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Featured Review: *Wastelands: Stories of the Apocalypse*, edited by John Joseph Adams

Book Review by Matthew Appleton

Wow, it's amazing how long the Bush administration has employed saber-rattling as a major component of its Iranian diplomacy. Two years ago (see *Some Fantastic* #9), when reviewing the Bison Brooks reissue of Walter M. Miller Jr. and Martin H. Greenberg's *Beyond Armageddon*—an anthology that dealt overwhelmingly with survival after a nuclear apocalypse—I called its return to bookstores timely, given the Bush administration's threats to use nuclear weapons to deal with Iran's alleged nuclear weapons program. Luckily, given that the government hasn't nuked Iran yet, once again it's becoming easier to believe that if humankind self-destructs, it will be through alternative means. (Then again, maybe we should worry about a McCain presidency—after all, he just loves to sing a few bars of "Bomb, bomb, bomb, bomb Iran" to the tune of the Beach Boys's "Barbara Ann.") It's those different methods of self-destruction that form the heart of J. J. Adams's new anthology, *Wastelands: Stories of the Apocalypse*.

From the start, it's clear that Adams is interested in exploring the many ways other than war that could cause civilization to face its end. The anthology starts with Stephen King's matter-of-factly titled "The End of the Whole Mess." Indeed, humankind is dying out, and in this story we discover that while we are responsible for our own demise, it's not in the matter you might expect. The story is told from the perspective of Howard Morney, the younger brother of the man who thought he found the cure to humanity's incredibly impulsive violent streak. Howard helps his brother, Bobby, implement the solution, but as is often the case with most scientific discoveries, the law of unintended consequences holds sway and the cure will ultimately cause the extinction of the human race. However, the story also portrays a very complex relationship between the two brothers and highlights the type of love that one can only feel for a close sibling. Surprisingly, it manages this by evoking the pathos generated by Daniel Keyes's classic "Flowers for Algernon."

The cause of the downfall of civilization isn't so clear cut in the follow-up story, Orson Scott Card's "Salvage." It seems like that this is some sort of post-nuclear holocaust, but we can't be 100% certain of that. In fact, a lot of the stories in this anthology share this trait—the end has happened, but the de-

tails are either lost or not germane to the tale. In "Salvage," the characters primarily face the challenge of deciding what from the past needs or deserves to be salvaged. While the decision seems rather clear cut when it concerns some of the electronic and mechanical items that can be found in the ruins, the issue isn't quite so clear when a comes to religious matters. These spiritual issues arise during an illicit salvage operation in an abandoned Mormon temple in the underwater ruins of Salt Lake City. In particular, how do you maintain your faith after something as horrible as the apocalypse happens? What purpose does that faith continue to serve? Those who are familiar with Card's own beliefs can probably surmise the answers to these questions without reading "Salvage," but the storytelling is strong enough to overcome the predictability of those answers.

Adams then chooses to follow up "Salvage" with Paolo Bacigalupi's "People of Sand and Slag." I have to admit that I have loved this story ever since I felt read it in the February, 2004 issue of *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*. Given that it was nominated for both the Hugo and the Nebula awards, I clearly shared this sentiment with a large number of other readers. In fact, if "People of Sand and Slag" weren't in *Wastelands*, I probably would've spent time railing against Adams for not including it. While not explicitly stated, the degradation and poisoning of the environment is the cause of this apocalyptic future. In order to survive the toxic mess we've made of the planet, humans have bioengineered themselves to the point where they are not recognizably human. Yet a remnant of the old humanity suddenly comes to the foreground when a group of soldiers encounter a feral dog that has inexplicably survived the deadly landscape. Seeing as the dog shouldn't be alive, it's an incredible statement about the amazing durability and resiliency of life in such a hostile environment. Despite the obvious difficulties and financial hardships that keeping the dog as a pet would entail, the soldiers decide to keep him, only to discover that its care and feeding is much harder than anticipated. As it progresses, the story contains a couple of wonderfully ironic statements from the soldiers. While looking at the dog, one soldier notes, "Must be a bummer to wake up and find out you're at the end of your evolutionary curve," (p. 43), and later, when discussing how different they are from pre-bioengineered humankind:

> "It sure can make you think," I muttered. I fed Lisa another handful of sand. "If someone came from the past, to meet us here and now, what do you think they'd say about us? Would they even call us human?"
>
> Lisa looked at me seriously. "No, they'd call us gods." (p. 53)

Methinks Lisa might be mistaken—she is certainly wrong about how I view her and her comrades. The ending contains something of a sucker-punch to the gut, but even then Bacigalupi manages to infuse the story with the hope that remnants of humanity in this post-*Homo sapiens* species will find a way to assert itself.

Lisa and her comrades aren't the only individuals in the anthology to bear little resemblance to their human ancestors. In George R. R. Martin's "Dark Were the Tunnels," one of the few stories in the collection that actually could have appeared in *Beyond Armageddon* (only three of the stories in *Wastelands* are old enough for Miller and Greenberg to have considered for their anthology) we are treated to a story that gradually links together a couple of plotlines that ultimately reveal what has happened to humankind in this particular post-nuclear exchange world. After witnessing the two different types of humans that evolve post-holocaust (one from the moon colony that escaped the exchange unharmed, and the other the descendants on Earth who found a way to survive), it's easy to draw a parallel to the Morlocks and Eloi in H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine*. However, the parallel is solely at the surface level (so to speak), as the two groups of humans are actually only interacting for the first time when they finally meet at the end of the story.

Adams interestingly chooses Tobias S. Buckell's "Waiting for the Zephyr" to follow "Dark Were the Tunnels." I found this interesting because of the way the stories are really products of their times. Back in 1973 when Martin composed his tale, the threat of nuclear annihilation was arguably the biggest threat facing human civilization. Although it was written in 2002, Buckell's story seems almost prophetic in its description of a civilization attempting to continue without access to cheap oil. Although peak oil was a concept most people weren't aware of when Buckell

wrote "Waiting for the Zephyr," there were individuals discussing it at the time, and it's now something that seems to have finally arrived in 2008, at great cost to virtually everyone worldwide. The beauty of "Waiting for the Zephyr," however, is it's depiction of teen wanderlust and how it will still survive even in a time that running away from home is made much harder by the paucity of ways people can actually outrun anyone who might wish to chase them.

But if there's a common thread to all the stories in *Wastelands*, it's survival, and Cory Doctorow's "When Sysasdmins Ruled the Earth" perfectly exemplifies the notion that somehow and in some form, humankind will survive. Mind you, in this particular story the apocalypse is a rather disturbing one, and unlike most of the other stories in the anthology, we witness the destruction of civilization. In fact, given some of the descriptions of how people died, the story actually borders on horror. Ironically, one of the things that makes this particular apocalypse possible is the Internet, which was actually developed by the military as a way to maintain communications after a nuclear exchange. Yet, at the same time, it also ends up serving the purpose for which it was initially designed when the sysadmins do what they can to keep it running as a resource to keep humankind linked together while the world falls apart. Like so many of the stories in the anthology, this Locus Award-winning tale features an emotionally powerful ending that offers hope that humankind will survive while simultaneously maintaining a sense of realism about its prospects in regards to rebuilding civilization.

