

# some fantastic

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Spring Supplemental, 2005

## Editorial: Everything Old Is New Again

Spring is here, which means the summer blockbuster season is just around the corner. It's actually already seen an early start with *Sin City*, *Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy* and the final *Star Wars* theatrical installment, and we can look forward to a new Batman movie, new versions of *War of the Worlds* and *Willie Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*, and adaptations of *The Fantastic Four* comic book and *Bewitched* television series.

There's something rather disconcerting about that list: there's nothing original there. Everything is part of a series, a remake or an adaptation. True, Hollywood isn't exactly a mecca of original thinking, but it would be nice to see more frequent attempts at new ideas. In my admittedly brief search of the upcoming summer releases, which didn't include animated films, the only movie I can find that shows any originality is *The Island*, which is about clones fleeing in an attempt to avoid become replacement parts for their genetic progenitors.

Mind you, Hollywood's track record in developing original sci-fi isn't exactly stellar. In fact, the only two recent films truly sticking out in my mind as nice original movies are *A.I.*, which is amazingly flawed but nonetheless underrated, and *The Matrix*, and both those movies are a few years old at this time. (I haven't seen *The Incredibles* myself, but I understand that it's better than either of those two films.) If you go back 10 years, you can add *Dark City*, *12 Monkeys* and *Being John Malkovich*, but pick any other decent film from this period and chances are it's an adaptation, remake or a continuation of an

(continued next page)

## A Brobdingnagian Education: Or, How Philip Jose Farmer Saved My Life In Four Easy Steps

By Danny Adams

Philip Jose Farmer saved my life. Many times over, in fact.

It wasn't by promising me the salvation of eternal life on the Riverworld, or stowing me away six days out of seven in a stoner cylinder or sharing a secret elixir which would allow me to survive for tens of thousands of years (barring accidents). All right, I'll admit "saving my life" may be embellishing a bit, but it's no more of a stretch than the master himself might appreciate.

What he did was ignite my innate love of literature, and show me my first glimpse of a world I realized I wanted to be part of. He invited me into the writer's world—his in particular. He challenged me to expand my mind and ideas to their furthest limits, and beyond. His practical advice and my studying his work paved my way, giving me the solid, practical knowledge I needed to begin building my craft, then to continue honing and refining it. He invited me in, then gave me the keys to the kingdom.

For the first eleven years of my life, Phil Farmer was actually just Uncle Phil, my grandmother's brother-in-law. I knew he wrote books—my parents and grandparents both owned quite a number of them. But even as much as I loved reading I still had no concept of what those books were all about.

And, quite honestly, I hadn't been introduced to honest-to-goodness science fiction as literature. I'd watched *Star Trek*. I'd read a handful of children's short stories. I'd even done a

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"...we'll be saying a big hello to all intelligent life forms everywhere ... and to everyone else out there, the secret is to bang the rocks together, guys." - Douglas Adams, *Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy*

smattering of writing here and there. But my primary childhood exposure to sf was by way of Saturday morning shows, such as practically everything created by Sid and Marty Krofft. (The *Land of the Lost* was my personal favorite—little did I know many of its episodes were scripted by some of the biggest names in sf!)

Thanks to Phil Farmer, I started my transformation the summer of my eleventh year. Every summer my parents and sister and I would go camping for about two weeks at a nearby, and these expeditions made for long, languorous days—the stuff dreams are made of. My sister and I didn't just spend most of our time outdoors swimming and hiking and generally seeking out hours-long adventures that kept us out of our parents' hair; we also spent a lot of hours reading. And that particular summer my mother had brought with her some of Uncle Phil's books: The *Riverworld* series, to be precise.

## Editorial: It's All Been Done

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established series.

None of this is to say that I find Hollywood's efforts boring. Rather, it's more of a reason why I am and will most likely remain an sf lit snob. While media sci-fi is not without its merits—and indeed provides pleasures lacking in sf, which is why both are covered in *Some Fantastic*—it frequently lacks originality. For that, I need to go to the printed page, much as Hollywood needs to in order to get many of its ideas.

### Other Odds & Ends

I'm sure there are plenty of editors who would've loved the problem I faced with the last issue: more material than space. Technically, since I don't print issues in the traditional sense, space and size aren't really issues. However, given that a significant percentage of people still use dial-up internet connections, I wanted to make sure that everyone could download the 'zine rather easily, thus the rationale behind two Spring issues, with this as the special supplemental. If I continue to be blessed with a plethora of good material, I may officially make this a bi-monthly publication rather than a quarterly, but in the meantime, I'm happy to compile special issues as needed.

As always, thanks for downloading!

—Matthew

One day when it was either blindingly humid or pouring rain, I don't remember which now, I scooped up *To Your Scattered Bodies Go* and started reading. And reading, and reading... As voracious a reader as I was, I still didn't understand half of it, but I was enthralled. Never mind that it is an amazing book in its own right. I had never encountered sf like this before. That is to say, intelligent, adult, far-reaching, far-thinking sf. I loved history... and here were real people as characters! I was fascinated by religious studies... the book presented another spin on immortality and salvation. Youngling though I was I had already grown quite passionate about certain things, and *Riverworld* possessed everything I could ask for.

