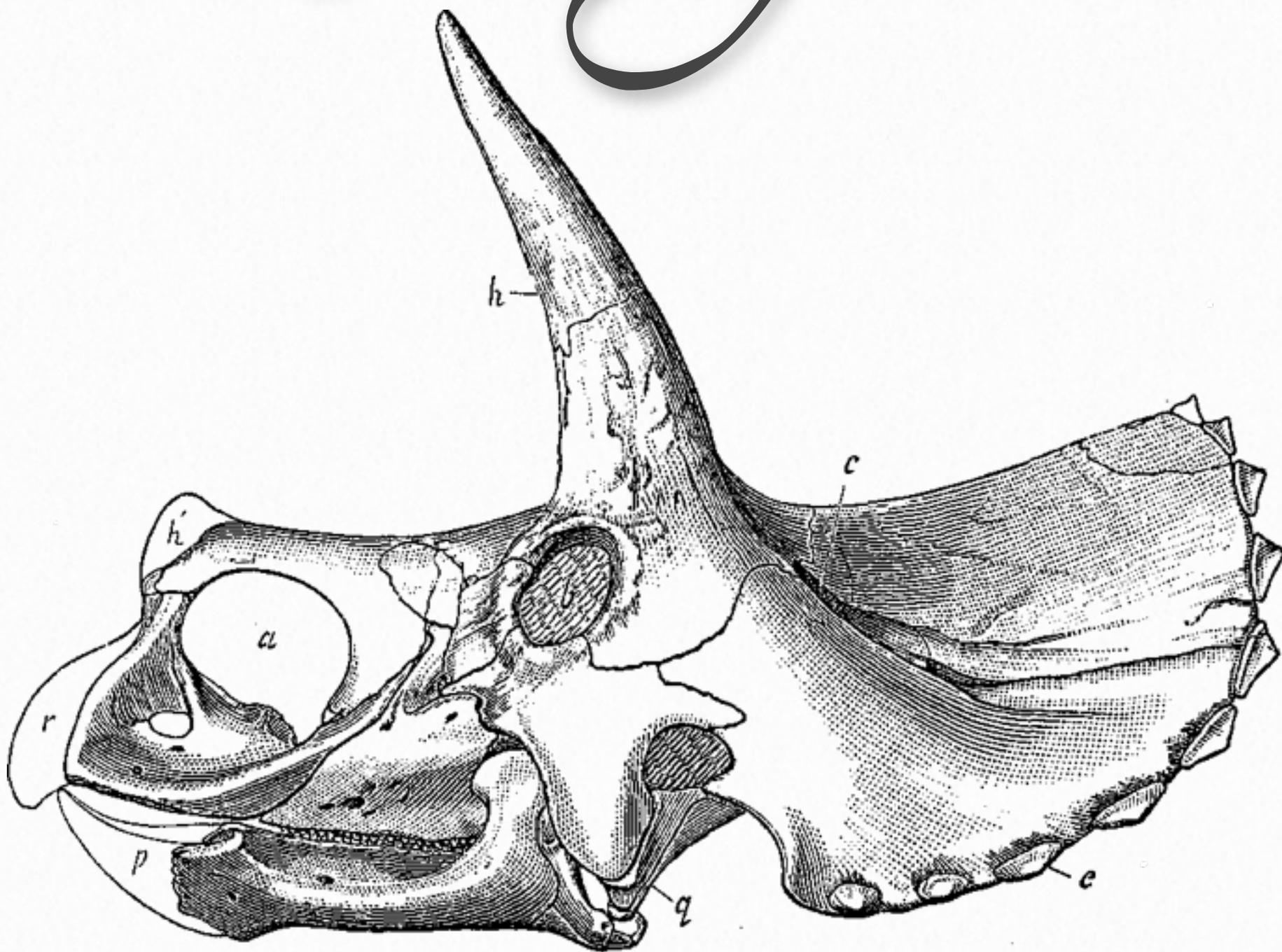


Ecdysis



Masthead

Ecdysis

No. 2 (February 2014)

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I Can't Believe You Haven't Read That

You'd be amazed at what I haven't read.

Apart from a short story or two, I haven't read anything by Delany or Zelazny.

I haven't read *A Canticle for Leibowitz*.

I haven't read anything by C. J. Cherryh.

I haven't gotten more than one or two hundred pages into either *A Game of Thrones* or *The Name of the Wind*.

I haven't finished anything by Iain Banks—with or without the M.

I didn't read the Heinlein juveniles until I was in my thirties, or Le Guin's Earthsea books until I was forty.

These are the sort of confessions that boggle my sf-reading friends. One of my friends, who's dead keen on Delany, Zelazny and Banks, invariably says "I can't believe you haven't read that!"

To which I can only say: too many good books, not enough time to read them. It's a good problem to have. And I think he understands. I know very well the enthusiasm over a beloved book that a friend has not yet had the joy of discovering. (Have you *seen* me proselytize Howard Waldrop?)

It's actually cute. But sometimes it can be a bit more problematic.

Sometimes it seems that sf fans expect you to pass a comprehensive exam to be entitled to hold an opinion on anything at all in

the field. I've seen it in those nasty online arguments, and so have you: "I bet you don't even *read* sf." And they can be very specific about what you should or should not have read. A failure to read the classics of the 1950s and 60s disqualifies you (though strangely a failure to keep up with current work does not).

It's the literary equivalent of the "fake geek girl" argument, and unfortunately it's deployed in similar circumstances.

It's also an attempt to maintain sf fandom as a [high-context culture](#).

High-context cultures are close-knit and share similar experiences and expectations. They get in-jokes. They have a strong sense of tradition. They have high barriers to entry. And they are less diverse.

Because they don't assume commonly held values, low-context cultures are much more explicit. Things are explained in more detail; clearly delineated rules are more important, relationships less so. But they are less closed, and more welcoming to outsiders.

I suspect that much of the conflict in the sf community is a function of one side defending its status as a high-context culture and the other side trying to make it more open. What one side sees as closeness and support, the other side sees as gatekeeping, exclusion and a lack of diversity.

But what does this have to do with not reading the sf classics?

Because a common body of reading is one way to maintain a high-context culture. As the educated elites of 19th-century Europe shared a common education rich in the classics, sf fandom has—historically—been able to rely on a common body of reading that has enriched our subculture.

But in both cases it's also functioned as a high barrier to entry.

Reading is a zero-sum game. If you're reading Heinlein, you're not reading something else. If sf fandom expects its participants to have had a good grounding in the sf canon, it's creating a monoculture.

I'd argue that our literature is a lot more lively if it's reacting to Borges and [Cimrman](#), Eco and Hodgman, than it is if it's reacting *one more goddamn time to Starship Troopers*.

Better art demands that we don't all read the same things.

But that's not to say that we should eject the sf canon or ignore the classics. Only that we should not make them essential reading for everyone.

Farah Mendlesohn's forthcoming study of Robert A. Heinlein, due out from [Illinois University Press](#) in 2016, looks at Heinlein through a historian's lens. "Because I am a historian, I am happy to explain some of the really terrible Heinlein works without feeling I have thus dismissed him as a writer," [she writes](#). A problematic work can be studied without necessarily being praised: "[A] work

such as *Farnham's Freehold* can be enfolded into a discussion of his limitations (both rhetorical and political) and understood without serving as some kind of justification (not even of the 'it needs to be read in its own context' kind). As a historian, I am perfectly happy to know that I like Heinlein without feeling that it is essential that new comers to science fiction need to read him. I like 1930s pulp magazines as well and I wouldn't wish those on any but the most serious of historians."

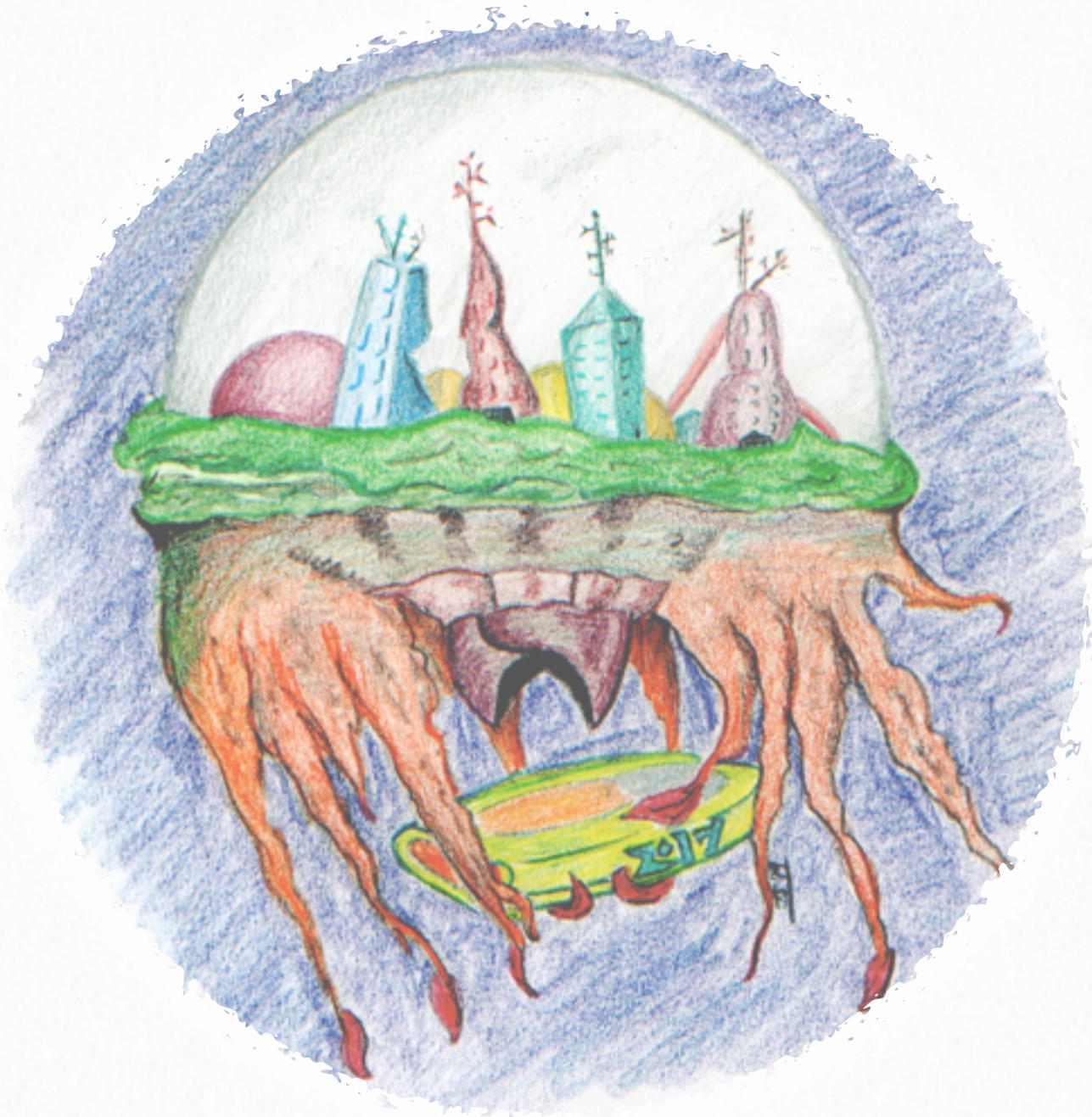
I like the historical approach. I have enjoyed reading Heinlein, but I am thoroughly sick of the chest-thumping that surrounds any discussion of his work. It's possible—and in Heinlein's case even necessary—to read a work without having to be effusive about it.

Scholars and critics need to know the history of the field. But if you're not a scholar or a critic, do you?

The fact that I've read Clifton and Riley's *They'd Rather Be Right*, easily the worst novel ever to win a Hugo, can be chalked up to the fact that I once wrote a paper on the immortality trope in science fiction. My knowledge of the genre was not substantially improved by having read it. I should gain no cred from having read it. The time spent reading it could have been spent on another, more contemporary, better book. It really is a zero-sum game.

The second-best way to ruin science fiction and fantasy would be to assign homework to one another. The best way to ruin it would be to impose an entrance exam.