On the other hand, there's an argument to be made that maybe the human race doesn't deserve to survive. In James Van Pelt's "The Last of the O-Forms," we see humanity on the brink thanks to a sudden, utterly random and apparently irreversible series of genetic mutations that is also affecting most, if not all, animal life on the planet. The Nebula-nominated story focuses on Dr. Trevin's Traveling Zoological Extravaganza, a traveling freak show that became famous early in the mutation plagues ravishing Earth, before the mutations starting popping up everywhere and it became obvious they were unstoppable. Like most normal people, Trevin, the operator of Dr. Trevin's Traveling Zoological Extravaganza, is just trying to make a living the only way he knows how. However, unlike most other people, he is relying heavily on the help of his mutant daughter, whom he keeps hidden because human mutants are feared by the "normal" humans. Furthermore, he won't let her call him "Daddy," though she is fully aware of their relationship, and even more disconcertingly Trevin doesn't show any sort of paternal love. Instead, he treats her like a detestable underling undeserving of his love. Towards the end of the story, we have what should be a moving scene where Trevin reverses himself, opens his heart and arms to his little girl and rightfully reasserts his familial bonds. However, the way it happens is even more monstrous that the mutations he had been trying to make a living off of.

Given Trevin's disturbing behavior in "The Last of the O-Forms," maybe a higher power should finally intervene humankind in judgment; thus it only seems fit that there are religious apocalypses featured in *Wastelands*. In "Judgment Passed" (which is also the only original story in the in anthology), Jerry Oltion tells the story of the eight humans to survive the Biblical day of judgment. They were actually light years away from the Solar System, surveying star systems for possible colonization, when the rapture occurred, and when they returned there was no sign of human life left anywhere on either Earth or the lunar colonies. Adams informs us in the introduction that Oltion views religion as "a scourge on humanity" and that those views heavily informed the story. Thus it's no surprise that the majority of the crew from the colonization ship are essentially a bunch of rationalists, and they view the various newspaper reports with a degree of skepticism—even going so far as to state that if Judgment Day really did happen, then maybe it's a good thing that they were accidentally left behind. In fact, using the millions of stored ova on the colonization ship, they

Wastelands: Stories of the Apocalyose

Editor: John Joseph Adams
ISBN-10: 1597801054
ISBN-13: 978-0060846755
Publisher: Night Shade Books
Release date: January, 2008

$15.95, 352 pages, trade paperback

can rebuild civilization without God and religion to muck things up. However, when one of them decides that they need to somehow get God's attention, he also decides that if necessary he's willing to kill one of his shipmates to do so. When all is said and done, the story certainly shows a hostility toward those who seek to force their religious beliefs upon others and suggests that we're better off without religion.

Interestingly, although God doesn't actually appear in the anthology—only his potentiality and possible motives appear in "Judgement Passed"—Satan does show up in Elizabeth Bear's "And the Deep Blue Sea." Although most SF readers will readily recognize the post-apocalyptic landscape that dominates the story, Bear's tale is actually a bit more fantasy-based than most of the other stories. In it we are introduced to Harrie, a very reliable express messenger who is willing to cross the radiation-scarred, sun-baked southwest when other forms of transport and delivery are unable. It turns out that the reason she has been successful for many years is a deal with the devil that is due to run out soon. During the course of the journey covered by "And the Deep Blue Sea," Satan keeps presenting Harrie with a way to extend the deal, but at what might be great cost to hundreds of people relying on the timely delivery of her cargo. While most of the stories in the anthology are mostly about physical survival, "And the Deep Blue Sea" also serves as a convincing exploration of how to continue confronting someone like Satan even when you've already sold your soul to him.

Returning to less metaphysical issues, David Grigg's "A Song Before Sunset" tells the story of Parnell, an elderly musician who attempts to bring back one piece of pre-collapse civilization by restoring and retuning a grand piano so that he could play one last concerto. The story is very reminiscent of Edgar Pangborn's "A Master of Babylon" (a story that appeared in the before-mentioned *Beyond Armageddon*), in which an aging former concert pianist inadvertently loses everything when he attempts to maintain a connection with the first humans he encounters in years. Like the main character in Pangborn's tale, Parnell ultimately loses everything too, but for very different reasons. The end is wonderfully foreshadowed, and we're left wondering just how much the children who grow up after the apocalypse will respect the remaining high points of a culture that found a way to somehow destroy itself.

Overall, John Joseph Adams has done an amazing job putting together *Wastelands*. As long as this review is, it doesn't do the anthology justice. In the interest of relative brevity, I didn't discuss Octavia Butler's Hugo Award-winning "Speech Sounds," Neal Barrett, Jr.'s "Ginny Sweethips' Flying Circus" (which was nominated for both the Hugo and Nebula), Jack McDevitt's "Never Despair" or a few other stories also deserving of comment. Nearly all the stories Adams selected for *Wastelands* display the type of good storytelling, wonderful characters and insightful explorations of humanity (in other words, quality writing) that screams for rereading, and the sheer volume and diversity of post-apocalyptic tales should satisfy any fan of this particular form of SF. But if that isn't enough, Adams provides wonderful introductions to each story and closes the anthology with a bibliography of post-apocalyptic novels, collections, anthologies, and graphic novels, thus ensuring that any fan of this subgenre will find plenty of other sources for such fiction.

My only complaint about the anthology is a minor quibble involving story order. Roughly halfway through the anthology, Adams inserts Richard Kadrey's "Still Life with Apocalypse," a vignette that presents the world as seen by the unfortunate souls left to clean up and catalog the post-apocalyptic destruction. It's the type of story that seems to me would nicely close the collection. In addition, I would have placed Jack Langan's "Episode Seven: Last Stand Against the Pack in the Kingdom of the Purple Flowers" immediately after Dale Bailey's "The End of the World As We Know It," given that according to Adams's own introduction Langan's tale was influenced by Bailey's. But, as I already said, my objection to the story order is a minor gripe, and it should not be taken as a truly derogatory remark about the anthology.

Story order aside, *Wastelands* is an excellent anthology that belongs on the shelf of any SF fan, and not just fans of post-apocalyptic fiction. It's hard to imagine a better way to spend $15.95 on a themed collection of short fiction.

Matthew Appleton is the co-editor for Some Fantastic*, and he probably enjoys apocalyptic fiction just a little too much for his own good.*

The Two-Horse Hugo Race for Best Novel

by Christopher J. Garcia

Editor's Note: Chris wrote this before the announcement of the winners of the 2008 Hugo Awards.