I've never been one to be shy about asking questions if I don't know something. Right away I had Uncle Phil on the phone. "What's a katra?" was one question I plied him with. (Most of the rest would be answered by reading the next books in the series.) He was so thrilled by my interest that he sent me copies of several more of his books, and for much of the remaining camping trip I could be found out sequestered away in a tent behind our trailer, reading endlessly. Then when I hauled the books with me to Florida, I started with *Time's Last Gift*... time travel! My favorite kind of story. *A Barnstomer In Oz* was another. And of course, I didn't stop reading the *Riverworld* books until I'd roared all the way through to the last page of *Gods of Riverworld*. They kept me up way past my bedtime.

I might've been red-eyed and sleepy the next day—but my insides were buzzing with the thrill of this new discovery and its limitless possibilities. The Farmerian collection didn't save me in and of itself, it was just the first step over the threshold. Salvation came the following summer. In June of 1983, my family and I took a trip up to the wondrous land of Kickapoo (otherwise known as Peoria, Illinois) to see my uncle and aunt. Over the course of two weeks the life-saving began. It was here that I discovered the magical world of Philip Jose Farmer wasn't bound in the confines of his mind.

Phil Farmer lives very much as he writes. You'll never know what you may find in his work if you're paying close attention: History, mythology and folklore, religion, symbols of all sorts,

literary references, bizarre but cutting-edge science, even images from artworks come to life. His house was much the same way. Outside flew the flag of Oz—designed by P.J.F. himself—and inside was a full wall-covering map of Baum’s magical land. Over on this shelf is a cast of a Sabertooth Tiger’s skull. Over there you’ll find three-foot-high statues of Laurel and Hardy. On that wall, a painting of the Red Baron’s famous Fokker. Then a painting of The Shadow. And three Hugos. Walking through the house was like walking through a museum.

Or, better still, a library. At the time he owned no less than twenty thousand books of every imaginable variety. He had read nearly all of them, or used them for research, at one time or another.

Those fascinating objects were no mere collections of curiosities; they were concrete fragments of inspiration.

Peoria at the time was a place of wonders as well. Want to ride a riverboat? Hop down to the Illinois River and buy yourself a ticket on the Julia Belle Swain, where he relaxed on the river cruise and felt right at home. Want to go to the top of the Ethicals’ tower? Ride with him up to the apex of the observation tower in Peoria Heights, and by his face you would swear he was gazing at the stars close-up. If you wanted to walk gently into the sacred, or speak with the ghosts of those who came before us, there were the Native American burial sites at the Dickson Mounds. At the Mounds he talked about (as well as any expert guide would) how the natives had lived, the kinds of games they played, and then—here his eyes lit up, naturally—he retold many of their stories and legends.

Uncle Phil led me through these places as he would a tour of his own writing. But better still were the tours of his mind: He was fascinated by everything, and wanted to talk about all of it. He would relax in his seat, laying both arms across the sides of the chair or sometimes leaning his head into one hand, a big grin dawning on his face. (Years later I realized I had adopted this pose myself.) You could talk with him for hours without realizing how much time had passed. Invariably he would start out with something simple—maybe the fact that triplanes were as popular in some places during World War One as biplanes,

or the meaning of the symbols spread throughout *The Wizard of Oz*—and then wind you higher and higher through the course of the conversation until he was explaining in vivid detail the latest breakthroughs in astrophysics, or the intimate details of the human brain, or the intricate connections between the most distantly-related descendants of the Indo-European language family.

And you would understand. You would be dizzy by the end but wanting it to go on, and feeling (with no small bit of justification) that you’d just learned more in four hours of supposedly simple conversation than you did in a whole semester of school.

Calling Phil Farmer brilliant is an understatement. “Walking Encyclopedia” might not be so far off, either.

That was the Second Step: Demonstrating that the “fantastic” in life is not, in fact, fantasy. It was

## some fantastic

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suddenly all real. It was suddenly attainable.

The act that changed my life, Step Number Three, was simple, quiet, and as is so often the case in our lives, utterly unrecognized when it happened.

I'll admit to the oddity that I never really thought of clouds as three-dimensional entities until my first airplane ride (not, alas, in a red Fokker). Of course I knew they were 3-D, but the appreciation of their great height and width and depth never really sank in until I was able to view them up close and personal in their native environment. So it was with books: Of course I knew books were made by authors who sat down and labored over pages and then handed their creations over to a publisher, but until one evening in Peoria, sitting in an author's native environment, I had no idea what this meant.

I wasn't even in his basement writing room; I knew better. I laid halfway down the basement steps, as quiet as I could be, listening to him type. Just listening. For an hour. An hour of pure revelation.

To this day it remains a revelation I find difficult to put into words. Like so many authors discover when pressed about where they get their ideas, the instinct of creation eludes verbal definition. This was my first experience with that moment where something from inside seizes hold of you and won't let go until you've set your pen to paper (or fingertips to keyboard) and created. Something new, something yours. Nowadays when that happens it means I'm about to write a story or a poem. Then, it meant I was about to become a writer—and knowing that I never would be completely happy doing anything else.

Such was Step Three.

The final step would wait three more years. Age fifteen. By this point I had written a science-fiction novel and was working on my second historical fiction book. Uncle Phil was growing more and more aware that I was really serious about this whole writing thing, so when I asked him for

writing advice he told me simply this (the way "simple" is defined as it is in "a simple conversation about anything with Philip Jose Farmer"): Don't just learn to write science-fiction by reading science-fiction. Read science, read history, read practically all the non-fiction you can get your hands on. He particularly recommended biology, anthropology, and classical poetry.

Interest yourself in everything.

I did. I have. An entire world opens to the mind that finds pleasure and fascination in all things. Since that time, I have never truly been bored.

Then, entire universes are imagined. And all things find their way into my writing sooner or later.

