 800 million years, which puts it safely in the correct age range for the universe. It would almost certainly be what's called a Population II star created shortly after the Big Bang (Population I stars formed quickly and went supernova within the first few hundred million years of the universe).

But still...uncertainty means that it could also be 800 million years OLDER than the estimate, or 15.3 billion years. Help!

David continues: "I could imagine that velocity effects may factor into getting a good spectrum, so its classification may not be spot on. What's more, there could simply be something about this star that's not understood that makes it not fit neatly on the H-R diagram."



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We know that Methuselah is a fast moving star, possibly moving as fast as 100 kilometers per second. The speed of light is 300,000 kilometers per second, and while that doesn't seem like a very large fraction, it might be enough to give us some bad information about the star's color and brightness, which in turn would increase uncertainty. Or, as David says, there just might be something else at work here.

There's another scientific principle that is useful to remember: Occam's Razor. It's the principle that complicated explanations require elaborate evidence. We could probably come up with some elaborate reasons to explain the apparent paradox, but the simplest solution, the one that doesn't require a rewrite of the history of the universe or a new understanding of astrophysics, is that Methuselah probably formed when the universe was less than a billion years old.

It's old, but not older than the universe. And it's close. It takes light from Methuselah (which is in the constellation of Libra, in case you're a stargazer) just 190 years to reach us, which in astronomical terms is barely a blip. Just think about that, something almost as old as the universe and it's right...up...there!

Sean Ellis is the author of several thriller and adventure novels. He is a veteran of Operation Enduring Freedom, and has a Bachelor of Science degree in Natural Resources Policy from Oregon State University. Sean is also a member of the International Thriller Writers organization. He currently resides in Arizona, where he divides his time between writing, adventure sports, and trying to figure out how to save the world. Visit Sean on the web at <http://seanellisthrillers.webs.com>

David Lee Summers works at Kitt Peak Observatory and is the author of numerous works of speculative fiction and recently edited the anthology A KEPLER'S DOZEN: THIRTEEN STORIES ABOUT DISTANT WORLDS THAT REALLY EXIST. To learn more about his fiction, visit <http://www.davidleesummers.com>

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INTERVIEW WITH ACTOR, VINCE LOZANO

By Song River

If you haven't had the chance yet to watch the teaser trailer for Acts of Desperation, it is worthy. As the comedic humor of desperation- movie making- and a knight in shining armor (cough, cough) all come through to give us a glimpse into why Acts of Desperation is a well scripted, humor thriller for all of us to enjoy.

Acts of Desperation by Richard Friedman "It's what happens when you're pushed to the edge..."

Starring: Judd Nelson, Quinton Aaron, Sara Castro, and Vince Lozano

Directed by: Richard Friedman

Song River: Vince, how are you doing my friend? It would seem busy is a word that describes you... always in action! It's great to talk with you again, and I am looking forward to hearing about this latest movie project. The trailer really intrigued me, and the humor implied, gave a great feeling as to where this was all going. In addition, the approach of using Kickstarter, and running on a limited budget to do this movie production, well...you've got to love the motion of independent film making.

Vince Lozano: (laughs) Thank you Song for taking the time too. We both believe in networking, and that is the catalyst really behind all independent endeavors. Yes, busy... wouldn't have it any other way!

Song: Why the title, Acts of Desperation? Give us a brief summary.



Vince: This suspenseful and unique thriller, filled with ironic humor, answers that question and tells the story of a desperate cop on the edge, obsessed over the fact that his beautiful but desperate wife is having an affair. At the same time, he tracks a desperately shrewd bank robber who is falling in love with a desperate and obsessed woman whose life he just saved from suicide. As if that's not enough, he is also being blackmailed by two desperately unhinged street criminals who will stop at nothing to get their money. Time is running out for all of them as their worlds collide in this unpredictable and desperately compelling thriller centering on six individuals and their treacherous "Acts of Desperation"!

Song: What is the setting and time period for the film?

Vince: It's present day.

Song: Over budget movies have been made for a long time in Hollywood productions, with the advent of special affects, high paid actors, and expanding staff runs in the credits, it seriously just all adds up. How are all of you proposing this creation on such a minute budget?

Vince: Limiting the crew and locations, as well as doing some of the expensive locations with green screen. It's very important to limit the budget in order to get a return on investment and show a profit. You don't need a 100 crew members to do 10 jobs. You surround yourself with actors and crew who want to do a great job. Those who don't complain about how much they're not being paid, but understand they're a part of something special.

Song: Are you all out to prove a point by choosing the budget you've given yourself to work in?

Vince: Yes and No you don't need a hundred million dollars to make a great film if you have the right actors and director script involved. Comes down to how passionate and dedicated you are.

Song: Does a low budget film actually equate to a 'low' budget film?

Vince: No! (laughs) It just means less people doing nothing on set, which leads to less people being fed and hanging out.

Song: Why did you, yourself Vince, decide this project was something you wanted to be involved in?

Vince: Great script and story! Also, once again I get to play a role, which I don't always get the opportunity to play.

Song: Tell us if you can, a little about your part?

Vince: I'll just say this he walks a fine line between good and bad.

Song: Bare bones production work, is it only a mark of independent films, or do you think Hollywood is ready to go back to bare necessities to create?

Vince: Hollywood will continue to make big films in my opinion. They are too much invested in Marvel. DC, Star Wars, and Star Trek. They have a huge following and built in audience and so on... and there is nothing wrong with those films. I enjoy them, they all appeal to a broader market. Which if it hits a home run with the audience... well, (pauses) then your talking about a huge return. Could turn into a billion dollar worldwide box office.