Since they announced the 2008 Hugo nominees, I figured that there were only two novels that stood a chance at winning Best Novel: it was either Ian McDonald's *Brasyl* or Michael Chabon's *The Yiddish Policeman's Union*. One is a magnificent novel from a writer who really understands the multifaceted world in which we live and how science fiction should bounce off and around it. The other is a mainstream writer who writes genre and has managed to come up with one of the most explosive alternate history books ever written. It's beyond the boundaries of AltHist, as well as an amazing detective story. The battle between these two was fought from the moment Hugo voting opened to the moment it closed, and right now, as I write this, the battle is over but we still don't know who won (and maybe it was Stross or Scalzi or Sawyer who managed to pull out the unexpected win), but there is one thing for sure: These were the two most interesting cases to argue.

Let us start with the settings. *Brasyl* is set in... wait for it... Brazil, across three different time frames. One is more or less today, one is near-future, and one is the colonial past. These is an amazing amount of color to the settings. Each bursts forth with passion, panic, sorrow, and a heavy sort of celebration of those three emotions mixed together. It's an impressive feat to take three different worlds, and looking through the history of that part of the world, you'd have to go back to the pre-Cambrian to find another time more contradictory. McDonald manages to give them all the same sort of world-gone-mad sensation. If you take certain passages and compare them outside of the context, you can see the way he has painted impressionism, minimalism, and classicism all with the same brush. "The compline of the forest spoke around them: insects, frogs, shrieking birds of night passage." "The warm humidity held and amplified smells; the fruity, blousy sickliness of the bougainvilleas that overhung the fundacao's fighting yard, the rank smokiness of the roda, the honey-salt sweetness of the sweat that ran down Marcelina's arm, the fecund, nurturing sourness of her armpit." "By night it is extravagantly beautiful as twenty thousand oil-lanterns bob and play across the ridges and valleys." Any of those could play a part in any of the time streams that McDonald exposes. It's a world as wicked and untamed as any science fiction author has ever created.

Chabon's world may be stranger. It is Sitka, Alaska, the home of the Jews. In this America, a vote that did not happen in the 1940s to create a territory for Jews in exile happens, and success for the program leads to a Jewish territory in Alaska. That also leads to a city of more than 3 million being born in the long nights and cold days of the Alaskan shore. "...The whole Federal District of Sitka, a crooked parenthesis of rocky shoreline running along the western edge of Baranof and Chicagof islands..." is how Chabon describes the physical area, but that is not what Sitka is. Sitka is Chandler and Hammett's big cities with their dark alleys and their gunmen ready to jump at any moment. Sitka is Puzzo's tenements and row houses with buttonmen at the mattress. Sitka is Hard Case Crime come to life in literature. Or at least what commentators have taken for literature. It is a familiar world to anyone who has read crime novels, who has followed Mike Hammer into the fight or Sam Spade across the screen. It is, in fact, The Big Sleep, shining off the rough-edges pages of a detective-alternative history that is acceptable to the NPR set. In short, while the setting is nowhere near as vivid, the players on that stage are more powerful.

Every character in *Brasyl* is flawed, like any good character is, but each is flawed against the matte painting of their time. Marcelina Hoffman is that

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Brasyl

Author: Ian McDonald
ISBN-10: 1591025435
ISBN-13: 978-1591025435
Publisher: Pyr
Release date: May, 2007

$25.00, 357 pages, hardcover

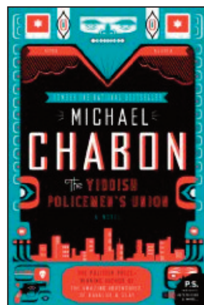
character, the one you know is flawed in so many ways, ways that may even represent everything you hate, but ends up being the one you come for. She is either an on-the-rise reality TV producer who takes on a mad new task or an insensitive, plateaued producer who goes for one last big score. It's interesting that I went back and forth between both of those thoughts at different points in the book. Her new project is downright cruel, and it seems like it'd be the project of a mind that is broken, leading me to want to think of her as trying to break through, but she pushes through, and other things like her practice of capoeira makes me want to think of her as on the rise. I dunno. The other character that hits is Father Quinn. He is the kind of priest sent on a mission that you want to be present in a story about such a country as 19th-century Brazil I also wished he had been the focus of the entire book, and in a way he may be seen as such, but he is hidden in a time stream, as it were, and is almost impossible to penetrate without rebuilding the entire story.

Meyer Landsman is to Chabon's novel as Hoffman is to McDonald's. The story of Meyer Landsman almost echoes the story of Sitka. Sitka once hosted a World's Fair, was a gleaming beacon with a bright future that failed. Landsman is a former hero, a homicide detective who once solved the greatest case in the history of Sitka and who blew everything with the bottle as his co-pilot. He's the kind of character who you want to succeed because you know that the only possible reality for that sort is failure and you want the surprise. There are a dozen other brilliant characters shining like diamonds in the exhaust-blackened snow. Tenenboym, the night manager of the flophouse where Landsman has folded himself to, is a greasy sort of stain on the page, but as little a part as he plays, he was the first figure to come to my mind. The Shemets family shows ups and down and sideways fortunes that bring to mind the Waltons, the Ambersons, and any family from any Lars Von Trier film. The murdered Emanuel Lasker comes across in bits and pieces, but before you know what's happening, you're sure you can draw him from memory. He is the fallen son, the junky who rises slightly from his ashes every time he takes up his pieces in a game of chess. He is one of those sorts: flawed but glowing. Berko Shemets is the kind of half-blood character that you'd expect to find in novels from Bay Area authors.

The language of the two books share much. They are both peppered with a strong flavor of their place. There is Portuguese all over *Brasyl*, Yiddish all over *The Yiddish Policeman's Union*, but it is not just the vocabulary that they push. It is the power. There are words that only have power in the world when uttered against the language we understand. Yiddish is the ultimate seasoning language. There's a sense of English-ism having taken over portions of *Brasyl*, and there are points where you know you are reading everything in metaphysical babelfish translation. It works better for Chabon, but it leaves much to think about in McDonald.

And then there's the difference, and ultimately what will make one of these stories take home a rocket: *Brasyl* is science fiction. If Asimov were to rise from the grave and pick it up, he'd say that it was SF, no question. If you were to tell the story to Jules Verne, he'd wonder what sort of madness you were suffering from, but then he'd say that it was scientific fantasy. That is the power of the book. It is science fiction and of a kind that is of the now. When the history of science fiction from 2000 to 2010 is written, McDonald will be included. He'll be lauded for understanding the possibilities of quantum variation and multiculturalism and how technology and the Second and Third World ebb, flow, react, and interact. Chabon is literature. It is not a detective novel or an alternate history tale. It is a novel for the mainstream, the hipsters who wouldn't touch genre unless it was coated in Telegraph Avenue cred. And this is positively dredged through that Terry Gross and Larry King visibility. The man won a Pulitzer, for Christ's sake! But does that mean that it's not good alternate history? That it's something less, or more, than a genre novel? I don't buy that argument, and I never have. There's no difference between a novel with one name and the same novel with a different

The Yiddish Policemen's Union



Author: Michael Chabon
ISBN-10: 0007149832
ISBN-13: 978-0007149832
Publisher: Harper Perennial
Release date: April, 2008

$15.95, 464 pages, trade paperback

name. You can compare Iain Banks and Iain M. Banks, and there's no difference, though many will argue the other way. There's no difference between Kurt Vonnegut before he said he wasn't a science fiction author and the day after. It's still masterful genre work that Chabon has constructed.