So there you have it: The four steps Phil Farmer



used to save my life.

Still not certain what I'm talking about? Even at my most miserable, stuck in my deepest depression, I can still write—in fact, writing is my greatest vent as well as my outlet. Even in times when I felt utterly aimless, I could create a story. When I had no idea what the future was going to bring and thoughts of the next year frightened me, poetry would be clamoring to come out. Plot notes brightened the whole sky. An outline for a novel would piece together a shattering world.

No one could tell me writing was stupid; Phil Farmer certainly wasn't. No one could warn me that writers starve, as I knew someone who'd made a success of it. And I was already aware that if I should start trying to publish seriously (as I finally did last year) how much work and heartbreak I would be in for—even if I became well-known.

None of that mattered. Phil Farmer showed me the human face and mind behind the writing, and revealed myself to me in the process.

I ignore writing at my peril. I have ignored writing, sometimes for long stretches, and always suffered deeply for my neglect.

Love me, love my need to write. The two are, now, inseparable.

(As am I now with my own library. I need a bigger house.)

I can't imagine life without it. I can't imagine me without it.

Thank you, Uncle Phil, for saving my life.

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Phil Farmer's last novel came out in 1999—*The Dark Heart of Time*, the culmination of his lifelong wish to write a Tarzan novel. But don't despair!

First, after reading the opening of an alternate history novel I was working on at the time, he gave me permission to finish an old novella he'd started and set aside in 1970: "The City Beyond Play," a simple (there's that misleading word again) futuristic story about a murderer hiding out in an isolated city built by medieval re-enactors. Though I'll be doing some of the writing, the overall story is all Farmer. I plan to have the novella finished by this summer.

Even better, he does have one more book coming out in 2005. *Pearls From Peoria* will be a collection of sixty uncollected (and in some cases unpublished) short stories, poems, and articles printed in a limited edition (550 copies) hardcover, with illustrations specially created for the book, by

Rose Press. You can find more information here: <http://www.therosepress.co.uk/html/pearls.html>

In addition, last summer I had the joy of helping Mike Croteau (a little bit), who maintains the official Phil Farmer website (<http://www.pjfarmer.com>), unearth several more unpublished short stories from ancient file cabinets deep in a cavernous chamber on the far edge of Uncle Phil's Kickapoo basement. These stories—a few nearly fifty years old, written as he first drew the notice of the science-fiction world but already showing more than a little professional ideamongering and polish—might very well be showing up in 21st century magazines sooner or later.

One can hope these simple conversations will last a lot longer.

*Some of Danny Adams' work has appeared or is forthcoming in Weird Tales, Mythic Delirium, Strange Horizons, Andromeda Spaceways Inflight Magazine, Not One Of Us, Illumen, Scifaikuest, Dreams of Decadence, Revolution Science Fiction, KidVisions, Star\*Line, Abyss & Apex—and issue #2 of Some Fantastic. Danny, his wife (and flamethrower partner) Laurie, and their two Yin-Yang cats live in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia, a long way from Peoria but filled with wonders nevertheless.*

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## Graphic Novel Review: *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* by Frank Miller, Klaus Janson & Lynn Varley

By *Matthew Appleton*

Let me start by saying that I am not a comic book fan. For a brief nine-month period in college, I dabbled briefly in reading and collecting them, but I never developed the type of addiction to them that I developed as a child to science fiction and baseball. It certainly didn't help that my limited time, energy and money dictated that I stop reading comics if I wanted to maintain some of my other keen extra-curricular interests. However, I am thankful for the brief foray in that it helped me understand Batman much better. Up to that time, my total knowledge of him came solely from the

campy mid-'60s television show, his adventures on the *Superfriends* cartoons from the '70s, the two movies directed by Tim Burton, and the animated series which Fox had just started showing on its fledgling network. However, I knew enough from my admittedly limited exposure to Batman and his heroic comic brethren to know that while I was growing up he was my favorite superhero.

My preference for the Caped Crusader was based on one simple fact: of all the comic book heroes, he was the most realistic. All the others relied on some sort of superpower. Batman, on the

other hand, was just a man with enough money to allow him to pursue criminals on his own time and dime. Yes, he could buy some rather impressive hardware—epitomized by Joker’s “Where does he get all those wonderful toys?” line in Burton’s first *Batman* film—but ultimately he had to make do with strength, wits and senses that were all within the range of natural human abilities.

It was during that sojourn into the world of comics that I first became aware of the darker side of my favorite superhero: that he was a borderline sociopath whose need to avenge the death of his parents had pushed him to the edge of schizophrenia. Despite the fact that he operated with a sense of justice and tried to uphold the law, he was basically just a vigilante thug whose own actions were legally questionable. Just about his only saving grace in this regard was that he didn’t actually kill anyone or use a gun. Some of this worked its way into Burton’s films, but not in a way that really explored this psychosis in detail.

Yet, in light of this realization I never actually purchased the one book many in the comic community suggested I should seek out when I mentioned my love of Batman: Frank Miller’s *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*. I understood that in addition to redefining the character and exploring his inner demons the book actually led to a renaissance in the world of comics, but my limited resources got in the way of my purchasing it. However, it constantly remained in the back of my mind as something to eventually purchase and read. The impetus for doing so finally came with the release of the *Sin City* movie, based on Miller’s other important contribution to the comic book industry. Given what I heard and saw about that movie, I wanted to see what Miller had to say about the character and his inner demons. I also viewed this as a kind of self-prep for the upcoming *Batman Begins* movie, which is set for release later this year.