Little films aren't gonna do that kind of business.

Song: Will the film go into production even if the budget goal isn't reached?

Vince: Yes!! We'll just have to push back the date.

Song: Why was kick-starter the chosen directive to back this film?

Vince: One reason was many films have had a lot of success in reaching there goal on KS. The other reason was really no risk to the backer, because if we don't reach our goal they get their money back.

Song: What is the projected release date?

Vince: Probably 2015... no exact date.

To follow Vince Lozano:

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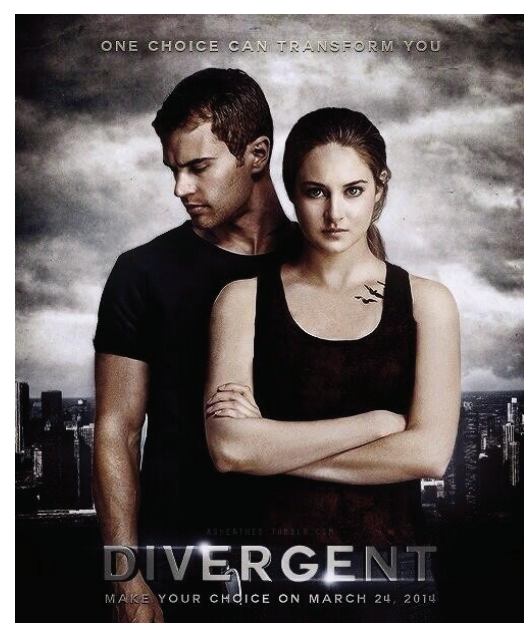
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MOVIE REVIEW: Divergent

Reviewed by PJ Hultstrand & T.M. Williams



T.M. Williams, author of Bohemium Grove and Sun Grove, and the upcoming book release for Undead Winter: The Apocalypse, gave us the following quote about the movie: "Divergent was a book with potential. Unfortunately, it missed the mark. The characters lacked the chemistry and emotion that you knew Roth was trying to convey. It's that chemistry Roth missed that the movie didn't. Where the book lacked, the movie picked up. I give the movie two thumbs up and is the first time I actually prefer the movie over the book version. Perhaps Veronica Roth should write screen plays instead."

Personally, I couldn't even get completely through the free chapter booklet I received at the Amazing Arizona ComiCon. Was it really that bad? No, but it reminded me too much of other works already out there; Harry Potter during the sorting hat scene, and Hunger Games with the back fighting between the factions. The movie just emphasized these similarities.

If you are looking for something new, then this is not it. But if you like the same movie reruns, then you better hurry because I don't think this will be in theater for long.

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WOD Bookshelf

THE SIX

by Joseph Selbie

Michael, Elle and Xu are thrown into another case that will put them at odds with even more nefarious characters. Once again there is the touch of the supernatural and the spiritual in this volume of the Protector Diaries. The magical talents of Michael and Elle are further developed and described in this story, so expect even more shapeshifting, and confusing dialogue moments. A few new characters are also introduced, including Fiona, who seems to be the female counterpart to the hacker and Protector, Xu. There is a fair amount of spiritualism and some drawn out speeches on the process of Awakening. This is offset for the most part by some well timed explosions and displays of magical prowess. This second book, while bringing in new characters and picking up where the Fifth Force left off, leaves a few loose ends to be tied up. Readers are finally introduced to even more of the shadowy figures that surround the earlier introduced Rockshaw. And Rockshaw is not left out, don't worry. If the Fifth Force drew a reader in to the Protector's Diaries series, The Six will not be a disappointment with much more of the same style and storyline.

-- Reviewed by J.J.M. Czep
Author of *Blackstrap's Ecstasy and Troll*



THE FIFTH FORCE

By Joseph Selbie

Joseph Selbie's The Fifth Force is the first part of the Protector's series, and I am eager to read the next installment. Selbie writes Fifth Force in the voice of main character Michael Dyson, as he is thrown headlong into an adventure that combines science with spirituality.

This science fiction thrill ride starts with a bang and ends with a twist. While it is part of a series the ending tied up nicely without leaving the reader dangling until the next book. There are several typical action scenes throughout Fifth Force, but that it only the surface of this story. Selbie is not afraid to delve into discussion on fringe science in his writing. The main character, Michael Dyson is very much the brains of the book, with knowledge and wit. His companion Elle, is the brawn. It is always nice to see strong, butt-kicking female characters in a book and even better when they are more than just badass. Elle has martial skills and a wit that keeps up with Michael. They make a balanced team that is constantly growing through the book.



There is a spiritual side to Fifth Force as well. There seems to be a trend in the science fiction genre of blending science with the metaphysical. It is fun, enlightening, and I think, speaks to the opinion currently in the world. If you enjoy fast paced action, are not afraid to push your mind to the edge of science, and are open to the endless possibilities of the universe, the Fifth Force is an enjoyable read.--

Reviewed by J.J.M. Czep
Author of *Blackstrap's Ecstasy and Troll*

THE WINNER'S CURSE (2014)

By Marie Rutkowski
Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, ISBN: 9780374384678(hb), trade pb ARC, 355 pages