Now, with two books this different, you have to think of several things that will tip a scale one way or another. Chabon is a factor. He has something of the too-smart literaryist to him. He always defends genre writing, which is nice (especially if you're his favorite: Ursula K. LeGuin), but his defenses are always based on reason instead of emotion. That's bad, as genre is the Literature of Emotion (That's a whole 'nother article!) and that hurts him. On the other hand, people love McDonald for *River of Gods*, which was a great book (I think *Brasyl* is better) and lost the Hugo to some book about a couple of magicians in 19th-century England. Go figure. That's why he might win.

Of course, with them splitting a segment of the vote, it could be someone else with the King of Nicknacks on their mantel.

Christopher J. Garcia edits The Drink Tank, *the twice Hugo-nominated fanzine, on* eFanzines.com *and is a writer, filmmaker and historian from San Jose, CA. He has had his work appear a bunch of places a bunch of times and he is damn proud of it.*

Fray, written by Joss Whedon, illustrated by Karl Moline & Andy Owens

Graphic Novel Review by Hawk

Meet the new Slayer, not the same as the old Slayer. Buffy Summers grew up a semi-spoiled child in sunny Los Angeles before moving to Sunnydale and learning of her destiny. In *Fray*, written by Joss Whedon (*Amazing X-men*, *Buffy: Season Eight*, *Serenity*), penciled by Karl Moline (*Route 66*, *The Loners*, *Buffy: Season Eight*) and inked by Andy Owens, Melaka Fray grew up in dirty Haddyn, with no parents to speak of and estranged from her last living sibling. Neither Slayer began knowing anything about her destiny; however, at least Buffy had a sane Watcher. Fray gets dumped into her destiny with no preparation, no Slayer dreams, and only a demon as a pseudo-Watcher. It's been 200 years since a Slayer has been called. The previous Slayer beat back yet another apocalypse and sealed the world from magic. No more Slayers, no more witches, no more vampires… until now.

What's changed to bring them back? No one knows, but Melaka Fray's needs to fulfill her destiny. Melaka's working with a demon who has his own agenda, vampires who mysteriously know her name, and a sister who alternates between protecting her and blaming her for the death of Melaka's twin. In between, she works at "grabbing" for the big crime boss of the west side of town. Melaka is crude, rude, self-centered, and helps the dregs of the Haddyn warren. Once she knows her destiny, however, she does her best to fulfill it—while making a little money on the side. One does have to live, after all. Even while an apocalypse is bearing down upon you.

Fray has Joss Whedon's trademark humor and satire, along with gorgeous art by penciler Karl Moline. In a future where radiation makes many humans look like demons and monsters, Moline creates realistic looking mutants that Fray interacts with on a regular basis. Unlike many comic artists, Moline does not foist big-breasted women and overly muscled men upon our eye. You almost believe you could go to the corner store and meet the people that Melaka Fray interacts with—despite, of course, the fact that they look like something from an irradiated science fiction future.

As is the (unfortunate) hallmark of any comic that deals with fight scenes, Moline has drawn huge,

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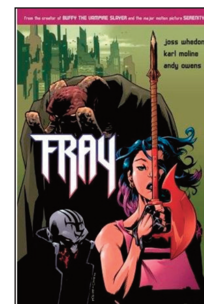
Fray

Writer: Joss Whedon
Illustrators: Karl Moline & Andy Owens
ISBN-10: 1569717516
ISBN-13: 978-1569717516
Publisher: Dark Horse
Release date: January, 2003

$19.95, 216 pages, trade paperback



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overreaching, splash page fight scenes. The splash fight scenes are filled with people kicking and shooting and rending each other into smaller bits. As in any comic that uses this trope, those panels are muddled and hard to piece together. However, when we are not looking at the obligatory fight scene panels, that's when Moline's art shines.

As an added bonus for buying the trade (rather than owning this in the original monthly comic book format), Moline has added bits from his sketchbook in the back of the trade. Even if you own the original comics (as I do), it's worth taking a look at the trade to see this sketchbook.

Reading *Fray*, one can tell how Joss Whedon used this as his first foray into both comics and futuristic visions. Melaka's speech is peppered with enough phrasing for her to sound like she's from a distant future, but not enough that she is incomprehensible to us. Flying cars, a reimagined New York… one can see in these images where it looks like Whedon pulled together some ideas for *Firefly* and *Serenity*.

Fray will suck you in and take you on a non-stop roller coaster of a ride. I recommend you have a few hours to yourself when you start reading it, as you won't want to put it down.

Fray should be rated PG-13 for some violence, references to sex, and mild swearing. If you enjoy reading this, you'll want to follow-up by reading *Buffy: Season Eight*. Volumes 1 and 2 are currently out in trade; in either Volume 3 (which should be released in November) or Volume 4, Melaka Fray will make her reappearance.

Hawk lives in California with her husband, where she spends almost too much of her time reading comics. When not fulfilling her addiction, she can be found reading books, hiking, researching, or enjoying non-computer gaming.

Weird Tales, The 21st Century: Volume One, edited by Stephen H. Segal and Sean Wallace

Book Review by Danny Adams

Weird Tales hardly needs any introduction; it was already established as a major source of horrific, macabre, and downright strange fiction by the end of the Jazz Age. It carried on through the Great Depression, World War Two, and the early Baby Boom and then was reborn in the 1980s to give voice to an old tradition: the weird and surreal mixed with sharp, modern storytelling. The original version brought names like H. P. Lovecraft and Ray Bradbury to the fore; these days it can provide you with speculative stars including Barth Anderson, Lisa Matchev, Kurt Newton, and Richard Parks, all of whom appear in this anthology. And this anthology, like the magazine itself, proves that *Weird Tales* doesn't just accommodate the horrific and macabre but any simply downright *weird* story that might not find a home and an audience anywhere else.

The opening piece, Richard Parks's "The Man Who Carved Skulls," is an excellent example of the chasm that can separate cultural perspectives: What seems darkly revolting to us is simply another culture's norm. In this case the norm is that the greatest honor you can do someone (and, at least in this case, the greatest act of love) is how your skull might be turned into an artistic masterpiece after your death. Parks is usually seen as a historical fantasy author, appearing in *Realms of Fantasy*, but now he turns that talent to giving us an age-old tradition packed into a few pages where the shadows of death are mixed from equal amounts of dark and light.

Another such turnabout occurs in, appropriately, the last story, "The Release" by Kurt Newton. How we define "release" compared with a culture that's non-human is vastly different, to say the least,

in this story of manipulation and a love that's used for selfish ends by one of the partners. Newton effectively portrays a narrator who is trapped by love and upbringing. Caught in a relationship that has ground him down so hard for so long, all he can do for himself is pitifully beg to be "released" by his partner... someday, at a time she chooses, which he repeatedly hopes will be today.