—Jonathan Crowe



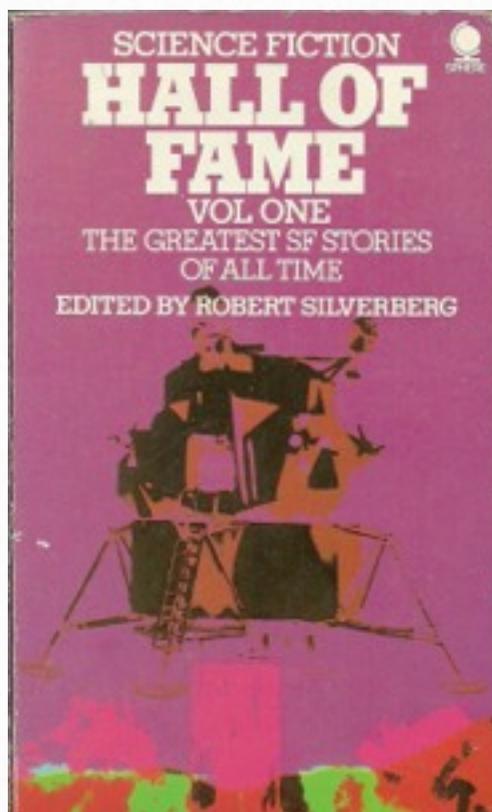
The Science Fiction Hall of Fame—50 Years Later

It was stripped of its dust jacket and relegated as a donation to the Hyde Park (Chicago) Used Book Sale: the thick pink book with the blue spine proudly declaring in fading gold serif capitals: SCIENCE FICTION HALL OF FAME. In smaller font, it added “Robert Silverberg” above, and “Volume One” below.

This was the book that Robert Silverberg had assembled of the agreed-upon best short stories published in science fiction (in English, mostly by American authors) prior to the es-

tablishment of SFWA and the Nebula Awards in 1965. The top fifteen were selected by the votes of SFWA members; the second fifteen, Robert Silverberg chose among the remaining highly-ranked nominees, with some of his own editorial judgement. This was, by consensus, the best that science fiction had to offer during its first thirty-five years.

Fifty years after the cutoff point (the youngest story in the anthology, Roger Zelazny’s “A Rose for Ecclesiastes,” is copy-



**The Science Fiction Hall of
Fame, Volume One:
1929-1964**

edited by Robert Silverberg

Doubleday, 1970

Currently in print as a trade
paperback from Orb Books:
ISBN 978-0-765-30537-4

right 1963), in 2014, through the eyes of someone born twenty years after the cutoff point, is it still the best? What can it teach us about the state of American science fiction then and now?

All that follows shall be the opinion of one person, female, born in 1985 and not in America. My only special expertise qualifying me to write this is that I had the book and felt like doing it. I do not have the depth of reading experience of, say, Gardner Dozois or Jo Walton by any stretch of the imagination; I happened to be born later than them and have had less time to gain it. But nor would I consider myself ignorant of the genre. So what is and isn't "famous" today is entirely subject to my experience, which has included secondhand bookstores, panel discussions on cons, and regular but scattered reading of SF magazines and discussions on Tor.com, *Strange Horizons*, and similar contemporary SF discussion sites. If I state that some theme or literary device is rare in my reading of current SF, and you are aware of an entire magazine specializing in it, please send a letter to the editor, and I will be happy to have more reading material.

Of course, I will reveal plot twists and ending details of the stories as they are pertinent to discussion: the stories are fifty and more years old, after all, so whatever statute of limitation there is on spoilers, they've passed it; and if a story relies strictly on surprise for its power, it does not merit the title of classic.

Of the thirty stories included, here are the ones I have heard of before I picked up this volume, in rough descending order of frequency I've heard of them:

- "Nightfall" by Isaac Asimov;
- "The Nine Billion Names of God" by Arthur C. Clarke;
- "The Cold Equations" by Tom Godwin;
- "A Rose for Ecclesiastes" by Roger Zelazny;
- "Flowers for Algernon" by Daniel Keyes (more the subsequent novel);
- "First Contact" by Murray Leinster;
- "Scanners Live in Vain" by Cordwainer Smith;
- "The Roads Must Roll" by Robert A. Heinlein;

- “**Helen O’Loy**” by Lester del Rey (mainly because of mention in the front matter to Asimov’s *I, Robot*).

Nine stories out of thirty had managed to still penetrate my consciousness over the last thirty or so years through being reprinted in other anthologies, or at least mentioned by other authors. Now I have certainly heard of the authors of the rest before, and even read some of their other work: John W. Campbell, Theodore Sturgeon, A. E. van Vogt, Clifford D. Simak, Henry Kuttner and C. L. Moore, Fredric Brown, Judith Merril, Ray Bradbury, Fritz Leiber, James Blish, Alfred Bester, Damon Knight . . . Of course I have heard of them. But not for these stories.

Raised as I was mainly on post-1980 science fiction (and science fiction and fantasy written by authors of other cultures than just the USA as well), through that lens, were the “forgotten” stories justly or unjustly neglected? How has a changing world sent some stories to the [Suck Fairy](#), Jo Walton’s expression, while others still made me glad I found them and eager to dust them off?

Let’s start with the values that are now held up by the science fiction I choose to read, that are conspicuously missing here, before going on to the values that they did have that now seem dated.

To me the most striking overall trend of the anthology was that, to quote Jo Walton once more, “This is an old-fashioned book, written before women were invented.” Most of the protagonists, and indeed most of the

speaking parts, are men, men, men. In an otherwise very clever plot questioning issues of diplomacy and war, not only does Murray Leinster assume that space crews should only draw from half the available competent population, but he assumes that any aliens we meet would have the same filters. The women we do see, for the most part, are either flat peripheral puppets of wives, secretaries and waitresses, or . . .

Oh, Lester del Rey, how *could* you? You were married to Judy-Lynn Benjamin, for crying out loud, by all accounts a woman of formidable intellect, insight and drive: how could you have given us such an unbelievable caricature as “**Helen O’Loy**”’s “she giggled and purred over the wisps of silk and glassheen that were the fashion, tried on endless hats, and conducted herself as any normal girl would”?

Now, to be fair, this was written in 1938, when del Rey was only twenty-three and before Judy-Lynn del Rey was even born, much less married him. Quite likely, he learned better since. But the idea that even in 1970, when the voting took place, Robert Silverberg and the members of SFWA thought that this was one of the thirty best stories written makes it clear what so infuriated Joanna Russ and James Tiptree, Jr. “**Helen O’Loy**” has historical value as a foundational text of robot science fiction; let us be charitable to it as such.

And there are a few female characters. Judith Merril’s “**That Only a Mother**” is told mostly from a woman’s perspective—if a

woman in delusional denial about motherhood, that, because of the rarity of women characters in this anthology, has the problem of seeming to represent all women as being subject to delusions and fixated on motherhood.

More interesting are the girls and women in “**All Mimsy Were the Borogoves**,” the only other at-least-half-female-authored story in the collection (its listed author is Lewis Padgett, the collective pseudonym of Henry Kuttner and his wife, C. L. Moore). Jane Paradine and her little daughter Emma are both individuals, with a sense of character and agenda independent of their femininity.

But I was most impressed, of the male-authored works, with A. E. van Vogt’s “**The Weapon Shop**”; the story’s viewpoint character, blind in his conservatism, does not realize how much his wife and particularly his mother-in-law perceive, but the narrator does convey depths of character to these women that he ignores. “Twice her voice echoed through the dust-filled interior, each time with a sharp: ‘That’s overweight, a gram at least. Watch your machine.’” It left me wanting to know better the precise, resolute, and

only incidentally female character that is Creel’s mother. And Alfred Elton van Vogt indisputably presented as male. It was not that stories with interesting female characters didn’t sell.

The monochromatic WASP monoculturalism, in an America that would have been thriving with immigrants, is of course another sign of the writers dominating in these times.

The oldest story, Stanley G. Weinbaum’s “**A Martian Odyssey**,”

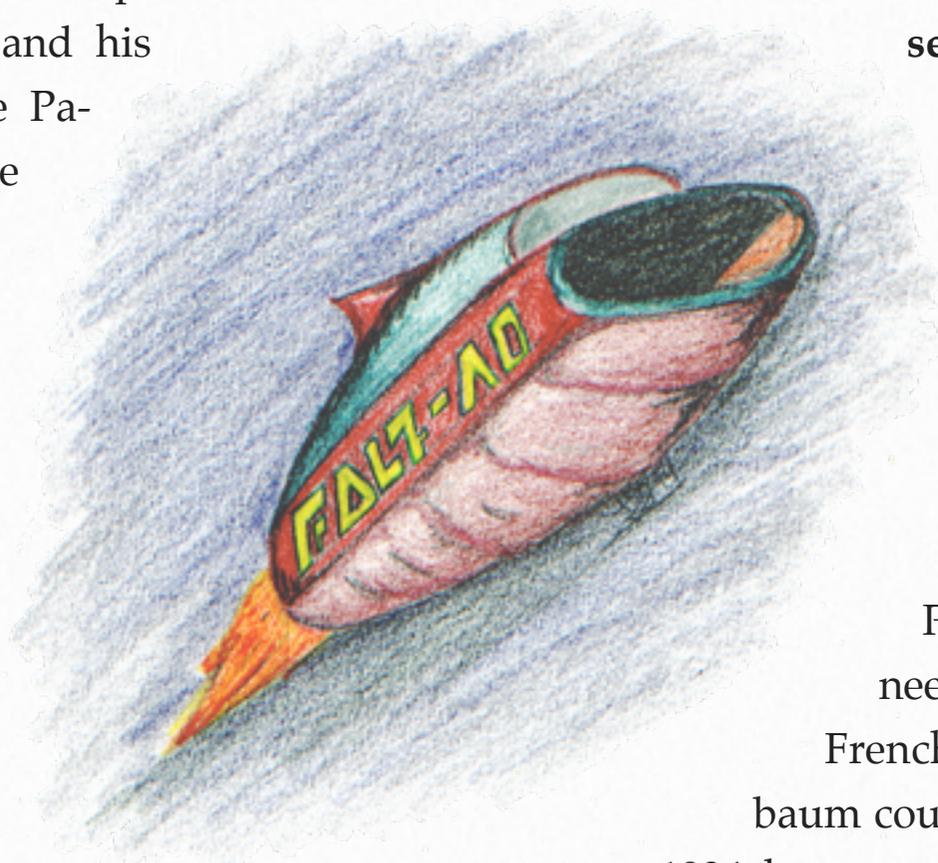
does its best to present, wonder of wonders, an international space mission, with the crew featuring, in supporting roles, the astonishingly exotic and diverse

Putz the German engineer and Leroy the French biologist. (Wein-

baum could not have known in

1934 how popular the name Leroy would be among African-American men after the civil rights movement; to amuse myself, I imagine the biologist as a bright black kid from Chicago’s South Side who did a minor in French before his Ph.D. Which, though, makes the eye-dialect all the more ridiculous.)

Let’s give Weinbaum points, though: he tried. I was saddened to learn that this was his first science fiction story, and he would be dead of lung cancer by the end of the next



year, although he did succeed in having a number of other stories published. It sealed his legacy through pioneering the sympathetic but alien character, which made me seek out what else he had written; [several stories are available on Project Gutenberg](#).

I went to look, because some of the other writers included were indisputably great as considered over the whole of their oeuvre, but the choice of their representative story I think has not stood the test of time.

I had been blown away by Fredric Brown's "The Waveries" and "Letter to a Phoenix," and if "Arena" had been selected over both of these, I had high expectations of it. But the very premise, that of genocide of one or the other species being decided by one randomly selected (male) individual, is entirely morally repugnant to me. Brown tries to justify it via telepathic contact with the alien showing that it is full of hate and so its species will not negotiate and thus deserves to die—but that reduces an entire intelligent species to homogeneity, refusing to entertain the possibility that Brown's capricious god happened to pick an alien Fred Phelps or Timothy McVeigh. On that one decision rests the fate of an entire planet's civilizations' history, psychology, art, science and possibly biosphere. The Sydney Opera House; Basho, Bach, the Beatles and the Bantu languages; the glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome; all memory of these could have been annihilated by a random shuttle pilot not proving smart enough, and who knows what

equivalent achievements of the Outsiders he vaporized by proving to be just smart enough. I will just open up and say that of all the stories in that entire volume, I found "Arena" the most morally vile. And yet . . . readers loved it. Because it is a distillation of the Golden Age SF's much-heralded Competent Man to its essence? Why?

Would "Arena" still be published in a world after *Ender's Game*? The novel exactly mirrors its setup: the protagonist is forced to commit genocide on an entire alien species in order to save ours, commanded to by an entity that has near-godlike powers in comparison to his own. But at least Ender, unlike Carson, clearly feels guilty afterwards.