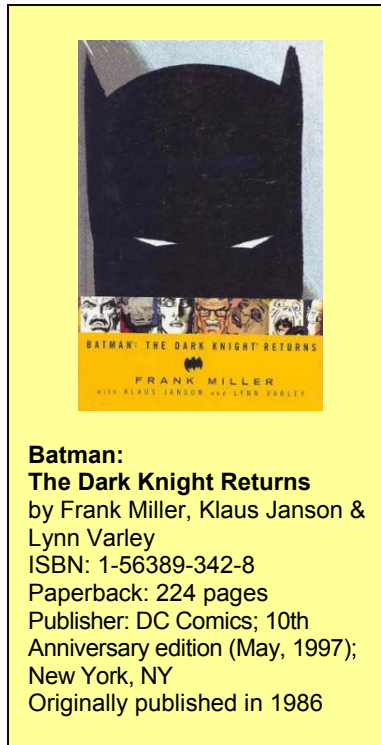
I was blown away.

For the uninitiated, the premise of *The Dark Knight Returns* is that Bruce Wayne is now 55 years old. He stopped donning the cowl 10 years earlier, and in the following years Gotham has witnessed an amazing surge in crime, both in its quantity and horrible brutality. It’s clear that his life is now relatively empty and that he still actively wrestles

the inner demons that initially caused him to become Batman. When Harvey Dent, a.k.a. Two Face, is released with a clean bill of mental health from Arkham Asylum and almost immediately embarks on a new crime spree, Bruce loses his battle to contain his dual persona and reassumes his crime-fighting mantle. Miller uses this scenario to explore all sorts of issues. Is Batman actually a criminal? Do his actions inspire others to engage in similar sorts of vigilante justice? What type of man willingly puts children in harm’s way so he can achieve his goals? How mentally ill is a man who is eligible to join the AARP and tries to physically fight stronger, faster criminals who are less than half his age? At what

point does he start ignoring previously self-imposed restraints so he can overcome the decline in his own abilities?

Clearly, Miller is not enamored with the Dark Knight. He’s shown as a hostage to the traumatic experience of witnessing the death of his parents as a young boy—an experience frequently hauntingly returns to him as flashbacks while he engages in combat. This is clearly a man in need of serious psychotherapy. Furthermore, he deliberately draws unflattering parallels between Wayne’s return as Batman and Two Face’s return to his criminal elements. While Batman may not be the threat to society that Two Face is, it’s clear that Miller feels that otherwise there is little difference between these two men. As the book nears its climax, it’s clear that Bruce Wayne believes that the ends do justify the means as he



further pushes the limits of what he feels is acceptable use of force.

Miller also tackles the issue of Batman's use of underage sidekicks in a fascinating way. To make his point about how willing Batman is willing to put them in trouble, he makes the new Robin a 13-year-old girl. This serves two purposes. First, it allows Miller to underscore Batman's cavalier attitude toward the age of his sidekicks; upon realizing how young the new Robin is, newly appointed Police Commissioner Yindel adds the charge of endangering the welfare of a child to the warrant she already put out for his arrest. Second, casting Robin as a girl also serves as a statement about the relative lack of women in the world of action heroes. To further accentuate this point, the new Robin is exceedingly bright, just as acrobatic as her predecessors, and displays much of the same disregard for authority that Batman shows.

But Miller has other targets clearly in sight. He portrays the talking heads of the media class in a rather unflattering manner, and his portrayal of ideological demagogues talking past each other seems almost prophetic in light of the evolution of political discourse on television over the past 20 years. Interestingly, he seems to hold celebrity therapists in rather low regard—showing them as more concerned with the perception of having healed clients rather than actually ensuring it really took place.

On a larger level, he casts a cynical eye on both the world as a whole and the world of comics. The politicians are busy following opinion polls and grandstanding for the cameras rather than actively tackling the issues. While Batman breaks the law with his style of justice, Miller also makes it clear he has little sympathy for his victims, sometimes portraying them pathetically accusing Batman of wrongdoing while understating or concealing what they did to get his attention. Making it a clear product of when it was written, Miller also addresses some of the matters concern-

ing the Cold War showdown between the U.S. and Soviet Union of the time and notably incorporates fears of a nuclear winter. By the end of the book, Miller actually seems to suggest that the traditional role of the superhero is superfluous and that in a more modern world, the superhero needs to serve society in a different manner.

While the Cold War is the most obvious dating of the novel (aside from the fact that the President is *very* Reagan-esque), there are other sections that 20 years after the fact caused me, as a first-time reader, to pause. Batman foils a plot to take down Gotham's version of the Twin Towers—remember, this was written before the first attack on the Towers in the early '90s—and then later in the book an airplane actually crashes into one of them. It wasn't an act of terrorism, but in the post-9/11 world it's hard to encounter these events without immediately wondering how Miller would've written the same story today.

Finally, you cannot evaluate a graphic novel without talking about the artwork itself. The colors are muted and at times sparse. When Miller does resort to using bright, basic 4-ink colors, it creates an accentual effect that really highlights that particular panel and the action in it. It's akin to adding an exclamation point to the end of a sentence. Given the look he eventually applied to his *Sin City* books, and the movie based on them—which is literally black and white with occasional splashes and touches of colors for affect—it's interesting to see his early application of this affect. The artwork of *The Dark Knight Returns* feeds beautifully into his use of color. Gotham looks like a dangerous, forbidding place at all times, and Wayne Manor is frequently shown as exceedingly barren, much as Bruce's life is outside his Batman persona. Furthermore, many of the extras and secondary characters are drawn with as little detail as possible—it looks like Miller was attempting to make their washed-out visual



appearance a metaphor for their literal importance in such a city.