Lisa Mantchev's "Six Scents" is, as the blurb on the back cover puts it, about "a brain-eating zombie girl who nonetheless makes a surprisingly good date." I admittedly came into this one with trepidation, as the surplus of zombie stories over the past few years has led me to avoid most of them. But Mantchev's story keeps a keen edge to it at all times; it makes you feel as if you're walking the edge of that blade, and she throws in both a compelling wryness—like the main character's line "I wasn't taking that, even from a masked psychotic"—and a familiar face at the end who pinches more than twists the story.

Trent Hergenrader's "Working Out Our Salvation" throws a dark spin on a father's love for his son—a love (if you can really call it that in the end) so great that the coal miner father, Charlie, keeps returning home no matter how often he is killed, be that death by mine collapse, explosion, or what have you. Needless to say this sets a bad example for his son, Johnny. Hergenrader's writing is appropriately understated, perfectly reflecting the reaction of Charlie's neighbors, employer, and the family who takes in Johnny. By the end of the story, you feel as if you've sunk deep into a mine yourself, where the light is fading and you didn't even realize you were dropping.

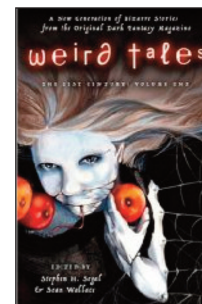
Reading "Bob Bodey's Body Parts" is like watching the proverbial train wreck: no matter how gruesome it gets, you find yourself compelled to keep watching until the grinding end. Bob is a loser who discovers a gumball machine selling real (if often miniature) body parts and tries his (poor) luck with them. Suffice it to say that sometimes things really are what they seem, and this isn't always a good thing.

One thing this new generation of *Weird Tales* does consistently well is to pick stories that find new ways to twist myth and folklore to their own (often wicked) purposes, and there are three good examples in the anthology: the back-to-back tales "Ravenous" by Phil Brucato and "Spider Comes Home" by Gerard Houarner, and "The Furious Host" by Barth Anderson.

All three contain a search of some sort: The narrator of "Ravenous," Nikita, wants to be a rock star and is searching for her own identity, but her friend Kelsey is already everything that Nikita wants to be. Truth be told, Kelsey isn't just a friend but a creature called from Elsewhere by Nikita as a child. Ravenous is the name of their heavy metal band but also the best description of their relationship, which by their teen years turns almost vicious, even while the two young women are locked in a symbiosis that Nikita doesn't quite understand. Nikita's tone throughout the story is smart but sardonic and edgy, with the right touch of insecurity too common in those years.

Spider in "Spider Comes Home" is the mythological Trickster, the one everyone blames for problems, ill luck, and any strange happening, but in reality he's been gone for a long, long while and is only now ending the search for his way home. No one can see him except for a boy, Dia, who has heard the Spider stories in his village but is willing to give this strange, elderly-looking, casual fellow the benefit of the doubt. Dia also thinks that he might be able to trick the Trickster into behaving himself, or at least leaving his village alone. Houarner's writing turns less concrete and increasingly surreal as the meeting between Spider and Dia lengthens, particularly when they come into a realm of stories, as it were; occasionally the language can be a little disconcerting, but overall the surreality is how it should be—one is dealing with an ancient mythical being, after all—and the concreteness returns, but with a special gift, when Dia reawakens into the "real" world.

Weird Tales, The 21st Century: Volume One



Editors: Stephen H. Segal & Sean Wallace
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ISBN-13: 978-0809562812
Publisher: Prime Books
Release date: November, 2007

$6.95, 206 pages, trade paperback

“The Furious Host” sees a group of friends—led by a ringleader in the form of the increasingly mad Charlotte—seeking out a Germanic Otherworld that Charlotte’s father accidentally discovered some years past during a mighty storm. It’s obvious early on that Charlotte has been “touched” by these powers, but her friends don’t realize this in the beginning—possibly because they’re all male (we do tend to be rather oblivious much of the time), and also likely because the search for this Otherworld involves a number of steps that incorporate (German) bar-hopping. But storms can bring primal energy to the fore against all rationality and education—even more so if you’ve already been touched by the time you start your quest—and the danger of pursuing living myths can come from inside as well as out. Anderson does a fine job of letting us see every step of the friends’ quest, which continues even when it’s clear that maybe turning around and going back to their normal lives might not be such a bad idea.

Similarly, “For Fear of Dragons” by Carrie Vaughn is a fairy tale takeoff and the “simplest” story in the book, told straightforwardly about a young virgin forced to become a dragon’s sacrifice—except she goes to her fate willingly, having another plan in mind when she finally meets the dragon. Vaughn puts a nice spin on the idea of gratitude not always being what it should—and sometimes coming from the strangest places—and weaves a tale that’s a welcome departure from the unrelenting dark edge in many of the stories preceding it.

Animal stories can be hard to do well, but there are two in the anthology that pull this “genre” off well. “The Past Never Dies” by Holly Phillips teams up a psychic woman with a psychic dog based on the connection that both are badly affected from deaths caused by a murderous arsonist. Moreover, the story gives us both human and canine points of view, and the dog’s comes across as believable and sympathetic without being too over the top. Finding the arsonist almost comes across as too easy, but overall the story is taut and tense and does a great job of portraying in a short space how the clairvoyant “gift” can often have disastrous consequences in people’s personal lives.

I mentioned above that *Weird Tales* has often been a home to the odd story that might not find a place anywhere else, and the second animal story, Paul E. Martens’s “What Happened When Tammy Brookmeyer Sold Her House,” is a tongue-in-cheek piece about a neighborhood being thrown into an uproar when an asocial bear moves into the title character’s home. A gaggle of problems now face the neighbors: What sort of food do you bring to welcome him? What do you do if he doesn’t send an RSVP to your barbecue? How do you approach him about his killing someone who confronts him about his loud music? And finally, how do you handle the gossip that he might be having an affair with the local animal rights activist? Martens throws a fun new spin on the whole idea of clashing cultures right in your own backyard.

Finally, Peadar O Guilin’s “The Drain” tells of how dark magic can become self-perpetuating down through the ages at a price—taken, of course, from those closest to the one who controls the magic. The story suffered somewhat from predictability; I guessed early on how the suffering character would relieve himself of the magic, for instance, though not *exactly* how. But the writing still handles the familiar theme well, and the girl Paula is well-drawn and believable as the young innocent who becomes a sort of mediator between the two who have been affected most by a magical icon, for good or ill.

Overall the quality of the stories in this first volume varied somewhat, but all were solid, enjoyable reads and left me—perhaps *hungering* is the appropriate word to use when discussing *Weird Tales* fiction—for the next volume. Regardless of what one thinks of the health of the speculative short story market, the stories the genre is producing are still vibrant, and this new series of the 21st-century *Weird Tales*.