Heinlein's story "**The Roads Must Roll**" nowadays does not seem to be still his best pre-1965 work in the court of public opinion; the 1999 *Locus* poll, which allowed multiple stories by the same author, ranks "And He Built Another Crooked House—" (1941) as the top Heinlein novelette and "All You Zombies" (1959), "The Green Hills of Earth" (1947), "Requiem" (1940) and "The Long Watch" (1949) as the short stories that made the list, with the tale of the violent putdown of an organized labour strike not even registering. What was it about "Roads" that appealed enough to the 1970 SFWA that they considered it the seventh most popular story of all? I do not have the hermeneutic skills to guess (Damon Knight mentions that it was the influence of the Teamsters at the time), and welcome discussion.

Bradbury's "Mars Is Heaven!" is a great story but nowadays, of his pre-1965 stories, I would gauge "There Will Come Soft Rains" (1950), "The Veldt" (1950), "The Fog Horn" (1951) and "A Sound of Thunder" (1952) to be far more frequently reprinted and influential—the last story re-shaped the time travel genre, after all. The Bradbury story I would never forget, personally, is "Dark They Were, and Golden-Eyed" but I allow that this is my subjective whim and specific buttons. But "Dark They Were" is the inverse of "Mars Is Heaven"—one is about Martians pretending to be humans, and the other is about humans believing that they are Martians. There are doubtless dissertations written about issues of identity and belief in Bradbury's work.

I suspect that to its readers in 1948, "Mars Is Heaven!" was a deeply visceral horror story. Nowadays, exposed to much more literature from the colonized point of view, I found a certain sympathy with the Martians: they were facing invaders and they fought back as best they were able. After all, what were the sixteen men in the rocket planning to do to Mars, once they found it?

Of Fritz Leiber's stories, I would agree with the 1999 *Locus* poll as well in preferring "Space-time for Springers" (1958) over "**Coming Attraction**," the tale selected for this volume (although I am cordial to friends' cats, I do not wish to own one nor consider myself influenced by felinophile bias in my preference for "Springers"). "Springers," however, is fantasy, and the Science Fiction Hall of

Fame sticks pretty tightly to science fiction—conditions SFWA has relaxed in the years since. "Coming Attraction," however, does not showcase Leiber's ironic humour; if there is any, I did not spot it in this story. What it is, is perhaps the volume's deepest engagement with the Cold War and nuclear fears—another class of story that does not get written much today, with climate change and dictatorship having taken their place in our dystopias.

On the other hand, there are stories that seem to me to not get written much today, and the question arises "Why not? Because I'd like more of them."

Clifford D. Simak may be the grandmaster whose oeuvre I know least of the ones represented in the Hall of Fame, and on reading "**Huddling Place**," I was struck most of all by his "realist" structure dressed up in science-fictional tropes. By this I mean that "Huddling Place" is the story O. Henry, Guy de Maupassant or Saki would have written if they were ordered to use science-fictional tropes (and discovered a passion for it): deeply introverted and introspective, set in an upper-class setting where "robots" are indistinguishable from servants—and with the characteristic O. Henry-style twist ending. The protagonist wins his internal conflict, and then learns that he will not win his external conflict with the universe, because the universe said otherwise.

When I was younger, reading anthologies and best-short-story collections in non-

SF, I gained the impression that the twist-ending style was the only way to write a short story that would merit being in one of these collections. It was only later that I realized that the structure of the SF stories I liked that were in the genre's collections were rarely of that variety, at least, overtly. If there is an internal conflict, if the protagonist overcomes it, he or she will win the external conflict. And rarely is the internal conflict as clearly framed as it is in "Huddling Place."

It's good to see our protagonists overcome adversity and win, if transformed. Perhaps the general trend in (American) SF is to have justice triumph at the end. The good end happily and the bad unhappily, in a fictional universe, because in our real universe they eventually, inevitably, will not. It took a strong writer to buck this trend and impose the Camusian absurdity of our reality onto fictional realities as well.

The Hall of Fame highlights not only now-rare styles, but now-rare devices: two of my favourite stories in the book, "Mimsy Were the Borogoves" by Henry Kuttner and C. L. Moore, and "**The Little Black Bag**" by C. M. Kornbluth, explore the same plot device: Object of Incredibly Advanced Technology Falls Back In Time to Contemporary (As Of Writing) World. Interestingly, I cannot recall the last time I had read a contemporary time travel story in that subgenre: time-travelling people we have aplenty, but time-travelling objects, no; the people usually have restrictions as to what kind of objects they

may bring with them. Even with Connie Willis's Oxford time travellers, the advances in their technology are very much de-emphasized (other than the time machine itself, the only technological difference I can recall is that the Tube extends to Oxford).

Why do we apparently no longer write Object From The Future stories? Because, as has been frequently noted, technological progress has been less radical than the early science fiction writers expected, while the social progress has been more so, and thus nowadays a human mind from the future is more strange and advanced to the people of the past than any technology? Or, I suspect, because the incredible technology of today is so dependent on infrastructure, as Kornbluth didn't predict his little black bag to be: an iPhone falling back in time to 1940 would lose most of its wondrous powers immediately without an Internet to connect to, and would very soon lose its power, period, unable to be charged. (Until solar cells become far, far more efficient.)

Or is it because the Object with Incredible Powers has migrated to fantasy and become bound to the shadow of the One Ring? Kornbluth's message, very clearly, is that technology is neither good nor bad but people make it so. Kuttner and Moore's is that technology may become too strange to comprehend, even in a children's toy, to have any measure of moral value be applicable to it. Special objects in recent speculative fiction, it seems to me, tend to either be MacGuffins

(where, by definition, their entire relevance to the plot is in their absence), or have some personification or intelligence, artificial or transferred, to them. Either they are completely understood, or they are really human. Which leaves little room for the equivalent of little black bags—or iPads, where the vast majority of us have no idea how they work inside, but use them, with little questioning, anyway. And what makes them interesting is what we, as characters in the story, decide to do with them.

I would argue, though, that the name-sake weapons of A. E. van Vogt's "The Weapon Shop" are not of the same class of items, in a story that I very much enjoyed (although I disagree with its main theme, "the right to own weapons is the right to be free": define "free," and while you're at it, define "weapons"). Although the weapons as described are indeed magical—can destroy any type of matter but can perceive when they are being used in aggression, can apparently teleport—the plot does not hinge on anything they can do at all. They are never even fired. What drives the story is the power behind the organization, the networks and money and the technology that also makes the weapons possible, but not the weapons themselves. Heinlein's union of road technicians is more tightly linked to the roads in his plot than the Weapon Shops of Isher are linked to their trade (at least, in that story). Replace the weapons with, say, Frank Herbert's melange and its valuable properties, and the story will

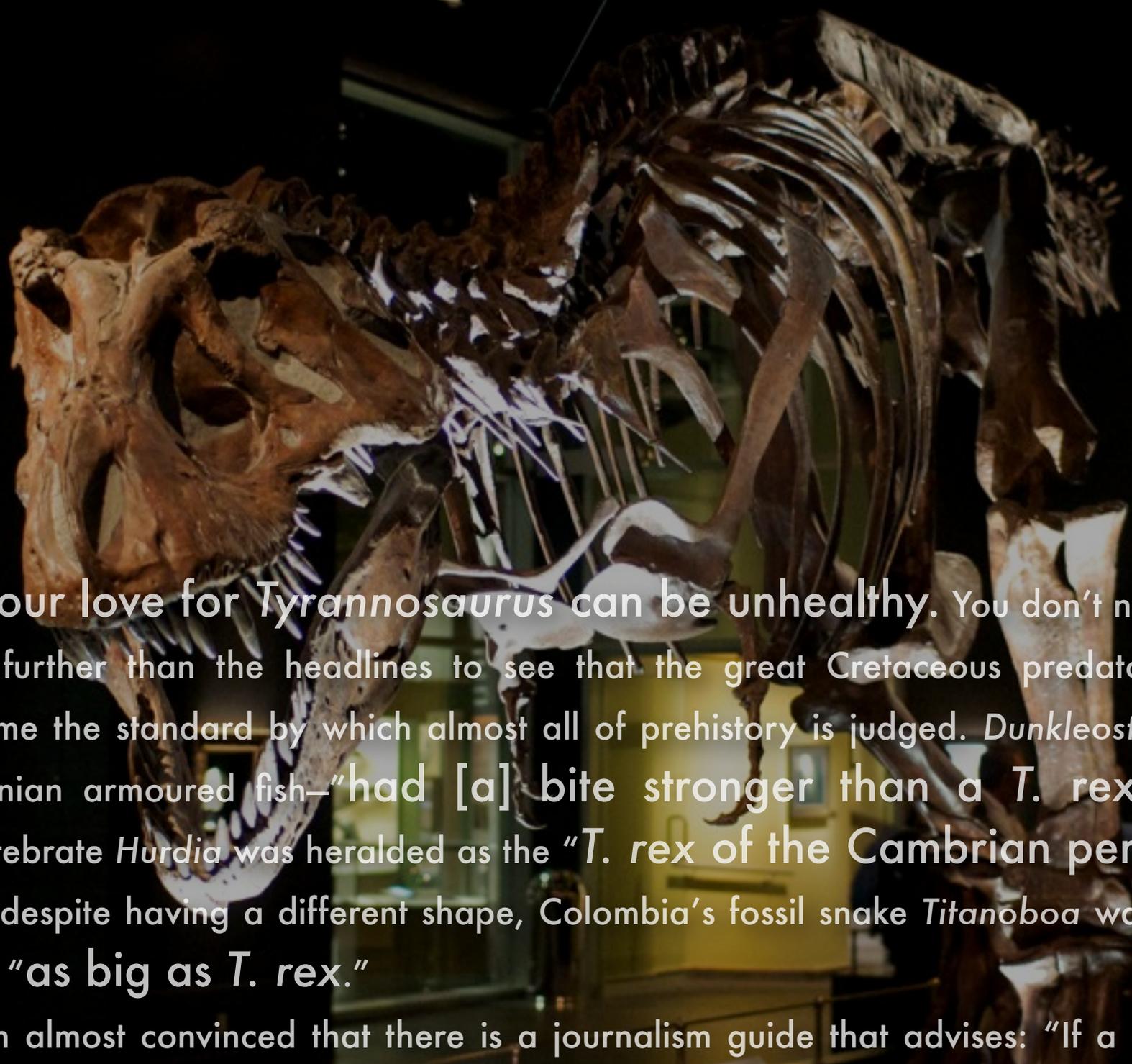
change very little. "The right to own spice is the right to be free." The choice to use weapons as the unifying motif is symbolic; but van Vogt's story today succeeds and endures as a character study rather than as a Second-Amendment polemic. It's the people in it, men and women alike as I mentioned earlier, that make it memorable, not the guns—unlike Heinlein's piece where it is the rolling roads that are the lasting image, not the rather flat people.

I suppose that is the end lesson that I've learned, or confirmed, from getting acquainted with the best of the best SF of fifty years before: the awesomeness of technology, or even a sensawunda planetary setup, may not be so awesome given fifty years, and a story that builds on values espoused in the zeitgeist will be outshined by other stories when the zeitgeist changes. But it is a story that says something lasting about human character, using characters that are themselves memorable, that will endure. And if we turn back to the stories I have heard of before, and loved, they are all about beings we can empathize with, even if Zelazny's Mars is as dated, scientifically, as Weinbaum's. The transformed habermen scanners of Cordwainer Smith and the hyperintelligent Charly of Daniel Keyes show us what people may be—and still remain people.

Fifty years later, people haven't changed. We've just started to see more of them in science fiction.

—*Tamara Vardomskaya*

Dinosaur Obsessions

A large, detailed skeleton of a Tyrannosaurus Rex is displayed in a museum. The skeleton is mounted on a dark, circular platform. The skull is prominent on the left, showing the characteristic large eye sockets and sharp teeth. The rest of the skeleton, including the ribcage, spine, and legs, is visible, extending towards the right. The background is dark, with some museum lighting visible.