I received this advanced reader's copy of the book from my teen librarian because I begged for it. For the first book in a new series, it sets up the world and its history very well. Kestrel buys a Herrani slave at the market to take back to her father, the Valorian General Trajan, but we aren't sure if she bought him for her father because he is a blacksmith or for herself because he can sing. Her passion is to play the piano and this upsets her father who thinks she should be preparing to make her choice, the military or marriage; these are the only two choices open to a high-ranking Valorian girl, but Kestrel prefers neither. In a quiet rebellion, she starts to take the slave Arin as her escort, but the personal repercussions are greater than she planned. When the slaves stage an uprising based on Arin's information, Kestrel has to decide who means more to her, Arin or her father - unless she can use her abilities at strategy to save them both. Excellent character development and we finally have a heroine who isn't an empty-headed shallow teenager. This is more of a sword-not-sorcery tale, but it makes me want to read the second one to find out how the relationship between the Valorians and Herrani and that between Kestrel and Arin develop. I've read several of this author's teen books and I liked them equally well; she handles difficult adult themes that teenagers must learn to handle in a way that isn't sappy or trite. I appreciate that when I pick up a Rutkowski book I know I'll get a real story with real characters.

-- Reviewed by: Normalene Zeeman
Adult Services Lead Librarian,
Prescott Public Library - www.prescottlibrary.info

LOST LAKE (2014)

By Sarah Addison Allen
St. Martin's Press, ISBN: 9781250019806, hb, 294 pages

Even if the only magic in the story is that of coincidence and a helpful and strangely aware alligator, it still has magic for me. Kate and daughter Devin, visit Great Aunt Eby at Lost Lake Resort in Georgia. Kate is finally able to pull herself together after the devastating loss of her husband in a car accident and decides to reconnect with her Great Aunt Eby at the one place where she felt the happiest. But when she meets the man who made her happy when they were both 12 and finds out the spark is still there, she has to decide what is right for her and Devin. Devin's life hasn't been easy, but with the help of an alligator who has an agenda, she thinks she can set her mom on the right track. As the stories come together, only Allen could make me cry for the secondary characters as she sympathetically tells their backstories. Everyone has a part to play and it feels like a Mission Impossible show as things start to come together. I read every book by her as soon as it comes out to see how she infuses magic into everyday life; because as we all know - sometimes getting through a single day can be the hardest thing you get done.

-- Reviewed by: Normalene Zeeman

STILL LIFE WITH SHAPESHIFTER (2012)

By Sharon Shinn
Ace Books (Penguin), ISBN: 9780425256817, hb, 343 pages

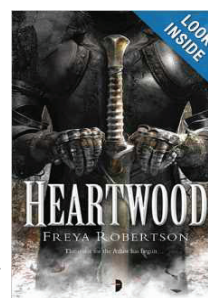
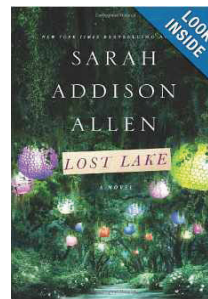
While this feels more like a love story than a fantasy story, the great character development is what drives the plot. Living with a shapeshifter has repercussions for family, friends and usually means any relationship outside of that is short-lived. How far would you go to protect the ones you love and how much of your own life would you put aside so no one gets past the secret? Melanie's sister Anne can shift into the shape of a Husky and when journalist Dante shows up wanting to write a book about shapeshifters, she tries to shut him out. This is the second in the Shifting Circle series; The Shape of Desire is the first and the characters from that story reappear here also.

-- Reviewed by: Normalene Zeeman
- www.prescottlibrary.info

HEARTWOOD (2013)

By Freya Robertson
Angry Robot Books,
ISBN: 9780857663863,
trade pb,
519 pages

The world building here is wonderfully different, with a sentient tree that lives off of sacrifices, warring



nations that have to work together to save the tree and an underwater world that has been hidden for centuries that wants to take over the world. The characters are nicely nuanced and fully fleshed while being recognized as their respective archetypes. The story starts out with a peace congress to talk about the "Arbor" but when they are attacked by a form of water creature they've never seen before, the story changes to a quest theme that carries through the rest of this first volume of a trilogy. This is the part where I usually start to get bored however, this time there are many startling revelations, a secret cache of old documents turning their world upside down, unlikely friendships made, romances kindled, magic learned and the all-important quest. I liked the characters and the world enough to overlook the extended quest part and now that that is over, I want to know where the story will go from here. The action towards the beginning is violent and the gore is there; not so much that it negatively affects the story, but the squeamish may want to skim through the battle scenes.

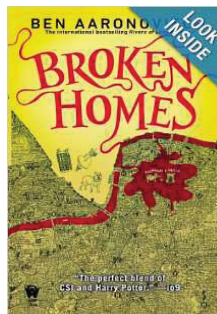
-- Reviewed by: Normalene Zeeman

BROKEN HOMES (2014)

By Ben Aaronovitch
DAW, ISBN: 980756409609, pb, 324 pages

Fourth in the Rivers of London series, the hunt for the magic-wielding, Faceless Man is still on. Apprentice Wizard and Police Constable, Peter Grant has more than enough magical crimes to solve. With the help of Master Wizard Nightingale as the heavy-hitting backup and Toby the magic sniffing dog, Peter and his partner Lesley, try to make sense of a London that few regular people see: fae, dryads, river gods and goddesses, German witches from World War II and the blossoming of a magic-infused building. Still as good as the others, the storyline and backstory start to come together here and you can nicely see where things might be progressing. The twist at the end, I saw coming, but it was still a cool end and sets up the next book with a great premise.