Danny Adams is the author of the short novel The City Beyond Play*, co-authored with Philip Jose Farmer and available for purchase from PS Publishing. In addition, his shorter works have appeared or are forthcoming in magazines such as* Abyss & Apex, Andromeda Spaceways Inflight Magazine, The Mount Zion Speculative Fiction Review, Mythic Delirium, Not One Of Us, Star*Line, Strange Horizons*, and* Weird Tales. *He and his wife Laurie live deep in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia with four cats who never fail to provide thrilling wonders, dangerous adventures, and chilling perils!*

Enchanted, Widescren Edition

DVD Review by Caroline-Isabelle Caron

The *Enchanted* DVD embodies everything that I dislike about Disney. As is the case with every Disney DVD, it is a blatant advertisement for other Disney products, from more DVDs (and their new venture into BluRay) to Disneyland/-world/-planet, and let's not forget the all-inclusive Disney Fairy Tale Weddings (no kidding). Let's sell the kiddies some more stuff! The overtly commercial objectives are quite irksome. There are laws against this type of advertising toward children on television, but there is no such ban on a home video. However, the obvious (more Disney stuff!) and subtle (Coke) product placements are the least of parents' problems when it comes to *Enchanted*.

Disney Does Meta... Badly

The concept of *Enchanted* is to give homage to all the Disney classic fairy-tale movies, starting with *Snow White* on down to *Beauty and the Beast*. Being a fan of classic fairy tales, I have read and reread all of the Brothers Grimm, Mother Goose, Charles Perreault, Hans Christian Andersen, as well as Aesop and La Fontaine (in the original language when possible). Furthermore, I do love Disney's *Snow White*, *Cinderella*, and *Sleeping Beauty*. They mostly follow the traditional stories, and the songs still sound great. Anyone who knows me knows I liked *Beauty and the Beast*. It is very different from Madame Leprince de Beaumont's story and Jean Cocteau's oneiric film adaptation, but it's well done. *Enchanted*'s every scene was inspired by a scene from a previous Disney animated feature. In fact, the BluRay version offers a guessing game and menu buttons leading to the original sequences and back. Disney included an advertisement to that effect on the DVD for all to see.

The story is simple: Giselle (Amy Adams), a fairy-tale (i.e., animated) princess-to-be finds herself thrown into real-world New York by the evil sorceress Queen Narissa (Susan Sarandon). Her beau, Prince Edward (James Marsden), rushes into this terrible world of woe to save her, while she is helped by divorce lawyer Robert Philip (Patrick Dempsey) and his daughter Morgan (Rachel Covey). Romance ensues, and the humans break into song while the chipmunk Pip grumbles. It could have been a very neat idea, merging fairy-tale romance with real-world concerns while bringing a little joy all around. However, instead of giving homage to the marvellous metanarratives that have instructed and entertained children and adults for centuries, writer Bill Kelly and producers Barry Josephson and Barry Sonnefeld have created a sort of Fairy-Tale Goulash.

Enchanted's plot is so muddled and yet so formulaic, almost cut-and-paste, that the movie becomes rather boring despite many great little insights, such as Pip being unintelligible in the real world (and rather coarse in animation). However fun, these tidbits don't make up for the general sense of artificiality of the storyline. There is a fine line between a fairy tale where the ending must be expected in order for the moral of the story to be apparent and a plot where everything, even the "twists," are completely predictable.

Frankly, only the two live-action song sequences perfectly hit their marks, both in referencing and renewing the musical genre. They are in fact delightful. The first is a requisite nod to both *Snow White* and *Cinderella*. Giselle, finding the state of Robert's condo unacceptable, calls to her animal friends to help her clean the place. Of course, this being Manhattan and not the Enchanted Forest, only pigeons, rats, and cockroaches come to help. The whole sequence is quite funny. With her new friends, she sings the "Little Happy Working Song," and the creatures perform a perfectly choreographed cleaning dance. A short featurette shows how director Kevin Lima worked with animal handlers to pull off both real physical effects and prepared for later CGI effects included in the sequence.

The second and by far the better of the two musical sequences has Giselle and Philip dancing and prancing around Central Park, signing "That's How You Know." In every way, this is the homage to 1950s musicals that the entire movie should have been. The song is spot on, the dozens of dancers are perfect, the choreography is grandiose, and the photography follows suit. It is simply marvellous. The included featurette offers wonderful trivia about how the whole large-scale performance was put together. There are interviews with the musicians and dancers, some of them Broadway and movie veterans from the 1960s. Imminently enjoyable.

Much less entertaining is the final featurette on the filming of the ball sequence. Though Susan Sarandon is at the heart of it, we see precious little of her and are mostly shown how the special effects and extras were coordinated. The blooper reel mostly shows the actors laughing, and the deleted scenes were deleted for very good reasons. Finally the flash-animated "Pip's Predicament: A Pop-Up Adventure" is nothing short of boring and useless.

All Our Base Are Belong to Disney

The gravest problem with *Enchanted* is not its derivative nature *per se*, nor its lack of depth, but rather a result of both. In their wish to celebrate the great cinematic legacy of Disney fairy tales, the writer and producers chose the most famous elements of of those specific animated movies. What is most remembered about *Snow White*? "One Day My Prince Will Come" and the poisoned apple. What is most memorable about *Sleeping Beauty*? Certainly Maleficent's transformation into a dragon. What about *Cinderella*? No doubt the scene where her animal friends help her sew her dress for the Prince's ball. In one way or another, these elements are all found, barely disguised, in *Enchanted*. Giselle herself is derived from every classic Disney princess. And there is the crux of the problem. Because most of the classic Disney fairy tales are not remembered for their messages, but rather for these contextually specific elements, *Enchanted*'s ultimate lesson is not a healthy one.

Where *Snow White* can be interpreted to impart a lesson about a daughter leaving her father's home, where *Cinderella* is about using ingenuity to fight adversity, where *Sleeping Beauty* speaks of patience, *Enchanted*'s message seems at first to be that it is okay to believe in fairy tales. Unfortunately, *Enchanted* urges children to believe in *Disney's* fairy tales. I am on record as scolding Disney for their more recent fairy-tale movies and their advertising around "the princesses." Disney's systematic attempts to glue a happy ending onto all the stories they adapt has created extremely paradoxical, if not frankly obnoxious, storylines. What they have done to *The Little Mermaid* is inexcusable (and the fact that they just released a prequel is even worse). If the mermaid does not die in the end, how are little girls supposed to learn the vital lesson that changing oneself to find love is dangerous and tragic? If she miraculously transforms into a human because of the strength of her love, what message are we teaching our children? I live in fear of what Disney would do the Oscar Wilde's *The Happy Prince*. This last great fairy tale must end with the Prince's statue's broken heart and the dead bird thrown together into a pile of refuse. Otherwise, how are we to learn the lesson about charity and selflessness? I shudder to think of the Disney movie, with the statue miraculously regilded and the bird revived by the magic of collective gratitude or something.

This is the true message of *Enchanted*: women find happiness in love and family. They can have careers if they must, but marriage is where happiness is. Giselle ends up happily settled with Robert and his daughter. His former romantically deprived girlfriend, Nancy (Idina Menzel), marries Prince Edward in the animated kingdom of Andalasia, and she *destroys her cellphone*, thus abandoning her career as fashion designer for love.