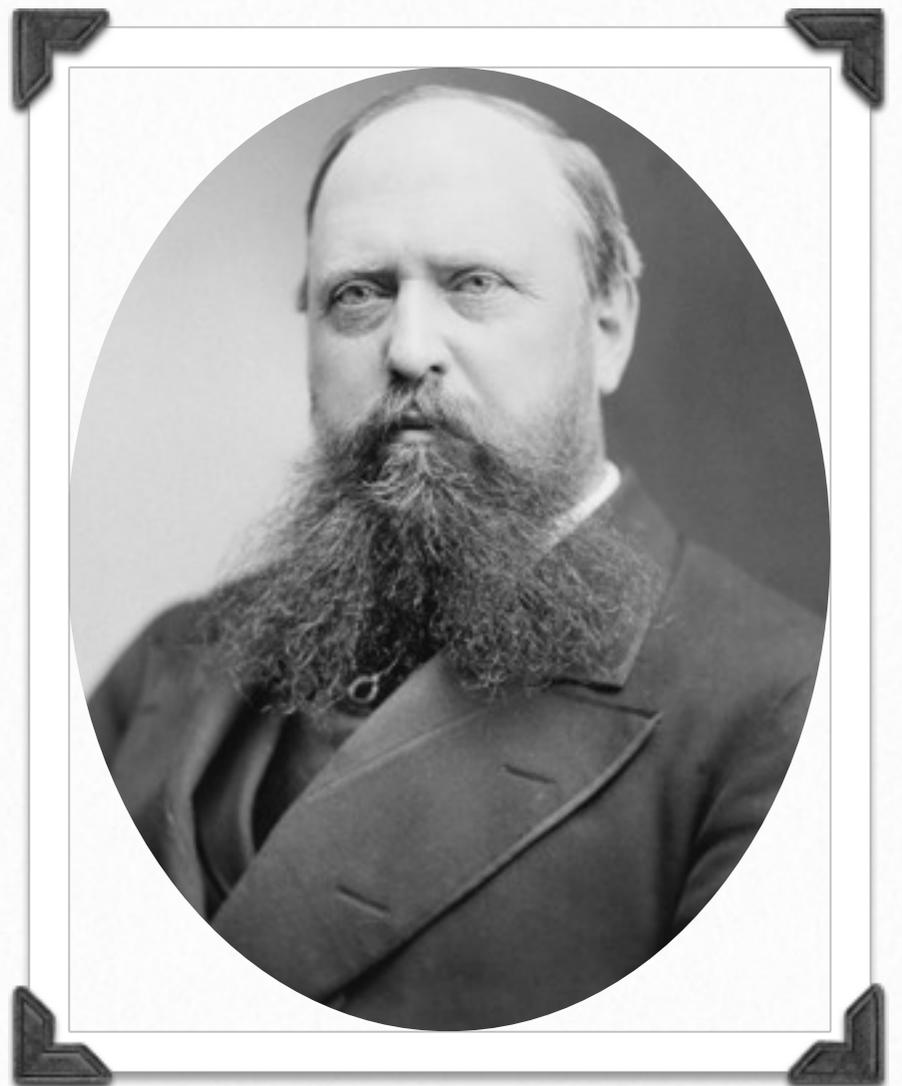
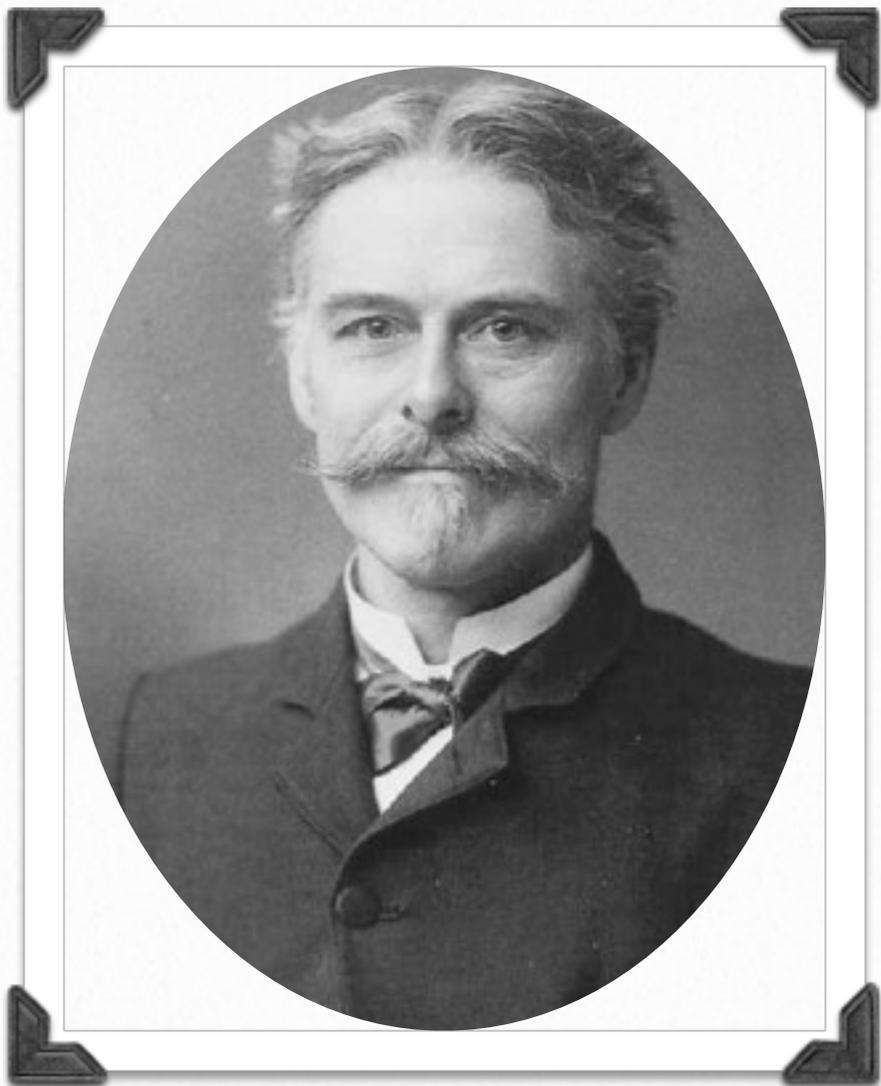
But our love for *Tyrannosaurus* can be unhealthy. You don't need to look further than the headlines to see that the great Cretaceous predator has become the standard by which almost all of prehistory is judged. *Dunkleosteus*—a Devonian armoured fish—“had [a] bite stronger than a *T. rex*”; the invertebrate *Hurdia* was heralded as the “*T. rex* of the Cambrian period”; and, despite having a different shape, Colombia's fossil snake *Titanoboa* was said to be “as big as *T. rex*.”

I'm almost convinced that there is a journalism guide that advises: “If a catchy headline doesn't readily present itself for a new fossil discovery, a reference to *T. rex* will do at a pinch.” . . .

The phrases “*T. rex* relative” and “*T. rex* cousin” are thrown around so often that they have nearly lost their meaning.

—Brian Switek, “Everybody loves Tyrannosaurus,”

The Guardian, 19 April 2011



The Bone Wars in SF

Two years ago I got it into my head to write a historical fantasy about the [Bone Wars](#), the famous feud between two 19th-century American paleontologists, Edward Drinker Cope (1840–1897) and Othniel Charles Marsh (1831–1899). They did everything they could to undermine and sabotage each other's careers; their crews scoured the American West for dinosaurs and Cenozoic mammals in hopes of beating the other to print. In the process, they found and named genera that have become icons of popular culture.

The dinosaurs named by the well-connected, Yale-backed Marsh include *Allosaurus*, *Apatosaurus*, *Camptosaurus*, *Ceratosaurus*,

Diplodocus, *Ornithomimus*, *Stegosaurus* and *Triceratops*; Marsh, a staunch Darwinist, also contributed considerably to the fossil record of evolution, publishing a monograph on toothed birds and found a complete fossil record of the horse, from *Eohippus* to *Equus*. The self-financed, neo-Lamarckian Cope, arguably the last of the amateur naturalists, named fewer dinosaur taxa, but was prolific in other fields (he was as renowned a herpetologist and ichthyologist as he was a paleontologist: the journal [Copeia](#) is named after him). Cope's dinosaurs include *Camarasaurus*, *Coelophysis* and *Monoclonius*; his erroneous reconstruction of the plesiosaur *Elasmosaurus*, in which he

placed the skull on the tail, was an early point of contention in his feud with Marsh.

Their feud was bitter, it made the papers, and in the end they ruined each other. Fantastic stuff, I thought: the bones of a good story. I imagined a tale in which Cope and Marsh would, at the end of their lives, resurrect the dinosaurs each had named to attack one another, their bitter professional feud turned red in tooth and claw.

For some reason, it would also feature rather a lot of Theodore Roosevelt.

I began work with some hesitation, and it has proceeded slowly. Partly because I'm new at this and don't know what I'm doing. Partly because I have other things on the go. And partly because there's simply too much to research.

By which I don't mean the numerous books on the Bone Wars themselves (for a selection, see page 19). I mean that I was trained as a professional historian (three years in a Ph.D. program, abandoned), but I was not trained as an American historian. This means that I know how to do historical research, but that I don't know the period of the novel. This also means that I know *exactly* how much I don't know, and I'm quite likely to do an insane amount of secondary research.

Because I was trained as a historian, I have what might best be described as an ambivalent relationship with alternate history and historical fantasy, because for me the plausibility bar is set that much higher. When an alternate history is predicated on a specific

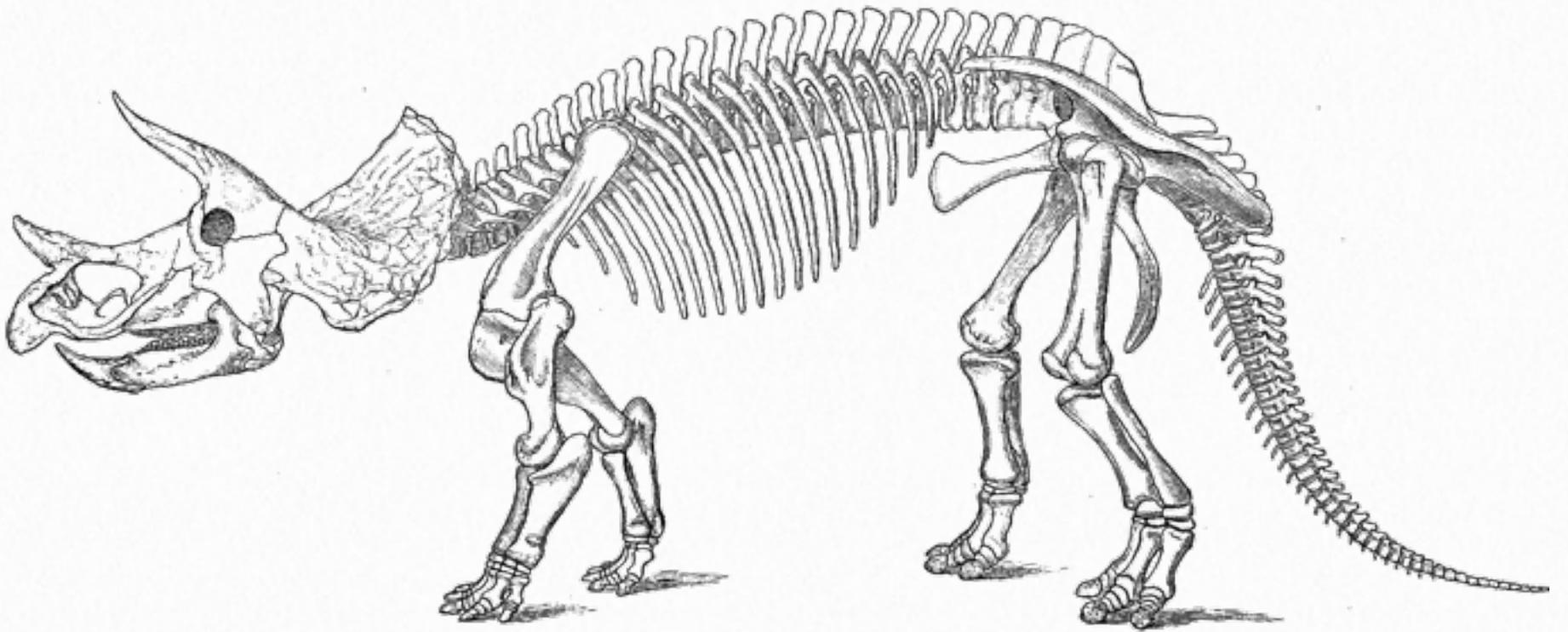
[jonbar point](#), its effect is rather spoiled when you know, professionally, that said jonbar point is simply impossible. Germany, for example, could never have won the Second World War: it wasn't a question of military ability, but industrial capacity.

And one person can't change the course of history unless the conditions enable it to happen (in which case it's not strictly speaking one person any more). My brand of history isn't very personal and doesn't allow for much individual agency. That doesn't necessarily translate into good fiction, though.

All of which is to say that I have a problem with alternate history, historical fantasy and historical fiction in general done sloppily. Gaps in the research tend to stand out. As such I don't tend to read very much of it, especially if it's the didactic sort with a big honking jonbar point in it.