In all, *The Dark Knight Returns* remains a powerful piece of writing and art, even 20 years after its original publication. Miller added an ambitious new chapter to the legend of the Caped Crusader, and in the process cast an unflinchingly critical eye on the man underneath the cowl. Even for a nomi-

nal outsider such as myself, it's easy to see how this work challenged the comic industry and was a major influence on some of the titles and superheroes developed after its publication.

*Matthew Appleton is the Editor of Some Fantastic, and he ardently hopes that the release of Batman Begins will erase all traces of Batman & Robin from his memory.*

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## Book Review: *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, by H.G. Wells

### "Deconstructing Granddad"

By Edna Stumpf

Not all science fiction fans have read H.G. Wells—these days, not all science fiction fans read—but they know who he is. He's Granddad. Born 1866; died 1946. There was some French guy making *literature scientifique* claims (Jules Verne) but Granddad invented it all: time travel, invading Martians, dying planets—decades worth of lurid magazine covers. Amazingly, he was English. Even more amazingly, maintainers of the classic canon still consider his credentials valid. He's, y'know, a Great Writer.

Wells was a pretty darn good one, actually, and still worth a return to the original text after God knows how many sensational movies have been spun from his work. In the case of *The Island of Dr. Moreau* there have been three. I caught the Burt Lancaster one (1977), which was stodgy, and the Marlon Brando one (1996), which was flaky to the point of fragmentation. The version I missed—

the 1933 *The Island of Lost Souls* with Charles Laughton—is reputed to be a masterpiece of horror. This strikes me as appropriate. Scientific speculation often veers off onto horror, the universe being the dangerous place that it is. Although among the first and strongest popularizers of Darwin and a champion of the scientific method, Wells was artist enough to sense the dark side of his substitute religion. He hoped that science would enable the human race to evolve ethically and intellectually. But I doubt he finally believed that it would.

*The Island of Dr. Moreau* was published in 1896, during a fertile five-year period that began with *The Time Machine* (1895) and established him as science fiction's English-language progenitor. Do I need to tell you the plot? One of those all-purpose narrator/adventurers, Edward Prendick by name, is shipwrecked, rescued, deserted on a sinister

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## Goats: The Comic Strip by Jonathan Rosenberg



goats: the comic strip apr 14, 2005

<http://www.goats.com>

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South-seas island, and gradually made aware that a once well-regarded pillar of the London medical profession is operating upon a variety of animals in an effort to turn them into human beings. Sure, you remember now. And the poor failures, who can sort of talk and think, gather for quasi-religious ceremonies during which they intone their master's rules:

"Not to go on all Fours;  
that is the Law. Are we not  
Men?"

"Not to suck up Drink;  
that is the Law. Are we not  
Men?"

Etc. Well, no, they're not. And considering the upright-walking, nonlapping mad torturer Moreau, should they wish to be?

Moreau is killed by an angry Puma Man, his creations revert, and Prendick finally escapes the island and returns to Victorian London, hub of civilization. This is a book, after all, that started out as a kid's adventure in the tradition of *Treasure Island*. It's darker, though, and the darkness makes an enormous difference. Into this darkness Peter Straub, who provides an introduction to the Modern Library edition at hand, makes an excellent guide.

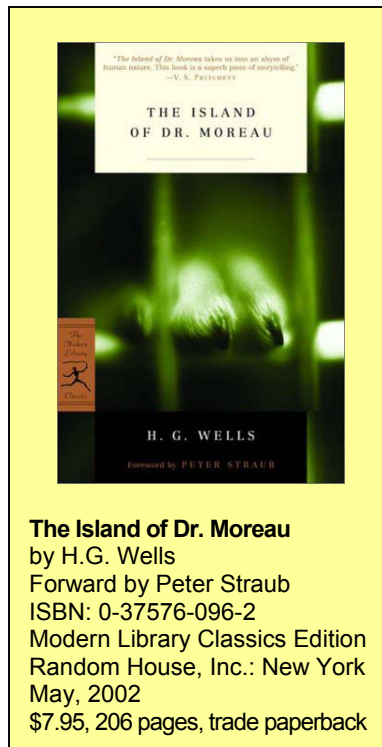
I've been a fan of Straub since *Ghost Story*. He's our primary supplier of the literate scare and commandeers the greater part of the brainpower in the horror field. He encourages us to a close reading of this book, pointing out that, for an apologist of evolution, the author lets astonishing doubts slip between the lines. His scientist is an unself-conscious sadist. His hero several times contemplates suicide. There is a straightforward satire of religion in the rituals of the Beast People. Wells, who escaped the working class through a combination of good luck, bad health and genius, had an intellectual's contempt for the Calvinism in which he was reared. Yet in *Moreau* the intellect holds no answers either.

Both the doctor and his creations increasingly speak nonsense. Prendick himself feels the incursions of a bestial nature even as, to exert authority over angry animals, he like Moreau pretends to be God. At the end of the book he has an unacknowledged kind of mental breakdown, seeing animals prowling the city streets. "Prowling women would mew after me, furtive craving men glance jealously at me, weary pale workers go coughing by me, with tired eyes and eager paces like wounded deer dripping blood..."