If this is the message Disney wishes for the

***Enchanted*, Widescreen Edition**

DVD Release Date:	March, 2008
Starring:	Amy Adams, Patrick Dempsey, James Marsden, Timothy Spall, Rachel Covey & Susan Sarandon
Director:	Kevin Lima
Screenwriter:	Bill Kelly
Rated:	PG
Number of Discs:	1
Studio:	Walt Disney Video
Special Features:	Featurettes: "Fantasy Comes to Life," "Happy Working Song," "That's How You Know," & "A Blast at the Ball"; outtakes; deleted scenes; animated short: "Pip's Predicament: A Pop-Up Adventure."

youth of tomorrow, especially for our daughters, then I want no part of it. There are a bazillion other tales, animated or otherwise, from Disney and others, that can entertain every member of the family and provide a true, up-to-date message. There are better, smarter, more fun stories out there for our children to watch and read, that give much better messages than *Enchanted* provides.

Caroline-Isabelle Caron is a history professor taking a sabbatical year off. So whatever is happening at the university at which she works, she does not care much.

Lords of Creation Series: *The Sky People* & *In the Courts of the Crimson Kings*, by S. M. Stirling

Book Reviews by Danny Adams

Pulp-style adventure science fiction short stories are enjoying a renaissance these days, both in terms of quantity and respectability. A lot of readers are discovering that, with doses of more modern writing styles, sensibilities, and scientific knowledge, adventure can be *fun*. Even so, novel-sized pulp SF has been much harder to come by, much less such novels written by an author as well-known in the field as S. M. Stirling. Now Stirling has added another twist: Very much as a tribute to classic writers such as Edgar Rice Burroughs, Leigh Brackett, Ray Bradbury, Philip Jose Farmer, Robert Heinlein, and others (all of whom are mentioned in his acknowledgements), he has written a sort of alternate history where the early pulp writers were spot on in their descriptions of Venus and Mars, right down to the human cultures that have arisen there.

In fact, Stirling takes his Burroughs tribute farther still. There are shades of Amtor from the Carson Napier of Venus series in Stirling's verdant, Cretaceous-like Venus, at least as far as the climate goes; savages abound, though while Amtor also possessed some high technology, Stirling's most advanced Venusians live at the rough equivalent of Earth's Bronze Age. And Stirling's Mars is almost pure Barsoom in its physical layout, a dry world where life clings in small pockets (including underground) amidst the remnants of dead cities and canals built when the planet was more lush.

All of the standard pulp elements are found throughout both books: along with rollicking adventure, there are sword fights, mind control, men versus machines, machines with the capability of mind control, zeppelins (built in part from the innards of native animals), pirates, savages, dinosaurs and prehistoric mammals like mammoths and sabertooth tigers, lost cities and their lost treasures, characters with dark secrets, and of course beautiful princesses (or the local equivalent of a princess).

Stirling turns many of these old conventions on their head, though: when our heroes are heading towards a lost city on Mars, for example, we expect them to find lost treasure because that's usually what happens in such a situation, and you may even guess what sort of treasure is in the offing, but finding it makes the characters' worlds much more complex, to say the least. While the Martian princess of *Crimson Kings* may remind the reader a lot of Dejah Thoris, she's the absolutely last character in the book you'd expect to sit around passively awaiting a rescue. In fact she's more likely to be the one rescuing the book's male hero. And it's worth nothing that Stirling makes numerous references to pulp and other SF forms throughout the book, including a ship named the *Brackett* and an alternate popular SF TV show called *New Frontier*. The title of the series itself harkens back to Eando Binder, while *The Sky People* carries shades of Poul Anderson.

Oh—but what are the books *about*?

In Stirling's alternate universe, the 19th- and early 20th-century speculations about life on Venus and Mars—by both scientists and writers—proved true, and after probes on each planet by Earth's two great powers—the United States and "Eastbloc," led

The Sky People

Author: S. M. Stirling
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by the Asian Communist nations—discovered life, the space race began in earnest. Both powers sent manned expeditions to the planets, and both established permanent bases. By the time each book takes place—*The Sky People* in 1988 and *Crimson Kings* in 2000—Earth humans are fairly well established on both, though few in number since the costs of sending them and supplies is extremely prohibitive. Politics between the two powers abounds not just directly, but also through the Earth humans trying to influence the cultures and politics of Venus and Mars, with varying degrees of success—or backlash.

The Sky People is almost pure Philip Jose Farmer: its hero, a Louisiana Cajun named Marc Vitrac, starts off ordinary enough—as ordinary as you can be if you're one of the select few chosen to go interplanetary, which is to say hardly ordinary at all—but proves himself strong, virile, and adventurous; he rescues a young greatwolf that becomes his pet, is perfectly willing and able to go native when it means survival, and even falls in love with the book's primary heroine. (Not to mention the fact that there are zeppelins. Only the riverboats are missing.) Venus's technological culture is primitive compared to Earth, but they have a long history filled with storytelling and deeply traditional rituals. In the process of searching the wilderness for a lost Eastbloc pilot, Vitrac meets and falls in love with the native heroine, Teesa, and together they discover that up until about 200 million years ago, Venus was... well, the Venus that we know in our universe. It becomes clear that there was conscious meddling going on, and it is Vitrac who comes up with the name Lords of Creation to describe who he thinks did the meddling.

In the Courts of the Crimson Kings is more Burroughs, Brackett, and Bradbury and also opens with a tribute to classic SF authors who happened to be watching the Mars probe landing during the 1962 WorldCon. (Another two more recent authors—or would-be authors in this universe—show up halfway through the book.) Mars is a slowly but inexorably dying world whose one empire, which reigned for nearly 40,000 years, has long since seen its glory days, but is still more technologically advanced than Earth when it comes to biological science because biology is everything, or more specifically genomes are. Your bloodline determines everything about your place in society, all encased in hidebound rules and traditions dating back to an age when Neanderthals still roamed the Earth. Playing politics doesn't go over well on Mars at all, and the Eastbloc pioneers have discovered this to their sorrow; as one of the American characters notes, the Terrans are there only at the Martians' sufferance. Also, there is equality between the sexes, and the book's main warrior hero is not the male explorer, Jeremy Wainman, but a woman named Teyud from the ancient Martian imperial warrior caste, Thoughtful Grace. The action culminates in the vast, millennia-old imperial city built on and buried within Mons Olympus, the 70,000-foot-high mountain with the 400-mile wide base that astronomers and SF writers have been poring over for more than a century. Stirling's descriptions of the city, Dvor Il-Adazar, are themselves worth reading the book up until that point.

What Stirling has done is to incorporate all the fun of pulp adventures and planetary romances without the purple prose or one-dimensional characters that stereotyped so much of the genre's earlier versions. Both books tend to be fast and sometimes even breezy reads—particularly the action scenes—but also incorporate realistic discussions about parallel evolution, anthropology, biology, and even linguistics (reminiscent of Farmer again, or even the non-pulp Suzette Haden Elgin to some extent). But don't expect hard SF; scientific speculation never gets in the way of first contact, intrigue, sabotage, big scary monsters, prison/dungeon breaks, fisticuffs, dart gun fights, and of course, boy gets girl—or just as accurately, girl gets boy.