And I really have a problem when it's full of Famous People. They don't sound right—the more you know about them, the more any dialogue that gets put into their mouth sounds false. Which is why the scene with Queen Elizabeth in Jo Walton's *Half a Crown* (Tor, 2008) didn't ring quite true to me; on the other hand, the historical characters in Alette de Bodard's [Obsidian and Blood](#) series posed fewer problems, because I don't have an internal voice that says, "no, wait, Ahuizotl doesn't sound like that."

Even with all of these reservations, there I was, a couple of years back, with this idea that wouldn't get out of my head, full of Fa-



Restoration of TRICERATOPS PRORSUS, Marsh. One-fortieth natural size.

mous People Doing Things They Were Famous For—the very kind of story I have a problem with.

Figuring out the solution to that problem—above and beyond the usual historian’s response of More Research—is why I haven’t made much progress in the past couple of years.

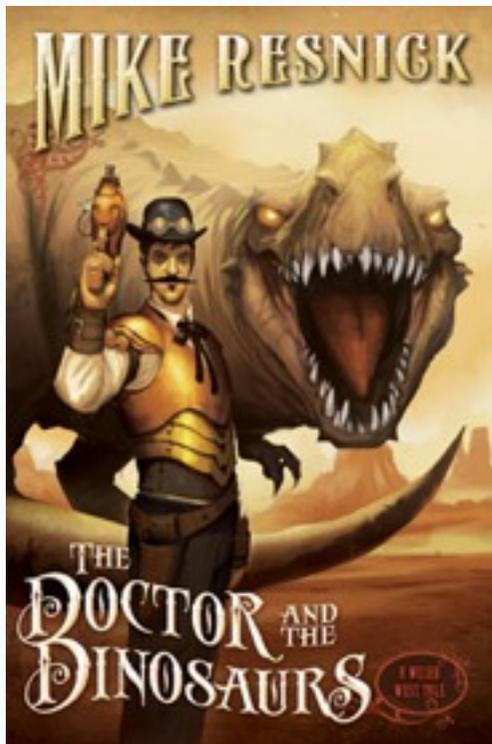
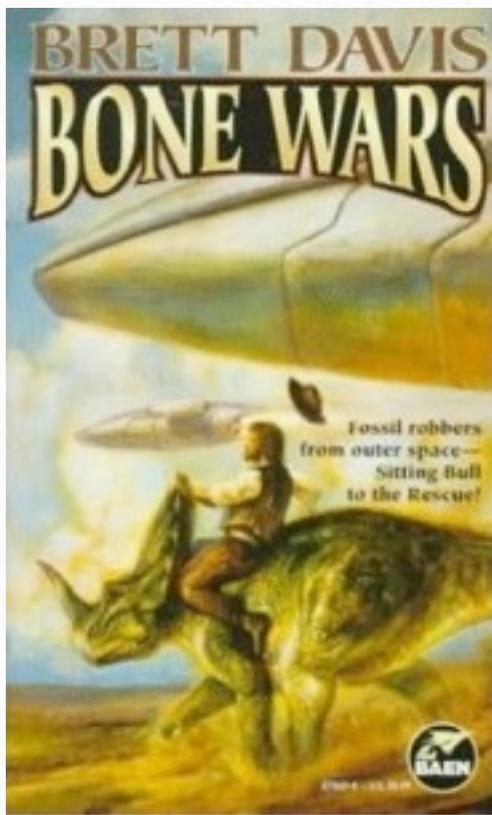
Meanwhile, I discovered that the Bone Wars had already been done in science fiction and fantasy—twice.

This isn’t necessarily a problem. If it were, we’d have a lot fewer alternate histories in which the Confederacy won the U.S. Civil War or the Nazis won the Second World War. (This might not necessarily be a bad thing, although Harry Turtledove might have had to go back to academia.) But, you know, the Bone Wars are kind of specific. Kind of a niche. I was worried that I’d have to abandon the project altogether.

I had to investigate. [Yann Martel could be inspired](#) by the premise of Moacyr Scilar’s *Max and the Cats*, which he heard about via a review, and make a deliberate decision not to read the book before he wrote *Life of Pi*. But I couldn’t do that—not in this field.

The first novel I encountered was Brett Davis’s *Bone Wars* (Baen, 1998) in which Cope and Marsh’s feud was overshadowed by alien fossil hunters after the same bones. No real concerns about overlap there. It was long out of print but I was able to find a copy via AbeBooks.

But the second book stopped me in my tracks when I found out about it. *The Doctor and the Dinosaurs* by Mike Resnick, which came out last December from Pyr, seemed to cut awfully close to what I had in mind. It had Cope, and Marsh, and resurrected dinosaurs—and it also seemed to feature an awful lot of Theodore Roosevelt.



Bone Wars

by Brett Davis

Baen Books, June 1998

ISBN 0-671-87880-8

Mass-market paperback, \$5.99

The Doctor and the Dinosaurs

by Mike Resnick

Pyr Books, December 2013

ISBN 978-1-61614-861-4

Trade paperback, \$18.00

Oh, shit. There went my book.

Tamara had some good advice: “I think the best step is just to read the book, critique it and adjust anything in your own draft that is too close.”

But as it turns out, apart from the dramatis personae, very little ends up being too close. It also turns out that *The Doctor and the Dinosaurs* is a deeply problematic book, and I’m not just saying that because it’s the putative competition. It has several of the things I dislike in historically based genre fiction. And then there’s how it handles Native Americans.

The Doctor in *The Doctor and the Dinosaurs* is Doc Holliday, who is the protagonist in Resnick’s “Weird West” series of novels, of which this is the fourth. The first three, which I have not read, are *The Buntline Special* (Pyr, 2010), *The Doctor and the Kid* (Pyr, 2011), and *The Doctor and the Rough Rider* (Pyr, 2012). The series bangs steampunk science up against Native American magic, with Holliday regularly caught in the middle.

As the fourth book opens, Holliday is waiting to die, finally, of consumption, but is pressed back into the fray by Geronimo—in this reality a powerful shaman (I balk at the term “medicine man”) rather than a war leader—who gives him an additional year of life to stop Cope and Marsh from desecrating Comanche land in Wyoming. Otherwise, the Comanche will resurrect ancient monsters. In this task he is assisted by his old friends, Thomas Edison and Theodore Roosevelt.

I really don’t know where to begin. The book relies on the trope of the Magic Indian, and I bounced *hard* off it. If such a thing could be done well, or with sensitivity, I don’t think this is an example of it. I’m not, however, the best person to critique this properly. Suffice to say, I have concerns.

Additionally, virtually every speaking part in this book is occupied by a well-known historical figure. There’s Cope and Marsh, and Holliday, and Geronimo, and Edison, and Roosevelt—and oh look! it’s Buffalo Bill.

Not that this steampunk gala of the celebrities of the 19th-

century is strictly necessary, because each of these famous characters are as flat as they come. I've done enough reading on Cope and Marsh to know that, in Resnick's take, they don't *sound* like Cope and Marsh. (Cope in particular had linguistic idiosyncracies that turned up in his correspondence, and was apparently a cussing champion of the first order.) It's as though everyone is running around with a label marked with their name, famous historical person, in lieu of actual character development. The only one who sounds even remotely like the real thing is Roosevelt—which given how many stories Resnick has written about the man, is not much of a surprise.

Because everyone in the book is famous, no one in the book can die prematurely: they're all reverse redshirts. As a result there is an absence of tension. Characters mill about and talk, and then there are dinosaurs, which they shoot at a lot.

Oh yes, the dinosaurs.

The book is set in 1885. It features two paleontologists who between them have named dozens of dinosaur genera. So why, *why* do the dinosaurs they encounter include *Tyrannosaurus* (discovered in 1905 by Henry Fairfield Osborn) and *Utahraptor*, which was first described in 1993? Why do Cope and Marsh identify them as such without so much as batting an eye?

How the hell were allosaurs insufficient?

In the end, despite the prodigious appendices with links and further reading, one gets

the impression that Resnick breezed through this one a bit. He clearly had fun writing it—more power to him—and we're supposed to have fun too. But this is one of those times, like watching a Sinatra Rat Pack movie, or a late episode of the U.S. version of *Whose Line Is It Anyway*, where all the fun they're having on stage isn't necessarily shared by the audience.

So much for the Resnick. What about Davis's *Bone Wars*?

It's a very different book, by a less well-known writer: *Bone Wars* was Davis's third novel, whereas *The Doctor and the Dinosaurs* was Resnick's 69th ([officially](#)). Where Resnick sets his story in his funhouse-mirror Weird West, the action in *Bone Wars* is set very much in our world. It is science fiction that happens to be set in 1876, not alternate history or historical fantasy.

Bone Wars is also a very earnest book. It's immediately apparent that Davis did his homework and sweated the details. Cope's and Marsh's internal monologues ring a bit more true. The Indians—Sioux and Crow, in this case—are much more grounded in historical reality. The main characters are not necessarily famous.

But the book lacks an X-factor.

The plot of *Bone Wars* is as follows: Cope and Marsh, whose digs are very close to one another, are having rotten luck at finding bones. They discover that the bones are being collected by two rival foreigners, whose rivalry parallels Cope's and Marsh's. They reluctantly join forces to deal with the alien pale-

ontological menace; hijinks ensue, aided by a subplot involving the crossdressing Al Stillson as well as the Crow and Sioux.

It's competently done. It's just dull. The stakes—stopping space aliens from stealing fossils?—are too low, and the delivery a little too flat. There needed to be higher stakes or more zing; what we have is neither. The result is a book that fails to engage, though I do have to give it points for effort.

Where does this leave me, and my plans for my own novel (the working title for which, I can tell you, is *Fossil Magic*)?

I think I'm safe. It's unlike either of these two books, though it does share some of the characters, and the notion of reanimated dinosaurs that Resnick uses. I'm telling a very different story, about revenge, and reputation, and the dichotomy between what the 19th century thought about dinosaurs and what we

know about them today. It's also set much later: in 1897, when Cope is on his deathbed in Philadelphia and Roosevelt is a police commissioner in New York.

More than that, I really shouldn't say. I should get to work on it instead.

But Resnick's and Davis's novels show me some of the challenges that I will have to face while trying to write this book. Doing the research; reconciling historical figures with the need for interesting characters; getting the science (as it was then known) right; treading a fine line between the attitudes of the time and those of today; making the story engaging without bungling the history—these strike me as the things that anyone writing historically based genre fiction has to deal with. Figuring out how to get them right is going to be my challenge.

—Jonathan Crowe

HISTORIES OF THE BONE WARS

The Gilded Dinosaur: The Fossil War between E. D. Cope and O. C. Marsh and the Rise of American Science

by Mark Jaffe (Crown Publishers, 2000)

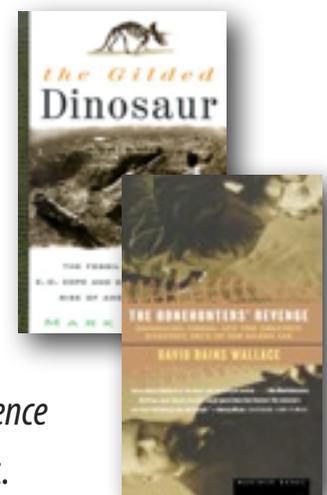
The Bone Hunters: The Heroic Age of Paleontology in the American West