Science fiction bore a long rap as the literature of starry-eyed optimists. Yet here he is, Granddaddy Wells, hopping across decades of pulp adventures to reveal a strangely 21st-Century cynicism. He was a literary chap, after all, open to his subconscious, and he did come of age during an era of flamboyant *fin de siècle* decadence. Darwin aside, Wells could see that the earth was a minor planet and its ruling race subject to destructive and self-destructive impulses. He lived long enough to know of the death camps. His last work of

nonfiction was called *Mind at the End of Its Tether*, and it was full of despair.

Dark science fiction has had a long, complex history; it didn't really come to the fore until the 1960s, once more decidedly under British influence. Those who can only see chain-store shelves crowded with cheap (though increasingly expensive) imitations of J.R.R. Tolkien might be amazed at the collection of technology-warped, war-torn, often post-apocalyptic futures produced during the 100+ years of the field's history. H.G. Wells—Fabian socialist, proponent of Free Love, champion of science, closet pessimist—would not have been. Of Wells' many thoughtful successors, those who challenge the adoration of science and the misuse of technology, I'd recommend Brian W. Aldiss and William Gibson at random. But his heirs are legion.



Wells' book was rather harshly received when it was published. People called it blasphemist. Peter Straub is amusing about this. "The contemporary reader, conversant with AIDS, crack babies, drive-by shootings, half a dozen enthusiastic attempts at large-scale genocide, and the emergence of an entire tribe of serial killers...steps back and in wondering tones utters, 'Blasphemy?'" Readers were once made uneasy confusing superior people with inferior animals. Readers today are more likely to assume that animals are better than people. We are connois-

seurs of evil. We take it in stride to an almost absurd extent. Reading Wells reminds us how seriously people used to take it.

This is a reasonably priced, brilliantly introduced, piquantly reviewed edition of a book that can still inspire an inner conversation. Plus, it's a good kid's adventure. Provided by Granddad.

*Edna Stumpf was a regular Philadelphia Inquirer book reviewer for over 25 years, often writing about science fiction. She also guest-lectured for science fiction film courses.*

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## DVD Review: *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind: Special Edition*

By *Caroline-Isabelle Caron*

*How happy is the blameless vestal's lot!  
The world forgetting, by the world forgot.  
Eternal sunshine of the spotless mind!  
Each pray'r accepted, and each wish resign'd;*

### *Eloisa to Abelard*

By Alexander Pope (1688-1744)

The love affair between Pierre Abélard (1079-1142) and Héloïse (1101-1164) is one of the most beautiful and most tragic in Western history. Hired by Fulbert—Héloïse's uncle—as her tutor, Abélard falls madly in love with his ward and they secretly marry. Furious, Fulbert has Héloïse interned in a convent and has Abélard publicly castrated. Their separation will last a lifetime, being only reunited in death, as they today lie side by side in Le Père La Chaise Cemetery in Paris. Their tragic love has inspired countless poets. Their correspondence fueled the 18<sup>th</sup>-century English poet Alexander Pope as he paraphrased her letters. Whereas Abélard and Héloïse bemoaned their inability to escape the desires of the flesh, Pope pondered on the happiness born out of never having mourned loves' lost.

It is from Pope's premise that Charlie Kaufman wrote his screenplay for *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*. At the beginning of the movie, Joel Barish (a surprisingly demure Jim Carrey) inadvertently learns that his newly former girlfriend Clementine

(an uncharacteristically extravagant Kate Winslet) underwent a procedure patented by Lacuna Inc. to erase all her memories of him. Heart broken, Joel chooses to undergo the same process that literally causes a lacuna (i.e. a "dead zone") to be created in the cerebral cortex at the specific memory site. The difficult or offending memories are simply zapped out of the mind. The movie follows Joel's neurological journey as his memories are erased from most the recent to the earliest.

As the process advances, we see Joel doubt that his relationship with Clementine was a failure. By the halfway point he begins to resist the erasure. He wishes to save the Clementine of his mind and hides her in his earliest childhood. He wakes up during the procedure, but the technicians (Elijah Wood and Mark Ruffalo) misinterpret this action, drug him once more, and continue to blot out Joel's mind.

His mind world is off-kilter and disjointed, as all memories are. Perspectives and colours are exaggerated. Scenes take on a surrealist air and dialogues are staccato. His remembrances deconstruct and fall apart before our eyes. The viewer has no choice but to mourn with Joel as Clementine is visually wrenched from his memory. We wish him to succeed in keeping her with him, though in the end it is Clementine's remembered self that convinces Joel to stop resisting and enjoy their love while he still can.

At the end of the movie, we realize that Joel and Clementine have both been prompted by some unremembered compulsion to return to the Montauk beach where they had first met, and where they meet again for the first time. The attraction is as strong as it once had been, long before the memories of their increasingly failing relationship had made them forget what they once had had. Michel Gondry's interpretation of Kaufman's story is one where our memories make us forget who we really are. Joel and Clementine can only get back together when they forget the hurts they caused each other. The spotless mind is not one which has forgotten its loves' lost, but rather one that does not remember the pain caused by these loves. As they meet again, Joel and Clementine remember instinctively? bodily? the love they once shared. When they are both given the proof of the failure of their love affair, they must choose to disregard this information in order to keep on loving each other. Paradoxically, Abélard and Héloïse's desires for each other are what ultimately save Joel and Clementine's emotional love.