-- Reviewed by: Normalene Zeeman -
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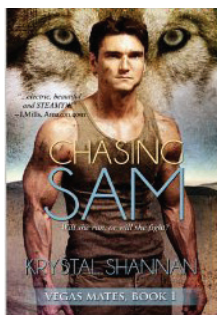
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CHASING SAM (VEGAS MATES SERIES, NOVELLA - #1

By Krystal Shannan



I have to admit this novella was not what I expected from the cover which shows a rather grim fellow. The story is a rather funny romp featuring a family of were wolf aristocracy living in Las Vegas who follow the old-world traditions when it comes to selecting mates for their children and retaining their power.

It turns out that Sam is really Samantha, a 25 year old medical student at Duke University. She did not anticipate her parents would schedule her hunt for a mate when she came home for Christmas. She wants no part of it because she really wants to become a doctor and not wasting her life being the good little political wife married to one of the three candidates her parents have selected.

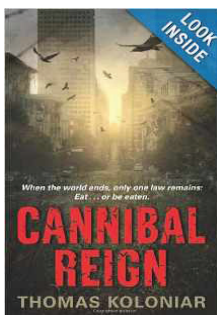
She meets a fellow in the airport who her wolf says is their mate (even though he is a were from “the wrong side of the tracks.”) He is an Army Ranger and a medic on leave for the holidays. Of course her family would never approve of him and the story continues from there.

The characters were well crafted and believable and there were a few unexpected twists. There were also some unanswered questions as the story ended but this is only the first one of a series so maybe they will be sorted out in future stories. There were a couple of patches that could have benefited from one last edit or proof reading but they were minor. Overall, I enjoyed the novella and look forward to more stories from Krystal Shannan!

-- Reviewed by: Jean Goddin, owner of Tomes & Treasurers Gift Store in Scottsdale, Arizona

CANNIBAL REIGN

by Thomas Koloniar



Cannibal Reign is the first published book by Thomas Koloniar, although he helped co-write two others. Thomas Koloniar is a former Akron, Ohio police officer who now resides in Mexico. In Cannibal Reign, the world is going to be hit by an asteroid. A few people find out this secret news before others despite the best efforts of the government to cover it up as long as possible. The main characters are a group of Special Forces soldiers that decide to save a certain few by buying, rebuilding and restocking an old nuclear silo which might survive the blast.

As the news breaks, people begin to panic and things start to fall apart. While the asteroid is not an Earth destroying event, it causes dramatic damage, especially to North America. Cannibal Reign first establishes the crisis, introduces the characters, and then shows what happens after this cataclysmic event. Not only does it follow the few in the silo and their challenges, but those left above the surface.

With food destroyed and no law and order, murder, robbery and rape are rampant. As things deteriorate, starving bands of armed men turn to cannibalism to survive. As with most post-apocalyptic novels, it shows that humans are often the worst danger, more so than celestial bodies striking the planet, the need for food, water, or shelter, or even medicines. The book also gives a glimpse into happenings elsewhere, which factor into the thrilling end.

There are a few problems with the novel for some readers. First, it's pacing is varied. At times it is quite slow and ponderous and at others it is constant non-stop action. This alternating between somewhat peaceful social drama and fiery combat action might not work for some. Second, whether intentional or not, the women characters are all portrayed as weak commodities needing male protection after the apocalyptic events. Even in the military units they immediately become

targets for rape, murder and cannibalistic meals. Women readers will certainly chafe at the way females are shown to fight over the men and be victimized.

It is a good first effort for the author and a decent read. The action scenes are much superior to the character development. If you like reading alternative scenarios for post-apocalyptic America, you should enjoy this story. If that is not your cup of tea, you can skip this one.

-- Reviewed by Michael Bradley

Author of *The Travelers' Club* and *The Ghost Ship, Fire & Ash, Twisted History, and Twisted Nightmares*

Web Blog: <http://mbtimetraveler.com>

GREATSHADOW

By James Maxey



James Maxey has authored several fantasy and science fiction novels. Greatshadow is the first book in the Dragon Apocalypse trilogy. As a fellow author, I always find it interesting when a story is told in a way that surprises me. So it was with Greatshadow, where the first person narrator dies immediately but continues to haunt his adventuring companion whom he had always secretly loved. He not only narrates and provides perspective but he also plays an active role in the story.

There are a slew of interesting characters in world very different than our own. The main character is the lovely Infidel, thus called by the fellow adventurers in the wild piratical town of Commonground. The adventure is reminiscent of a rollicking game of Dungeons and Dragons with an imaginative Dungeon Master and players of all alignments that would as soon kill each other as accomplish a joint task. The details of the belief systems, magic and objectives of each of the characters is revealed in timely fashion so you are not kept in the dark on what is going on but wonder who will survive and who will not.

The title character, Greatshadow, is a primal dragon that controls and lives in all fire on the planet. For various reasons, groups would like to destroy this dragon, whether for treasure, power, to reclaim the island, revenge, or for religious reasons. The adventure is well paced and interesting and the characters themselves nothing like you would expect. My congratulations go to the author on creating a truly unique fantasy world.

If you like good old fashioned fantasy novels with humor, conflict, danger and a tough two-fisted female lead character, then you should definitely check out Greatshadow by James Maxey.