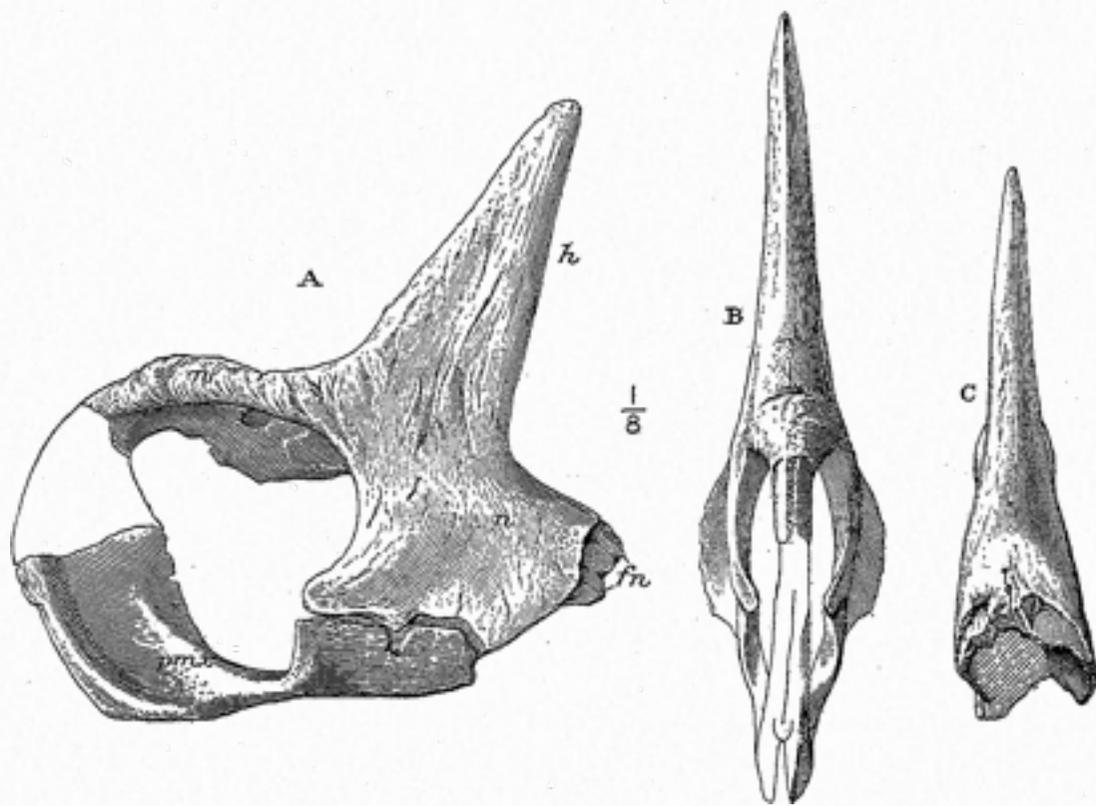
by Url Lanham (Dover Publications, 1991)

The Bonehunters' Revenge: Dinosaurs, Greed, and the Greatest Scientific Feud of the Gilded Age

by David Rains Wallace (Houghton Mifflin, 1999)

My recommendation: skip the Lanham, read the Jaffe and Wallace. In addition, PBS's *The American Experience* broadcast an hour-long documentary in January 2011 called "[Dinosaur Wars](#)," which you should check out.





Unicorn Chaser

The Badlands blazed in the scorching day; no nightingale trilled no tune;
The heat only promised to break away with the rise of a cold white moon.
But the hunters gripped at their guns and swords—for now, now was the hour . . .
And the unicorn came lumbering,
Lumbering—lumbering,
The unicorn came lumbering up to the maiden's bower.

Shading his wide, wide withers, all punk-rock spiked was his mane.
His hoofs had left thousands of trackways, thundering over the plain.
His hips were like those of a bird, they knew—but the gaze of them all was borne
To the mark of what they were seeking,
What lifetimes of research were seeking:
The dagger curving and peaking, on his nose was his single horn.

In the shade of the tent the maiden stood clad in khaki and gray,
Behind her eyes calculating clades and codons and DNA.
Three doctorates had she paid for this quest, and paid with no love for years:
But now, three-ton tread drumming,
The beast of her dreams was coming:
Let others raise dragons up from the dead—the unicorn now was hers.

“What drove you to seek this creature?” the journalists all would say.
“To use all of healers’ knowledge to bring the healing beast to our day?
He has no grace like the beasts of myth, no stag-footed colt of yore.”
The maiden replied, eyes gleaming,
“I want the truth in my dreaming.
Since girlhood has unicorns been for me shaped like a styracosaur.”

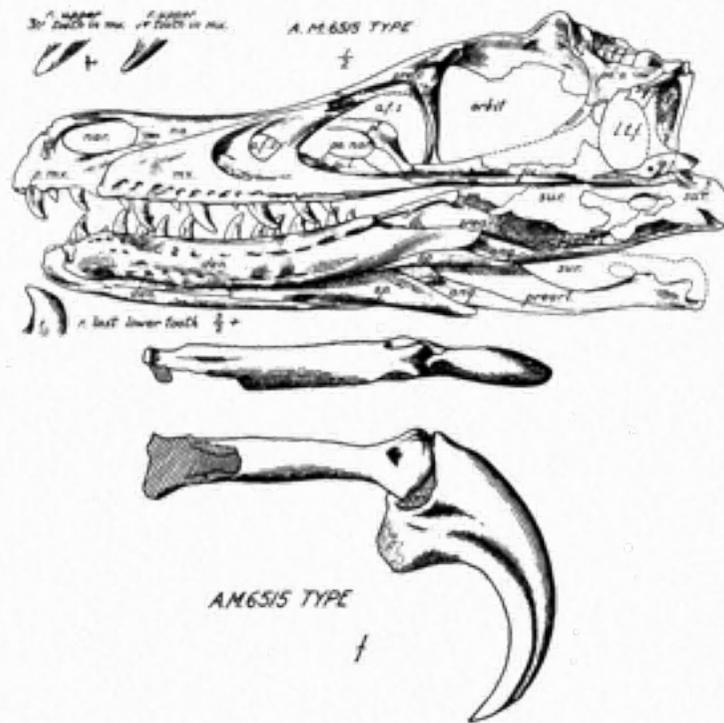
And now he came down the hillside, a unicorn of her own,
The shape of the *Monoclonius* released as a single clone.
Bird-hipped and bird’s ancestral uncle, and bird instincts in him ran straight.
For he thudded up to the maiden
Whose dream-image he had been made in,
Gazed lonely eyes at the maiden, and begged that he have a mate.

“Oh, flocks and ceratopsian herds, oh may they again be mine!”
I’m a unicorn zombie story, she thought, but I thought not I’d be Frankenstein.
The dead monster I raised, I should have guessed will be lonely and seek its kin.
His frill mane, she scratched behind
(Though her hand bled, she paid no mind),
Apologized to the unicorn, and promised she will begin.

And still of a winter’s night, they say, when the winds on the Badlands wail,
When the moon is a ghostly galleon, tossed inland by a monster gale,
When the sediment layers creak with the tales of all that had gone before,
The unicorns come lumbering,
Lumbering—lumbering,
The unicorns lumber across the plain, in herds of a thousand and more.

Shading their wide, wide withers, punk-rock spiked are their bony manes,
And their three-ton gallop drums out their Cretaceous refrains.
Scales and osteoderms on their backs; but their beaks of their kinship to flocks will tell.
And their shadows stretch out the morn,
Dams and calves, each with curving horn:
Still not clear how they stop being maidens, but they do it extremely well.

—Tamara Vardomsкая



Quoth the Raptor

Once upon the late Cretaceous, when the theropods predaceous
 Roamed the plains of vast Alberta for delicious hadrosaur,
 I was bending, groaning, drubbing, but my time machine was stubborn,
 And despite all of my rubbing, it would not return to war.
 I was growing quite concerned now, for I feared tyrannosaur.
 Only that, and nothing more.

Ah, distinctly I'm recalling, it was spring, the rain was falling,
 The corythosaurs were calling to the mates they would adore.
 Eagerly I wished repair, but alas, I lacked a spare
 Flux capacitor to bear the load of going yet before.
 "Cursed piece of junk!" I glared. "Will I feed a carnosaur,
 Or be choked by meteor?"

As I nodded, nearly croaking, suddenly I heard a knocking
 As of some strong avian critter rapping on my TARDIS door.
 "Surely," sighed I, "surely best is it's some *Saurornitholestes*,
 For velociraptors rest in peace in Asia, long before.
 Bird or beast, I dare not test this wall's resistance any more.
 Grab my gun; unbar the door."

Open then I flung the shutter when, with many a flirt and flutter
In stepped a dromaeosaurid of the Mesozoic of yore.
Not the least obeisance made he; not an instant stopped or stayed he,
But, with mien of lord or lady, strode up to me, where he bore
Dragging in his terrible-clawed foot,—a flux capacitor!
I was mute for minutes more.

Much I marvelled this ungainly fowl to bear me gifts so plainly
Which had no possible place in Mesozoic days of yore.
Was there some ill-starred Time Master whom unmerciful disaster
Followed fast and followed faster to this time and to this shore?
To help my posthuman kindred, if they live and aid implore,
Or to flee the carnosaurus?

The door shut; and yet this raptor bore no ill towards its captor
When I asked it, “Worthy theropod, whence came you to this door?”
Trying to process this strange vision, I was plagued with indecision—
Was it stolen from my humans, this advanced device it bore?
But I heard an altered Anglic voice from the dromaeosaur:
Quoth he, “6034.”

“Far into your future ages, dino uplift all the rage is.
I’m a time traveller too, though you’re three thousand years before.
I came back for my kin’s traces, to bring them to the sentient races
And my time machine is parked over on yonder river’s shore—
And your primitive machine could use my spare capacitor . . .
So I brought one to your door.”

Much I marvelled at this greeting and the wonder of this meeting.
But there was no time to lose, this time when yonder treads tyrannosaur.
With *Saurornitholestes* lifting, my machine got humming swiftly,
Though he muttered at how primitive I and my people were.
I asked how could I return his loan of flux capacitor.
Quoth he, “Time cap—”
Then, a roar.

The tyrannosaurs were here, and they had no sense of fear,
But believed that we should show respect to elders ever more.
Promptly, then, I floored the pedal, with no thought to pause or settle—
And ignoring that the setting was to 6034.
I awoke. Above me waiting, smiling, my dromaeosaur.
'Twas his time. I was of yore.

The uplifted beasts are flitting; in the TARDIS queue I'm sitting,
But 'tis years before I get my flight to 3054.
I try being staunch and stoic; but I miss the Mesozoic
Where the culture shock was lesser, and the simple beasts were more.
Six millennia of practice making bureaucracy a chore—
I'd rather face a tyrannosaur.

—*Tamara Vardomskaya*



Dinosaurs and Sodomy

When Michael Swanwick talked about finding the balance between dinosaurs and sodomy, he was talking about the balance between action and emotional nuance. He was not speaking literally.

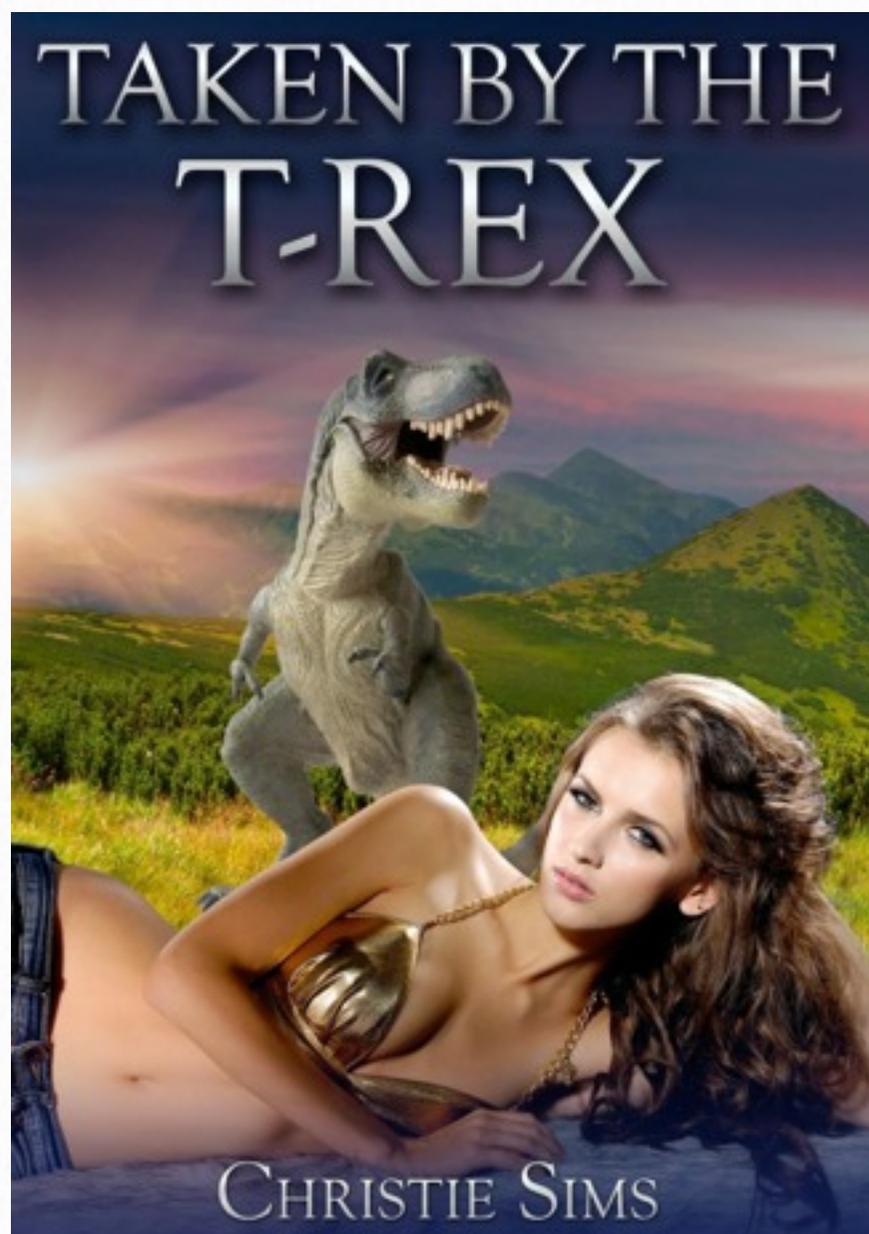
Dinosaur erotica is emphatically *not* what Michael Swanwick had in mind.