Every element of the special DVD special collector's edition 2-disc set seems to be geared at explaining a movie that was so pitifully misunderstood and so completely rejected by American audiences. The photo booklet collects quotes and pictures from the movie with excerpts of ecstatic reviews, all to prove the film's quality and make the reader remember that it was "The best reviewed and most original film of " 2004. Michel Gondry's and Charlie Kaufman's audio commentary takes a systematic approach to explaining the logic behind every scene. Conversations with Gondry and Carrey, then Winslet aim to explain the construction of the movie, as are the behind-the-scene documentary "A Look Inside *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*", the exploration of the visual effects and the

specific look at the making of one of the pivotal sequences.

Strangely enough, these efforts are largely unnecessary. *Eternal Sunshine*, though visually and stunningly surrealistic, is quite linear in its construction (so are the DVD menus). We move backward into Joel's mind in a relatively straight line. It is the visuals that are complex. Or rather they appear complex.

We learn from the DVD extras that the visual effects are, with few exceptions, the product of theatrical and optical tricks, rather than post-production CGI special effects. Gondry used forced perspective, lighting, masks and filters to create Joel's deconstructing memories. As it is, we learn that Gondry does not trust CGI, finds the process artificial, and prefers the organic process of tricking the camera as if it were the eye. So for the scene where Joel observes himself speaking with Lacuna's Dr. Howard Mierzwiak (Tom Wilkinson), Carrey had to run back and forth behind the camera, putting on and yanking off his coat and toque, to play both his on-screen selves.

We also learn that much of the actual dialogue, though based on Kaufman's very tight screenplay, was largely adapted from very emotional rehearsal sessions where Carrey and

Winslet shared their own personal experiences of love's lost. We learn that much of the emotional tone of the film is also born out of Gondry's unabashed lack of self-confidence. This makes *Eternal Sunshine* a much more personal movie than it would be at first glance, but it also explains why Carrey pulls off a flawless performance, with no trace whatsoever of the exuberant personality that usually peeks through even in his best on-screen performances. For the American audience, the only flaws of these numerous and verbose DVD extras



**DVD Release Date:** Jan., 2005  
**Starring:** Jim Carrey, Kate Winslet  
**Director:** Michel Gondry  
**Screenwriter:** Charlie Kaufman  
**Rated:** R  
**Studio:** Umvd  
**Special Features:** Commentary track with Gondry and Kaufman; conversations with Jim Carrey and Kate Winslet; deleted and extended scenes; souvenir booklet; "Anatomy of a Scene" featureet; Polyphonic Spree music video.

might be Gondry's and Michel Bismuth's (co-author) extremely thick Parisian accent, which often make their remarks simply incomprehensible, a fact that Carrey and Winslet make ample fun of.

There is no doubt that *Eternal Sunshine* is a great movie, about the notion that how we love is determined by what we remember about who we loved. It is a visual journey, as our memories often

are, but it mostly an emotional assessment of why we love the way we do and that, in order to truly forgive, we must not forget.

*Caroline-Isabelle Caron is an Assistant Professor at the Department of History at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario. Her research focuses on North American popular culture, primarily among French-speakers.*

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## DVD Review: *Shaun of the Dead*

By Alex Esten

By now, we all are very aware of *Shaun of the Dead*'s peculiar advertising and tagline campaign that describes the film as something entirely different ("A Smash Hit Romantic Comedy. With zombies.") from *Dawn of the Dead* or *28 Days Later*. Due to this constant bombardment, I admit, I was initially very reluctant to delve into how *Shaun of the Dead* is so unique and entirely separate from the "Zombie genre." However, after viewing *Shaun of the Dead* in its entirety, I feel compelled to strongly stress that distinction, because it's an incredibly important distinction to understand.

Now, *28 Days Later* and *Dawn of the Dead* depend on the zombie infestation, because without it, the films have no point at all; we don't really care about the characters, apart from wondering which one is going to get killed off next (a coloring from the teeny slasher flicks, perhaps), so we're not really intended to bond with them on any real, meaningful level (perhaps only mildly in *28 Days Later*), because while *Dawn* certainly earns Ana's romantic redemption with Michael, that romance takes a backseat to the real story at hand, to the real focus of the film: zombies have overrun the world.

*28 Days Later* is no different. Granted, the origin of the violence in *28 Days Later* is a rage virus,

but the assailants function in the exact same manner as the zombies in *Dawn of the Dead*, so I really do not see the need to make any real distinction between the two films when discussing story and plot. Similar to *Dawn of the Dead*, the human protagonists vanish when the zombies run through the streets. *28 Days Later* is focused squarely on those infected. I certainly highly regard Danny Boyle, because he's crafted a high-quality, high-



tension horror film with *28 Days Later*, but at its core, the film is still a zombie flick.

In many ways, *Dawn of the Dead* and *28 Days Later* both suffer from what I like to call the Terminator Fallacy: the real star of the films is not any of the human characters;

the real star of the film is the villain. *Shaun of the Dead* is the total opposite.

What distinguishes the film from the zombie flick formula (zombies first, then human interest) is that *Shaun of the Dead* is a romantic comedy that just happens to have zombies in it. If there were no zombies in the film, and no traces of the gore inherent in a zombie flick, the film would attract the types of crowds that would attend a Hugh Grant/Julia Roberts romantic comedy chick flick—though, seeing Hugh Grant and Julia Roberts getting eaten alive in a zombie

flick could and *would* be extremely satisfying. At its core, the film is about Shaun's life and how he deals with various real-life obstacles and complications, such as freeloading friends (Ed), a dead-end job (think Staples but worse), and a girlfriend (Liz) who is constantly annoyed with his slacker behavior.