The end of *Crimson Kings* opens almost limitless possibilities for Stirling to continue the series. Admittedly I caught myself hoping for a few moments that the next book might be a hollow Earth story a là Burroughs's Pellucidar. (That would be a harder sell, I'm sure, even in Stirling's alternate reality.) I don't know what Stirling will hatch up next, but I'm certain it's going to be a wild ride.

In the Courts of the Crimson Kings

Author: S. M. Stirling
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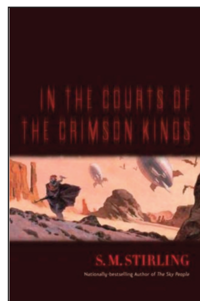

A Fable of Tonight Series: *Stalking the Unicorn* & *Stalking the Vampire*, by Mike Resnick

Book Reviews by Christopher J. Garcia

Let's talk mileage. Every character has a certain amount of mileage that can be dragged out of it. Sometimes it's almost endless how much energy you can suck out of a player, like Indiana Jones, James Bond, or Sherlock Holmes. Other times, you feel like you're dry by the second frame, like Remo Williams, Austin Powers, or the *Dude, Where's My Car?* guys. It happens a lot in fantasy: series that run on for books and books based on characters who you'd rather discover have fallen over a Swiss waterfall than have returned to the pages. Some authors make a living on those characters—*cough,* Robert Jordan, *cough*—and they tend to gather some scorn.

Mike Resnick has created a fine character in *Stalking the Unicorn* and carried him forward. Mike Resnick's greatest creation is a certain P.I. by the name of Mallory. Now, if there was ever a name for a detective, it's Mallory. John Justin Mallory. I would say it's a name that would investigate a murder simply because it was there, but it would require a reader to have a knowledge of the history of Mt. Everest, and I can't assume that. Anyhoo, Mallory is a detective who would be a cliché if Resnick hadn't meant him to be one. He's every detective Humphrey Bogart or ever played. (It doesn't quite shock you to find Bogart making an appearance in the book.) Mallory's wife done run off with his partner, and then an elf named Murgensturm pops in to his office. Yes, it's one of *those* kinds of novels. For me, a guy who loves detective stories (and especially 1940s noir pictures), this is the perfect blending of the genres. The problem is, there's another genre popping into frame: humor.

Now, I'm not a humorless reader. I like comedy. Heck, the typo I made when I typed that last sentence is also true: I live comedy. The problem is here it shows up all over the place and at times feels worn, maybe even too heavy. There's an exchange in the middle of the book (In incredible brief: Why not on Sundays? We're closed on Sunday.) that I almost wanted to carry with gloves because it's an antique. The jokes are good, and the general tone is light, but it muddies the novel, makes it feel as if you can't take it seriously because it's not serious, much the same way that you can't take The Man With Bogart's Face seriously because it's not serious. Then again, if you took that seriously, you'd be in more trouble than you know.

That said, the main character has legs. He's punchy and wry, a hard-drinking dick with the kind of deep pain that only a dame with legs up to here could tame. Of course, he's based on every successful detective who's ever made it to page or screen. That's one of the fun bits, finding all the stuff that you know Resnick put in his pocket from others' noir leavings. It's an awesome little thing. The book certainly reads better to the detective fan in me than the fantasy fan in me. I know. I asked them.

Mallory has something going for him as the story wraps up. He decides to stay in the alternate Manhattan where the elf came from. He has a new Girl Friday and of course, Colonel Winnifred Carruthers at his side to help him out. This is a good group, though it feels like a set of characters designed to be noble and entertaining in a universe that's completely made of other people's leftovers. It's fine, because we know that's exactly what we're reading.

As you can read, I had some conflict within myself over *Stalking the Unicorn*, and imagine my surprise when I came across the other book in the package that held the first Mallory tale: *Stalking the Vampire*. What I also discovered was that *Stalking the Unicorn* was a reprint and that it had originally been written in 1987. That was a good year. I was 13. I'd have loved this back then. I reread the book, honest to God, cover to cover, and with that in mind, I seemed to enjoy it more and catch even more bits from pre-

Stalking the Unicorn

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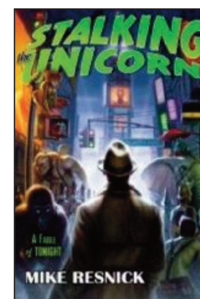

vious detectives. Weird. Resnick had written a few stories featuring Mallory in the interim, but the second Mallory novel, *Stalking the Vampire*, proved that sometimes you don't get it right the first time and sometimes characters age better when you don't sign a 12-book contract the day after you sell the first one.

The story is pretty flush: Mallory is living in the alternate New York, and now he's worried about The Colonel being the target for a vampire. There's a wild series of characters here along with Mallory, and they manage to take a bit of the spotlight. There's a dragon-man by the name of Scaly Jim Chandler who wants to make it as a pulp writer. I think there's a lot to love about Chandler, and a lot to leave you guessing. I'm a big fan of that sort of character. Felina, Mallory's catgirl partner, is awesome. She's a little like the characters you find in old crappy detective shows who use their Caprice to run over the guy who has the gun pointed at their boss. She's actually more than that; she plays the role of partner. There are some great exchanges between Mallory and Felina. The one that got me the most is one where they're talking about animal crackers and answering questions. It's a lot of fun.

One of the things that I love are the little places and events that are strange and slightly off. It's very similar to Harry Potter, where you know what it is but they've twisted it. There's the Zombie Ball that's held at the L. Conguin Hotel. It plays like any number of scenes where a detective goes to a party to dig up info, but it's up against a neat background. There's Charlie the Harp and the Dead Enders and all the goblins, gnomes, elves, humans, and mummies. (There's a minor problem that Mike Resnick doesn't seem to get rock 'n roll, and that shows in the way he presents Charlie.) There's the visit to The Gryphon's Roost. There's a wild section of craps, and there's Mary Queen of Slots. That's the kind of comedy that I thought worked much better in *Stalking the Vampire* than *Stalking the Unicorn*. Mallory is Abbott in the book. Numerous characters throughout the book play Costello. Felina is the most fun character, but Mallory is awesome. He's a real detective, a hard-bitten dick who does it all. I just love him, even more than I did in the first novel.

So, there's no question that Mallory has more legs to him. Resnick could give us a long series of Mallory novels, and it'll never be Mallory that'll lets us down.

Stalking the Vampire

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LETTER OF COMMENT

Thanks—I liked the review [Edna Stumpf's review of *The New Weird* in Issue #15]. Thought it was measured and interesting. One small thing—there's no Kelly Link in the *NW* because... she's not *NW*. Doesn't self-identify as *NW* and doesn't fulfill the definition of *NW*. As mentioned in the intro and elsewhere in the book.

Thanks again!
Jeff Vandermeer
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SOME FANTASTIC

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