-- Reviewed by Michael Bradley

Author of *The Travelers' Club* and *The Ghost Ship, Fire & Ash, Twisted History, and Twisted Nightmares*

Web Blog: <http://mbtimetraveler.com>

KINGS OF MORNING

By Paul Kearney



Kings of Morning is the third and final novel in The Macht Trilogy. Paul Kearney is an author from Northern Island with a number of published fantasy novels. He has a unique style in that he takes people and portions of our history and rewrites them into a fantasy story line. The Macht Trilogy is a rewrite of the history of Phillip of Macedon and Alexander the Great as they face the Persian Empire. In the trilogy, the Macedonians are the Macht, and Persians/Assyrians are the Asurians. He does not stick strictly with the historical version or characters but about half of the story will be known to those study that area and period

of conquests. The first novel explores an alliance of the Macht with an Asurian to invade the latter. The second deals with the aftermath and the rise of Corvus, the Alexander the Great character. The final book starts with the Macht invasion, the fight at the river and the fantasy version of the battle of Gaugamela. There are fantasy aspects to the novel and it is very well written. He elegantly draws you in to the world of Asuria and the Macht through use of characters both high and low and excellent descriptive scenes and narrative.

Those used to worlds full of magic and mysterious powers will find this a disappointing story line, as it reads more historical alternative history than a world redrawn with different laws and physics than our own. I enjoyed the novel and found it an easy and interesting read. One distraction is that the story line includes the usage of about a dozen main characters and changes perspectives and locations. While each is handled well, it makes the reader more of a distant observer than one that develops a clear hero to cheer on or villain to wish dead.

I would recommend this story for the in depth look of life during those times, the strong characters and the great writing. Just don't expect a lot of fantasy elements.

-- Reviewed by Michael Bradley

Web Blog: <http://mbtimetraveler.com>

A VERY KLINGON CHRISTMAS (2014)

By Paul Ruditis, Illus. by Patrick Faricy Gallery (Simon & Shuster), ISBN: 9781476746807, hb (picture book)



Yes, I know it is very early for buying Christmas presents but this is such a great parody book for Star Trek-loving parents to get for their Star Trek-suffering kids. This Santa has a warp-20 sleigh led by eight tiny birds-of-prey with a ninth that sometimes leads the way and Christmas dinner is not what Earth kids expect but Klingon kids will enjoy. Illustrations are reminiscent of Norman Rockwell but include batliffs, tribbles and very cute Klingon kids celebrating the great Kahless's birth; rich with reds and gold, they bring Christmas to life with text that perfectly represents this special holiday as Klingon's celebrate it. This is a great addition to your collection of eccentric holiday stories.

-- Reviewed by: Normalene Zeeman

Adult Services Lead Librarian, Prescott Public Library - www.prescottlibrary.info

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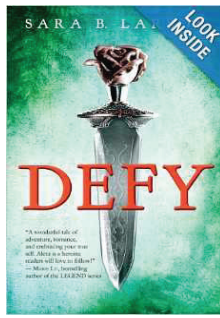
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DEFY (2013)

By Sara B. Larson
Scholastic, 323 pages
ISBN: 978055597586, hb,

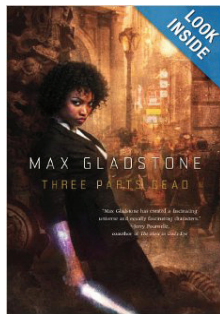


The flavor of this one is very similar to other authors of young adult fiction, Kristin Cashore (Graceling), Veronica Roth (Divergent) or Suzanne Collins (Hunger Games). With a strong female teen protagonist who is gutsy and smart, you feel like you are in the story as she is easy to relate to. Alexa is pretending to be just another of the prince's guard. With the help of her twin brother Marcus, she is hiding in plain sight as Alex, the best fighter in the guard. When a sorcerous death threat against the prince catches them all off-guard, leaves her brother dead and her reeling, she has to decide who to trust, Prince Damian or her fellow guard Rylan. As events escalate and more is at stake, she finds out that who knows her secret is not as important as who she can trust to keep it, even though one of them may break her heart. This seems to be the first in a series and I liked the story, the setting and the characters enough to read the rest. As this is a debut novel by this author, we have lots to look forward to.

-- Reviewed by: **Normalene Zeeman**
Adult Services Lead Librarian, Prescott Public Library - www.prescottlibrary.info

THREE PARTS DEAD (2012)

By Max Gladstone
Tom Doherty, hb, 333 pages
ISBN: 980765333100



Three Parts Dead is an interesting twist on the fantasy genre. Magic is more about contracts and cutting deals or finding loopholes in these deals than it is about wands and magic words. The "wizards" of this world are more akin to lawyers.

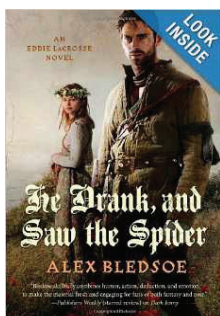
Tara, the main character, is a craft woman recently dropped out of the school of magic. No she didn't drop out, the professors dropped her out. Thousands of feet from the ground. She is fortunate to have a job offered to her as an apprentice to a notable craft woman. This is not a spell casting adventure though. The story reads much more like a dime detective novel or a murder mystery. Just put aside that the primary murder victim is a god.

Three Parts Dead is a good read for those interested in fantasy with an urban edge. I look forward to seeing more by Max Gladstone.