[Rule 34](#) says: “If you can imagine it, there is porn of it”; the recent outburst of ebook dinosaur erotica—featuring dinosaur-on-woman and, more rarely, dinosaur-on-man couplings—is proof of that. The Internet and the media [found out about it last fall](#), and can’t quite decide if they should LOL or clutch their collective pearls.

Dinosaur erotica is a subset of the apparently fast-growing [monster porn](#) genre. Its best-known practitioners, Christie Sims and Alana Branwen, [got into it because it was something new](#). It also turned out to be lucrative.

Their titles are alliterative (*Taken by the T-Rex*, *Romanced by the Raptors*) and sometimes over the top (*Beloved by a Pack of Deinonychus*, *Horny Thumbs of the Iguanodon*). They’re short stories, available on Amazon for the Kindle for around three dollars apiece. But I have not been able to bring myself to buy and read one of these stories. (Just think of what it would do to my Amazon recommendations!) Others, on the other hand, have: their reports are [here](#) and [here](#).

Giggling over erotica is like giggling over fanfic. It’s easy to do, but it’s not particularly nice



1 of 14

to mock whatever floats someone else’s boat. But even dinoporn’s practitioners don’t seem to be taking this all that seriously.

And let’s be honest. This sort of thing isn’t exactly new to us. Dinosaur-human couplings have appeared before in science fiction—if, that is, you count dinosaur-descended reptilian humanoids as dinosaurs. In Harry Harrison’s *West of Eden* (Bantam, 1984), there is an encounter be-

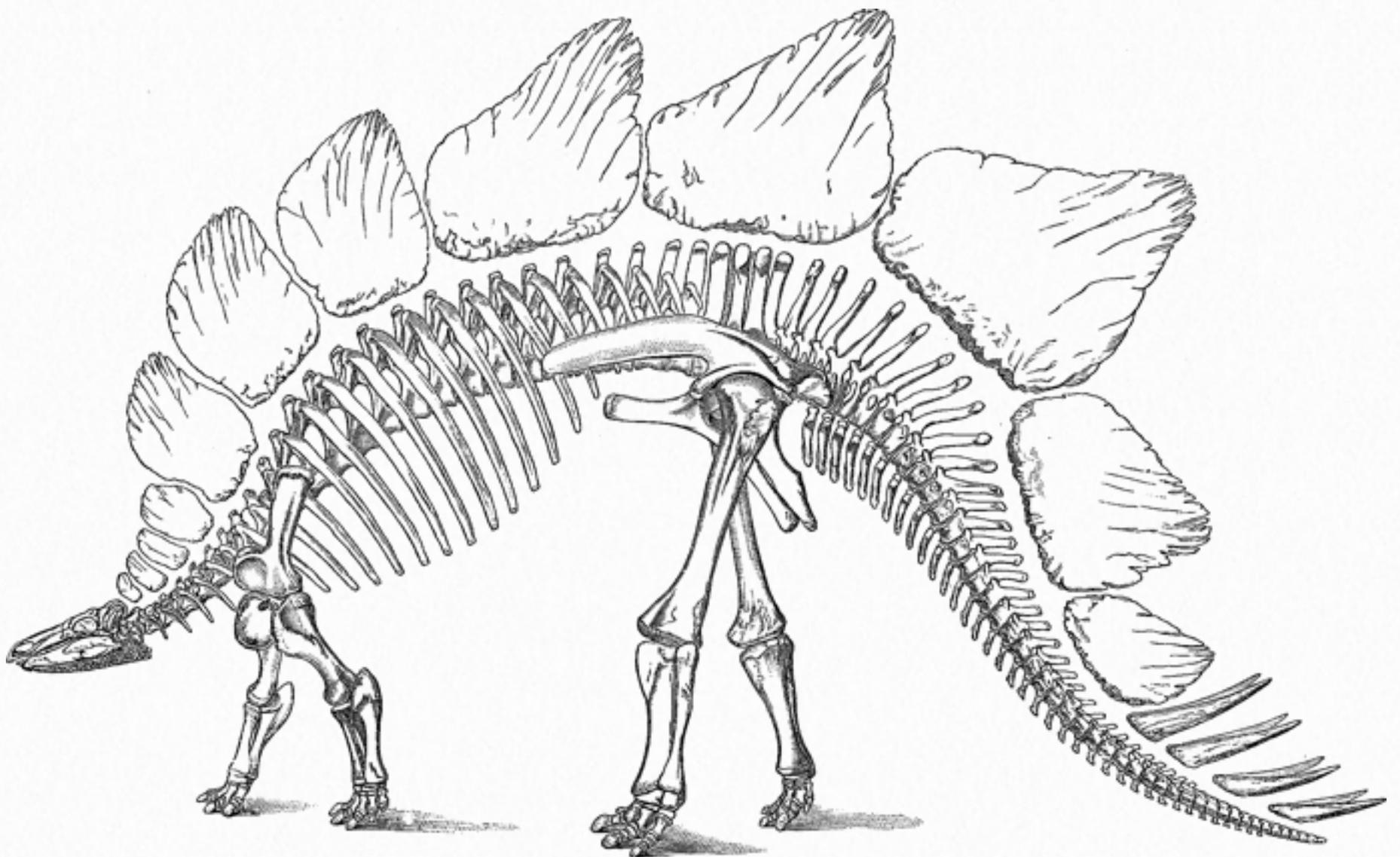
tween the human Kerrick and his captor Vaintè, a member of the dominant, lizard-like Yilané, who are descended from the dinosaurs the asteroid failed to extinguish. And on TV we have *Doctor Who*'s Madame Vastra and her wife, Jenny. As for dinosaurs themselves, rather than their Silurian or Yilané descendants, we have "[A Bird in Hand](#)" by Charlie Stross, a hilarious but scientifically rigorous exercise in making Swanwick's dinosaurs and sodomy a literal thing.

The thing is, as Brian Switek points out in his book *My Beloved Brontosaurus* (FSG, 2013), we really don't know anything about the mechan-

ics of dinosaur sex—even whether they had external genitalia. Did males have simple equipment like reptiles, did they have the ridiculous penile equipment of Muscovy ducks, or did they make do with the so-called "cloacal kiss" used by most birds? We don't know. We especially don't know [how stegosaurs managed](#) to get around those plates and that damn [thagomizer](#).

I can't imagine a cloacal kiss making for hot 'n' steamy stuff—but again, I'm not going to pay three dollars apiece to find out and warp my Amazon recommendations. And my brain.

—Jonathan Crowe



Restoration of *STEGOSAURUS UNGULATUS*, Marsh. One-thirtieth natural size.



GOD IN THE LATRINE

WHY HAST THOU SUMMONED ME, PUNY MORTAL?

Um. Oh. Ah. Hi there. Ah, this may take a moment to explain—

SPEAK SWIFTLY, MORTAL, LEST THOU BE SLAIN WITH CRUEL TORTURE.

Look, there's no need to adopt that tone. I was, ah, just asking for help, a friend said to use this number, I *called* it—

WERT THOU GIVEN A BUSINESS CARD?

Yes, here it is. Anyway, I called the number, it went right to voice mail, I didn't quite understand *all* the menu options but, ah, I did the best I could—

AND?

And then there was a flash of light and a tremendous bang, and, ah, then you were here here with me in the bathroom. You know, I'm beginning to think there's been some misunderstanding—

INDEED. WHAT ASSISTANCE DIDST THOU ASK OF THY FRIEND?

Well, actually, you see, there's been a bit of a blockage here, not pointing fingers or naming names, but, you know, people don't need to use *quite* so much tissue paper when they're doing their business in here—

AND WHAT HAS THIS GOT TO DO WITH ME?

Well, you see, ah, sir, that's where I think the, ah, mixup took place. See, what I said was, my toilet was blocked, and I needed to find a snake, and my friend, well—

THY FRIEND IS A BLOCKHEAD.

Well I thought he knew what I *meant*. Context and all. But you'd think he'd have given me the number of a pet shop, not *this*. Not that people haven't been finding boa constrictors in their toilets, but—

DO I LOOK LIKE A BOA CONSTRICTOR?

Well, no. Obviously. Anyway, that's the mixup then, I suppose you'll be off, no hard feelings—

IT DOES NOT WORK THAT WAY.

It doesn't?

SADLY, NO.

Oh. Oh. Am I in peril of losing my mortal soul?

SADLY, NO.

Oh. What then?

THOU HAST SUMMONED ME FOR A PURPOSE, WHICH I MUST NOW FULFILL ERE I DEPART.

Oh dear. You mean—

INDEED.

Ugh. But what's the catch for me? I mean, I summoned you; in most of the stories there's usually a price for doing so—

IT DOES NOT WORK THAT WAY.

You mean to say that you have to perform a service and there are no strings attached at this—at my end? That—that doesn't seem very fair to you.

IT HAS BEEN REMARKED.

Well look, I'm very sorry about this—

LET'S JUST GET THIS OVER WITH, SHALL WE?

Oh. All right. Well, here's the, ah, item in question—

THE BLOCKED TOILET, YOU MEAN.

Ah, yes. That. Sorry, I do seem to speak a bit euphemistically—

IT APPEARS THAT THE TRAP IS CLOGGED.

Oh, you've had some training. I wouldn't have expected that—

I WILL TAKE CARE OF IT. *ATTENTION VILE DEBRIS: BEGONE!*

That—that's it?

GIVE IT A FLUSH, THEN.

Oh. Okay. Hey, that did it! What did you do?

I'M AFRAID THAT'S A TRADE SECRET.

Well that's good, very good. I was worried for a moment you'd have to go crawl up there and auger the, ah, detritus out yourself?

DO I LOOK LIKE A PLUMBER'S SNAKE?

Ah, no. No. No, *sir*. No. No, you look like a fearsome and very, *very* impressive serpent god, who must be very put out by this inconvenience *for which I am very sorry, by the way—*

SPEAK NOTHING OF IT.

Oh, that's very kind—

NO, YOU MISUNDERSTAND ME. SPEAK. NOTHING. OF IT.

Ah. I—I think I understand you. Professional reputation, and all that.

INDEED.

Are your eyes normally that red?

ANYWAY, I MUST BE OFF. THY PURPOSE FULFILLED, AND ALL THAT. ALSO I MUST HAVE A WORD WITH THIS FRIEND OF THINE. I MUST FIND OUT WHERE HE GOT THAT CARD HE GAVE THEE.

I suppose you could just ask. You're not going to, are you?

NO.

Slaying and cruel torture, I would imagine.

I COULDN'T SAY.

Should I warn him that you're coming?

YOU MAY.

Will it make any difference?

NO.

—Jonathan Crowe



Secret masters of fanzines: Chris Garcia, Neil Jamieson-Williams and Taral Wayne at SFContario 3's "Fanzines and Fan Writing" panel, 12 November 2012.

Letters of Comment

PDF worked fine. Great artwork, and I enjoyed the spoof fiction. I am so old that I attended Worldcons before the beginning of your graph on attendance data.

But I do have one quibble—why do you think that Númenórean mariners on a flat Middle-earth would have had the use of a compass? The magnetic compass works in the magnetic field of a spherical Earth with a molten rotating core—it is an electromagnetic field. Mars, which has no molten core, also has no planet-wide field.

For another non-standard fanzine, see <http://www.fanac.org/fanzines/IGOTS/IGOTS35.pdf>

—*Ned Brooks*

You're right. I spent so much time thinking about what a flat earth does to celestial navigation that what it does to compasses slid right by me.

Hey, just came across *Ecdysis* on eFanzines and gave it a preliminary read. I'm certainly going to be returning to it a few times as there's a lot to chew over!

A few notes, as I can never tell when I'll have the time to properly respond and a brief note is better than nothing!