-- Reviewed by **J.J.M. Czep**
Author of *Blackstrap's Ectasy and Trolls*

HE DRANK, AND SAW THE SPIDER (2014)

By Alex Bledsoe
Tor Publishers, 317 pages
ISBN: 9780765334145, hb,

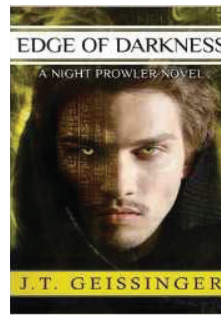


If it's Alex Bledsoe, it's on my to-be-read pile. This is the newest Eddie LaCrosse story and while our gentlemanly sword-for-hire is traveling with his girl, Liz to deliver a parcel, he meets crazy King Jerry and this makes him remember an incident in his far past where he saved a baby girl with a tattoo on her back; but since he couldn't take care of a baby, her dropped her at the nearest town. This is where his past catches up to him as he thinks to just stop by and see how the girl is doing. There are fights, disguises, double-crosses, kidnapping, friends reunited and more. As usual, the pace is fast and I couldn't put it down. The end is good and we get to see Eddie rise above his baser nature - more than once! I loved it and am eagerly awaiting the next. Bledsoe just can't write these fast enough; so I'll go back and re-read Jim Butcher's Dresden books and Glen Cook's Garret, P.I. books while I wait for his next one.

-- Reviewed by: **Normalene Zeeman**
- www.prescottlibrary.info

EDGE OF DARKNESS (2013)

By J.T. Geissinger
Montlake Romance,
ISBN: 9781477848944, trade
pb, 432 pages

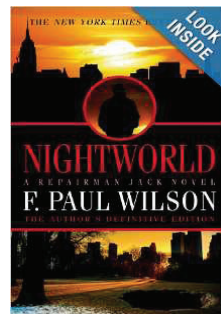


This is the fourth Night Prowler story about the shapeshifting Ikati, but this gives us a new side to Christian, Leander's brother, who in previous stories was not very likeable. Here he changes his spots by giving us some of his backstory that makes us feel more aware of his sensuality and the reasons he is so distant. He meets a human girl in an antique bookstore and falls hard; but he is in Barcelona to catch a megalomaniac who's out to enslave the world - yes that would be Cesar of the previous book Rapture's Edge. Human girl, September Jones and her human, best friend Asher try to make sense of Christian's on-again- off-again obsession with Ember but who knows what is going on in the mind of an Ikati assassin? When Cesar discovers that Christian values Ember, Cesar uses Ember's step-mother to get her to give herself up as bait to draw Christian out. Since that is exactly what Christian wants, you can expect violence, mayhem and naked men who have just shifted. The romance is well-developed and the storyline matches pace with the action and the relationship growing together. The twist at the very end is set up to lead you into the next book and the threat to the world is even bigger.

-- Reviewed by: **Normalene Zeeman**
- www.prescottlibrary.info

NIGHTWORLD

By F. Paul Wilson



There are a multitude of books about various forms of the apocalypse. Some are outstanding and very captivating. NIGHTWORLD is an incredibly gripping book that surely fits the definition of outstanding. It is a solid read, very thoughtful. The characters are well developed and the plot is quite clear.

According to the author, this is the final installment of the Secret History. It is also the conclusion of the Adversary Cycle. So I was fated to learn of this body of work as the author brings the curtain down. So be it, I enjoyed this book enough to check out the earlier books in the series. It seemed like I just got to know Repairman Jack, and he's a real kick ass, take no prisoners character.

The story starts in New York City, Central Park to be precise. On the morning of May 17th, people start to know something is going wrong because the sun rises several minutes late. That is just the beginning of a bizarre metamorphosis for the planet. Rasalom, the ultimate villain, has convinced this alien species known as The Ally, that there is no more intelligent life here, and thus Earth is no longer worthy of consideration. His plan is to engulf Earth in perpetual darkness and put it into the Otherness.

Repairman Jack and Glaeken assemble a few stalwart individuals to combat the situation, though it is feared that they are already too late. They have to reassemble a weapon that acts as both a beacon to the Ally and is the only hope of slaying Rasalom and stopping this transformation before it runs its course. Reassembling the weapon is no easy task: part of it was melted down into two necklaces centuries ago and are now on Maui, one in the possession of a woman who will age rapidly and die without it and the other in the hands of a man who believes himself to be the old god Maui; the other part is in pieces near an old keep in Romania, whose parts only glow at night.

And night, friends, is not the time to be out in this story. All kinds of monstrosities come out of gaping pits, ruthlessly killing humans as Rasalom

grows in power. Plus, the nights are getting longer as the Otherness works its way into control.

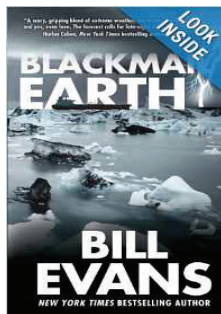
I found the ending to be very powerful, and I will not reveal it here. Fans of Wilson's work will be very satisfied with this novel. Those wanting an apocalyptic tale with lots of twists that will make you THINK will really enjoy this novel.

Awesome work, sir! Thank you for sharing your vision.

-- Reviewed by: **Ronald C. Tobin, author of A Ruby for Victor**

BLACKMAIL EARTH

By Bill Evans



Can a meteorologist write a classy novel about eco-terrorism, fill it with suspense, intrigue, biting politics, solid characters and plot twists that will keep the reader guessing until the novel concludes? Clearly the answer to that question is yes. Bill Evans is a senior meteorologist and he wrote this book.

The novel is set in the near future in which the climate has worsened. Most of the US suffers under a major drought and is experiencing record highs. The Maldives are sinking beneath the ocean and the desperation has resulted in the government there actually moving dirt from one island to another to keep from totally drowning. Muslim extremists have started blaming the West for this disaster.

Not surprisingly, the lead character in this novel is a meteorologist named Jenna Withers, an intelligent and attractive woman who works for the Morning Show in New York City. After covering a giant dust storm in upstate New York (and meeting her love interest, an organic dairy farmer) she gets called to participate in a Presidential task force that is tasked with coming up with ideas to stop global warming, ways that don't involve having the American people change their lifestyles, as such approaches have been deemed non starters. This means that they are looking into rather risky proposals known as geoengineering. Two of the most common methods checked into here are putting large amounts of iron oxides into the ocean or releasing sulfates into the atmosphere.

One of the people on this task force is a former Senator from Texas. She is very involved with the large oil corporations. Unbeknownst to the rest of the task force, she arranges to have a tanker filled with iron oxide sail to the Maldives. Once this is found out they say it is just going to be a controlled demonstration to see how well this would work in cooling the planet off. Terrorists take advantage of the situation and take over the tanker, killing the crew and taking an aging reporter, Rick Birk, hostage. The terrorists say they will blow the tanker up and release all the iron oxide at once unless the US shuts down ten large coal fired power plants. Since Jenna once had contacts with people in the Maldives government, she gets sent there as an analyst.

Then, to further complicate matters, the North Koreans get involved. They threaten to launch thousands of missiles into the upper atmosphere and release enough sulfates to put the planet into a deep freeze.

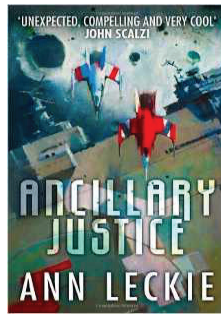
The political intrigue in this novel is very believable. The science about geoengineering and what it could actually do is well researched. The characters are well developed. An interesting twist, solid sub plot, revolves around pagans and witches and the grisly ritual murder of their leader Green Spirit.

This is a very good novel even if parts are somewhat predictable. I appreciated the research that went into it. It ended as I expected it would, but it was solid. If you enjoy a novel that makes you think, this one won't let you down.

-- Reviewed by: **Ronald C. Tobin, author of A Ruby for Victor**

ANCILLARY JUSTICE (2013)

By Ann Leckie
Orbit Books, 384 pages
ISBN: 9780316246620,
Trade pb.

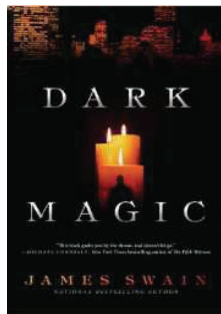


Breq seems pretty ordinary when we meet her/him, but as we learn more, we discover she/he is the last remaining ancillary (mobile human/AI unit) left after the destruction of the Justice of Toren, a huge battleship from the Radchaai empire - his/her ship for 3,000 years; she/he is looking for closure, but we aren't sure in what form it will come. Why Breq is where he/she is and doing what he/she is doing takes a little time to figure out as the author has great control on how much background information you get at any one time, but it is well worth it in the end. The seemingly-senseless gender ambiguity is difficult to get used to in the beginning; even the aliens have trouble figuring it out as the author does a clearly-difficult job of keeping body image out of any of the descriptions so well that you can't really tell who is male or female and most of the time it truly doesn't matter. Even though you aren't gender-sure, the characters are still relate-able and interesting and as the story builds towards climax, you are just as invested as Breq and Seivarden. 3000 years of existence allows Breq to make contacts that come in handy, but it doesn't happen often enough for the reader to take it for granted. You do have to pay attention, as the story-shifts from present to flashback are not differentiated in any way from the previous text and context is your only clue; but again, the author has done it very well, so you just fall into the story and go along. Planned as a series, this is on my list of future books to read as the end was where it really stated to get interesting.

-- Reviewed by: **Normalene Zeeman**
Adult Services Lead Librarian, Prescott Public Library - www.prescottlibrary.info

**DARK MAGIC (2011)
SHADOW PEOPLE (2013)**

By James Swain
Tor (Tom Doherty Associates)

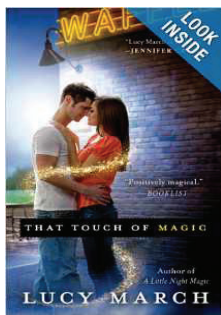


Author James Swain has written many books, been nominated for many awards and is a magician in his own right. In this series, his character, Peter Warlock is a real psychic who hides behind the guise of a stage magician as he and six of his psychic friends really can see the future. When the future needs help, they send anonymous notes to NYPD to stop the incidents; but a group of evil psychics have targeted Peter's group and they need to find out how his parent's deaths tie into the mystery. Shadow People is the second in the series and Peter and his girlfriend/magician's assistant, Liz, are drawn into the hunt for a well-hidden serial killer that Peter keeps seeing in visions. The addition of shadowy visitations from the future may help bring the killer clear enough that FBI Special Agent Garrison, who we met in the first book, can use Peter and Liz's clues to close in on the evil that seems to be targeting Peter. The stakes are just as high in this sequel and we get to learn more about Peter's parents, his background and the very intriguing group of psychics that are his friends.

-- Reviewed by: **Normalene Zeeman**
- www.prescottlibrary.info

THAT TOUCH OF MAGIC

By Lucy March
St. Martins, 310 pages
ISBN: 9780312389383, pb,



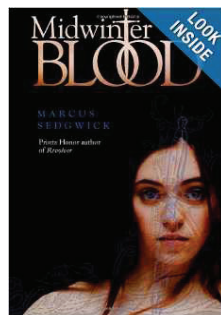
A Little Night Magic (2013) was the first in the Nodaway Falls series about out-of-work librarian Stacy Easter, who just happens to have a little magic in her. In this sequel, Stacy's magic goes awry with some help from a nonmagical neurologist seeking

fame for his newly discovered formula for chemically-inducing magic in the nonmagical . But the side effects are serious and when her family gets involved, things go downhill from there. However, with the return of Leo North (The One Who Got Away), things may be looking up for Stacy - if she can just stay alive long enough to solve the mystery of chemistry, return her mom to nonmagical status, save her friends from death by magic overdose, and finally get the guy. The end is worth it, so don't skip any pages.