I'm torn. I don't like blogs, for the most part, because of the format. It seems so often limited, unconcerned with how the writing is presented. The content that shows up in zines that never

seems to make it to blogs (for the most part) is Fan Art, and layout is seldom a serious concern. Yes, I've seen some that certainly do take advantage of layout, but they seem rare. I do totally agree with you that a zine is a much better place to put longer pieces, things that should be placed in them to stand a bit against the slip of time.

What's funny is that I get it from both sides. The Traditionalists don't like my approach to *The Drink Tank* (though some, not all, seem to get behind *Journey Planet*, and thanks for the compliment on issue 16! That was a great experience working on it) and non-Fanzine folks tend to dismiss it completely as another old and musty fanzine that's out of touch with the reality of now. And many rightly point out that I just plain suck as an editor and won that little Hugo more based on personalities and the fact that we were in my neck of the woods in 2011. Really, only that McCalmont bastard's ever bothered me with his criticisms. I don't mind being told I suck, I know a fair bit of the time I do; what I mind is being accused of being intellectually dishonest. He may be the one person in the Universe who I actually don't like.

And see, I *love* the art you used for that Fish story! It really pulled together with the words and increased my enjoyment of both! *That's* what I love about zines!

I loved *Pacific Rim*, a whole of fun (and looking at the footage and doing some quick math, my home in Santa Clara, California, would have been fine after the initial attack!) and I've written a fair bit about it. It is a film that is best enjoyed with only the bare sensory portions of the brain

working. I over-analyzed it first go, then watched it again just to enjoy the moving lights and it was most satisfying.

The same way I enjoyed that second viewing of *Pacific Rim* was how I enjoyed *Snakes on a Plane*. The only time I've been thrown out of a movie theatre was while I was laughing far too hard at the film *Anaconda*. I've been watching a set of 100 B-Movies, and there's not been a giant snake movie yet. Interesting . . .

The Hemingway Hoax is a book that I enjoyed parts of, but then there was a whole bunch of other stuff that just didn't get through to me. I liked the Hoax part, I think it was the science fictional element that I just didn't enjoy. It happens.

OK, I leave now to drive into the foothills and hope I can find the Bigfoot Museum!

—Chris Garcia

Fan art was actually a major reason for starting Ecdysis: I wanted Jennifer (my spousal equivalent) to Do More Art, and figured that a fanzine would give her an outlet for said art. I think my plan turned out well, don't you?

“Those who persist in publishing fanzines in the era of online publishing tools are largely interested in the fanzine as artifact: they're deeply in love with the format. The content is often beside the point; they just love making, sharing and reading fanzines.”

You say that as if it were a bad thing. Yet, it is largely true that those who publish fanzines actually love the methods and forms of fanzines as they have been.

Beyond that, it is difficult to generalize. Some of us are happy to edit our fanzines in a digital medium. It's cheaper, more convenient, and in principle ought to enable us to reach a much wider audience. Other fanzine editors insist on soiling paper. Much as I sympathize with them, I cannot afford to follow their example, and publish by PDF. Some fanzine editors produce both digital and paper editions of their zines. A few have given up the idea of single issues and linear page orders, and post their fanzine on-line as a website. I tend to wrinkle my nose in distaste—how can I even save this on my hard drive? Any time I want to read from such a “fanzine” I have to go on-line again, and deal with download times, pop-ups, scrolling, non-intuitive navigation and other irritations.

Nothing wrong with web sites for what they are, but why insist that urban graffiti on a wall is the same as a printed page? In my mind, websites are not and never will be magazines or fanzines, not even if they should drive the printed word to extinction.

They are different forms. Again, you say this as though it were a bad thing?

Content is an altogether trickier issue. For one thing, many of the Old School fanzine publishers have been reading SF and Fantasy for decades. Their interests changed over the years in different ways, too. Some seem to be as keen to read one-or-two hundred SF books a year as they were when they were 20. Most seem to form the habit of reading other genres as well . . . typically mysteries and historicals. I'm very fond of mysteries set in ancient Rome, for example. Some fans

even lose interest in SF and Fantasy altogether. I'm not quite that far gone, but I probably only read five or six new SF novels a year. From my point of view, there's very little that's genuinely new in the genre, merely variations on old themes. But even if I lost interest in SF entirely, why should I give up publishing a fanzine?

Perhaps I shouldn't call it an SF fanzine, though. I'll give you that. But in fact I do write about SF to some small extent in my own zine. In the last year I've written about collecting Isaac Asimov, the life of Judith Merrill, knowing Bob Tucker and reasons to admire Ferengi. I've even outlined the plot of a Bob and Doug McKenzie movie in which they go to Mars. What do you want from me? A confession? There, I admit it, I'm still sometimes a science fiction nerd. But a lot of the time, I'm not.

Of course, there's no reason why anyone would want to read what I write, when I'm not talking about Harry Turtledove or Robert J. Sawyer. I fool myself, perhaps, in thinking that my wit and worldly experience is reason enough to win the readers' interest. In my darker moods, I know this isn't so. More people are curious what John Scalzi writes to his mother on the back of a postcard than will ever care about anything I ever write, not even if I was an undiscovered Proust. You see, the “undiscovered” part is all important. The real consequence of the internet does not actually seem to be greater democratization of the literary world, but an even steeper climb to find readers. Once a site is popular, it may gain millions of readers more. But until then, it may as well not be online. Both me and Brad Foster had

blogs for a short while early in 2013. We both abandoned them when our readership plateaued around 13.

Those of us who publish, though, don't do it entirely for the feedback or the egoboo. That helps, but when you come right down to it, we publish the fanzines we publish because we love doing it. The readers don't have to love it too. It's enough that we the publishers do. And, once again, you say it as though it were a bad thing.

These young people . . . I ask you!

As for fandom at large, now that it consists mainly of people with little or no contact with generations before them, they may well wonder why Hugo awards exist to acknowledge the accomplishments of people and publications they've never heard of. Nor is there any way they could be aware of most of fandom's history. For 70 years fandom was a small, relatively cohesive body of insiders who had their fingers on the pulse of the SF genre. But that was when the number of readers was almost certainly in five figures, and the number who would ever choose to become active participants in the hobby were an order of magnitude smaller than that. With Marvel Comics making pseudo-sci fi movies several times a year, with *Star Trek* or *Star Wars* or *LotR* adding a blockbuster or two to the big screen every summer as well, the number of people who regard themselves as fans of SF or Fantasy may well run into the millions. Nothing about Old School fandom could have been expected to survive that. Fandom today cannot be cohesive or about insiders, indeed even the idea of having a history seems irrelevant. SF has arrived with

NASCAR, Burning Man and Twitter as part of Mass Culture. It may well re-invent itself in the same faceless, quicksilver, faddish, commercialized way as other Pop Cult Phenomenon. That's not for me to say. I won't have anything to do with the outcome, as will no single individual or small group of self-appointed Secret Masters. The fate of fandom may well be in the hands of the board of directors of Dragon Con instead, or Disney/Lucas pictures.

Do you wonder why I just want to publish my fanzine? I seem to think that at the bottom line, you're saying the same.

—*Taral Wayne*

Here's a new Canadian fanzine. Now, there's something I haven't been able to say (or type) in quite some time. Congratulations to all of you for producing *Ecdysis* 1, and thank you for something new. Time for a letter of comment.

I am sure you've heard over the last little while that only paper fanzines are worthwhile. Nonsense, sez I. The basic idea behind them is sharing ideas, communications, participation and community. Those of us who are a little pre-Web see worth and physicality in a paper fanzine. They are nice to have, but I am very aware of the enormous finances behind putting out your issue. E-zines are easier to store (just ask people who huge fanzine collections), much cheaper to distribute, and easier to create something with true graphic value. I think we are used to discrete issues of a publication, its collectors' value, and a linear way of reading publications, from start to end, in order to read and consume

all contents. The quality of content is indeed important, for many feel that reputations can be made on the quality of the writing, and in the fanzine past, they can be and were made.

I think growing audiences are not necessarily what the average faned or zine reader wants. Sure, we'd all like to see more people read and appreciate what we put together, but as long as we have readers within the fandom, and we get some positive feedback via the letter writers and the contributors contributing once again, and we get to participate, that may be all we really want. Many of the people in this fanzine fandom are quite set in their ways (so conservative in this rather liberal literature), and are clinging to something familiar in this very much changing overall SF fandom. (Wait until you get to that age, and you will probably find yourself yearning for the way things used to be.)

I have contributed to a blog or two, and I archive my letter writing on a LiveJournal account, but I have found that a blog entry, in this age of millions of blogs online, is a tiny needle in an enormous haystack. I appreciate the fact you see a difference between a blog and a fanzine . . . have a look at Nalini Haynes' *Dark Matter*. She started *Dark Matter* off as a fanzine, which got some feedback, especially from me, but because of the amount of news she received, and the fact that news can become stale quickly, she changed over to a blog, which better suits what she wanted to do. Unfortunately, with so many updates, often three or four a week, it becomes impossible to read and comprehend a discrete amount of writing and respond to it. The

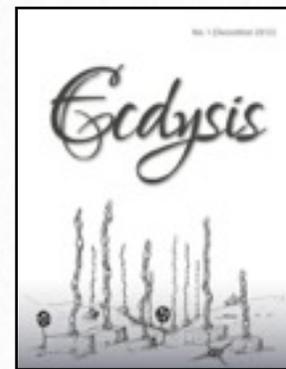
strength of a fanzine is that an issue can be worked upon, sent out to a potential audience rather than be passively posted on a blog, read and digested by the audience, and responded to for valuable feedback. I have to wonder if many bloggers are writing for an audience of zero. The fanzine provides the opportunity for sober second thought, instead of the sniping that easily appears in online discussion. I am glad that you are formatting your zine for newer technology, but not everyone has an iPad smartphone. I don't, and I am not likely to be able to afford one any time soon. As long as you still produce a readable format I can bring up on a desktop or laptop, great. If your only format is one that requires a particular reader to access, or if you have other parts of your zine unavailable to .pdf users, you will lose readers. Make your publication as accessible as possible on as many platforms as you want, and as many platforms as your readers need.

I certainly agree with you re aspiring writers. There's lots out there to promote them, and try to sell their works. I know many of them, and I know they try their best to promote themselves and sell their books, but there are times that this is all they have to say, or they comment on nothing else but their sales.

A Clockwork Fish . . . an interesting steampunkish essay, with some great steampunk artwork. If you would like to see this get more exposure in a steampunk magazine, for they do exist, let me know. Besides Chris Garcia's *Exhibition Hall*, there are amazingly complex graphic-busy zines that come out of Delaware and New Zea-

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land. Seeing these zines would also give you some more insight into fan-oriented zines.

The Imperial Torturers' Guild? There's a t-shirt waiting to be printed. On the back . . . the beatings will continue until morale improves? Same goes for the Quadrifolium Junior College. Something can be done with that to make sure nothing breaks copyright with J. K. Rowling or Lev Grossman or any other author who's written about a school of magic.

Yvonne and I went to one of the first Can-Cons some years ago, and found it so literary and full of self-promotion, the way you described the writing-industrial complex on page 5. At that Can-Con, I found little for me to do but be an eager and adoring audience to the authors in attendance. For me, a convention has some level of audience/fan participation. I am told that little has changed over the years. I would like to return to find out for myself, but I suspect there will be little interactivity. Prove me wrong, guys.

I think this has been an excellent first issue, and I am very interested to see what you have in mind for the second. The more we have discussions of fandom in the modern day, the more you can understand where 30+-year fandom veterans like me are coming from, and the more I can un-

derstand what newer fans want out of modern fandom themselves. See you with the next issue.

—Lloyd Penney

I think audience and feedback matter regardless of the format. I've been blogging since 2001, and I think a lot of blogs have suffered the fate of Brad's and Taral's: it's hard to go on if it seems like no one's reading. Your letters of comment are encouraging in exactly the same way that comments, reblogs and trackbacks are in the online world: they say that what we're doing is being read and considered.

*Ideas can't be copyrighted, or J. K. Rowling would have gone after Lev Grossman—and then Ursula Le Guin would have gone after Rowling: **A Wizard of Earthsea** predates **Harry Potter**, after all.*

It's safe to say that Can-Con has been in rebuilding mode for the past few years. Recent programming has still had a strong writerly focus (as well as a science track), but I hope to see that diversify as the convention grows.

Ecdysis welcomes letters of comment. Send yours to ecdysis@mcwetboy.net. Letters are lightly edited to correct typos, punctuation and spelling mistakes, simmered in a white wine sauce, and served on a celery root purée.