-- Reviewed by: **Normalene Zeeman**

MIDWINTER BLOOD (2013)

By Marcus Sedgwick
Roaring Book Press, ISBN: 9781596438002, hb, 262 pg



This is part dystopian, part historical and only Sedgwick could keep me turning pages all the way to the end. It starts in 2073 on the isle of Blessed near England. We meet the inhabitants and a researcher who is looking for the very-well-hidden secret of immortality or long life that the islanders seem to have discovered. My library calls this a young adult novel but the concepts and adult themes are advanced. As you travel backward in time trying to discover what started this macabre series of events, it seems that we also have the story of star-crossed lovers. With so much going on, it is easy to get lost, but the author brings it all together in the end and while this is not like any other Sedgwick book, it still gives a sense of something worthwhile accomplished at the end, which is actually the beginning.

-- Reviewed by: **Normalene Zeeman**

INTO THE STILL BLUE (2014)

By Veronica Rossi
Harper, 389 pages
ISBN: 9780062072092, hb,



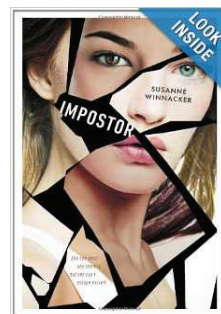
Finally the end is here. The first one blew me away with the intricate worldbuilding and the well-developed characters and how the chaotic setting was very much a character in how it helped move the story along. The author drops you right into the story where the second one left off. Loss of a main character in book two still has Roar reeling and Aria is recovering from a major injury. Aria and Perry are reunited but the Aether storms are worse and if they don't rescue Cinder and find a way into the Still Blue, they will die. Trouble between the Dwellers who have hovers enough to take everyone to safety and the Outsiders who have the gifts and now have possession of Cinder may make it impossible to make this rescue work. Cinder's power to manipulate the Aether is the only thing that will get them through the barrier. Perry's friendship is critical to make Cinder push

hard enough to open it, but if this is a one-way trip for Cinder, can Perry force Cinder to make that last push? Read it and find out.

-- Reviewed by: **Normalene Zeeman**

IMPOSTER (2013)

By Susanne Winnacker
Razor Bill (Penguin, Inc)
ISBN: 9781595146540, hb,
274 pages



Variants are teens with powers, members of a secret group within the FBI. They are opposed by Abel's Army, a group who believe Variants should be able to do what they want with no rules. Abby's power is that she can change her appearance into anyone she has touched; so when a murder happens, she is sent into the situation as the survivor (who didn't really survive) to see if she can unearth any clues as to the identity of the killer. As this is a teen book, there is the obligatory teen romantic triangle, which is not believable, but once you get past that, the story is ok. No sex, little violence, and an over-the-top, teenaged killer who is just a little unbelievable, make for some giggling even when the violent situations are occurring. This was a fun read once you get past the overwhelming teen angst and the powers were cool. I will probably look for the sequel as I like the worldbuilding.

-- Reviewed by: **Normalene Zeeman**

HALFBAD (2014)

By Sally Green
Viking (Penguin), 394 pgs
ISBN: 9780670016785, hb,



With all the prepublication hype this debut novel received, I was really worried it wouldn't live up; but it was very good and I'll read the sequel when it comes out.

This is very similar to A Discovery of Witches by Deborah Harkness or The Witches Daughter by Paula Brackston, only for teens. We meet Nathan when he is very young and are told he is evil because he is the son of the worst black witch ever, Marcus; but when he doesn't seem evil and is actually much nicer than any of the white witches we meet, we're not sure what a black witch really is. Flashbacks of his childhood are interspersed with his current situation and while flashbacks aren't for everyone, it helps flesh out his personality while not being too distracting and still nicely moving the storyline along. The White Witch Council wants Nathan to kill his father and he doesn't want to, but if he can't find a relative on his 17th birthday to give him three gifts and a quick drink of the family blood, he won't survive. So that sets up the tension, conflict and the trilogy. I like Nathan and the other quirky characters we meet and can't wait to see how the author moves the story in the next two books.

-- Reviewed by: **Normalene Zeeman**

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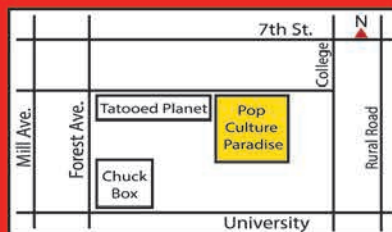
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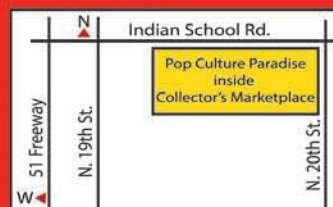
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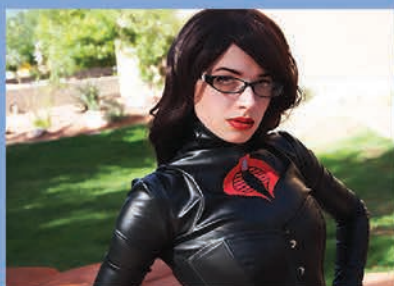
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