The plot progression is testament to this, because unlike *Dawn of the Dead* and *28 Days Later*, the deaths in *Shaun of the Dead* are never arbitrary. Each character in Shaun's life represents a different part of his emotional maturity, and throughout the film, as Shaun begins taking control of his life (growing out of his slacker phase and developing into an adult), those characters die. There's actual character development/growth in *Shaun of the Dead*, which is definitely appreciated.

For the film alone, the DVD is worth the price, but the Special Features are surprisingly robust and rival those of more "big-title" releases. There are the expected and customary Behind-the-Scenes documentaries, trailers, photo galleries and various poster images, but while they're very interesting and entertaining, they pale in comparison to the smaller hidden gems of the Special Features.

The commentaries are incredibly insightful, and certainly worth listening to, because they're not useless director babble like Anchorman. The commentary with Simon Pegg and Edgar Wright is particularly impressive, because they point out many of the subtleties throughout the film, and revealed some things that I still ended up missing even after seven or eight viewings without the commentary.

There are various types of subtitles for the film, but the Zomb-O-Meter, which resembles VH1's old *Pop-Up Video* series, steals the show. In

the Special Features menu, there's a sub-menu entitled "Missing Bits," which contains what could be considered the outtakes/bloopers of the film. These range from tried-and-true assaults on the ridiculous nature of airline censorship ("Funky Pete"), to graphic novel/comic book explanations of mild plot holes, but "The Man Who Would Be Shaun" is the highlight of "Missing Bits." Nick Frost (Ed) and Simon Pegg (Shaun)

perform a scene from *Shaun of the Dead* with Nick and Simon imitating Sean Connery and Michael Caine, respectively.

The TV Spots aren't what you would expect. I thought they were going to be commercials and TV promos for the film, but they're actually the full "shows" that Shaun happens to click through when he's watching TV in the film. They function as social criticisms, in that with segments like "Zomb-aID" and "Fun Dead," it's as if the filmmakers are jabbing at bleeding-heart musicians (the types who defend mistreated yet convicted criminals) and commercial exploitation of a crisis.

I'd highly recommend *Shaun of the Dead*. It has a wit that we rarely see in horror films, especially ones featuring zombies, and its technique, cinematography, shot composition, structure and pacing are exceptional. Most importantly,

though, it's a very well-written and intelligent film that avoids using a cliché simply to use a cliché. *Shaun of the Dead* satirizes the genre and does it subtly. The same cannot be said for other horror genre "satires."

While *Dawn of the Dead* is empty calories, tasty but ultimately Taco Bell, *Shaun of the Dead* is brainfood. Mmmm...brains.

*Alex Esten is a fourth-year English Major in the College of Arts & Sciences at Rutgers University-Camden.*



**DVD Release Date:** Dec., 2004  
**Starring:** Simon Pegg, Kate Ashfield, Nick Frost  
**Director:** Edgar Wright  
**Screenwriters:** Simon Pegg & Edgar Wright  
**Rated:** R  
**Studio:** Umvd  
**Special Features:** Theatrical trailer; extended & deleted scenes, including extended TV spots from the movie; outtakes; casting tapes; Zomb-O-Meter; zombie gallery; EPK featurette; special effects comparisons.

## Book Review: *Bad Magic*, by Stephan Zielinski

By Matthew Appleton

I like to think that I'm a fairly astute reader and that I can quickly get a handle on just about any genre book I decide to start reading. However, every once in a rare while I encounter a book that leaves me somewhat baffled for the first 30 pages or so. Stephen Zielinski's *Bad Magic* is one of those books. My problem stemmed in part from the packaging. Its cover and jacket copy suggested a Lovecraft-esque dark fantasy/horror novel while the cover blurbs on the back suggested something along the lines of William Browning Spencer's *Resume With Monsters*. Yet, one-fifth of the way through the novel I still wasn't sure exactly what type of book I was reading.

Such is part of the charm of *Bad Magic*.

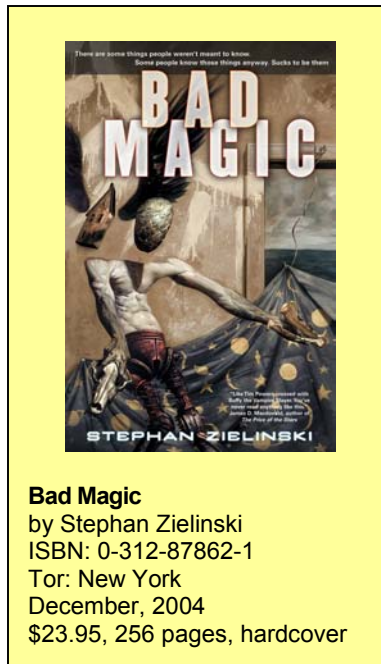
The premise of the novel is simple enough. In a plot device straight out of an H. P. Lovecraft story—"From Beyond," to be precise—it turns out that humans have a psychic third eye, and that most of us lack the ability to open it. Those with that skill are able to see that all sorts of other beings that are downright hostile to humankind populate our world. In fact, humankind as a whole is under constant surveillance and attacks by humans with magical powers and the menagerie of creatures visible to humans only via the third eye. Many of these creatures appear human to those without the ability to discern their true nature, and the few humans who can open their third eye offer the only defense our species has. Unfortunately, those who choose to protect humankind are in the minority and appear as though they are slowly losing the battle. Zielinski's story centers on these few brave souls. The nominal protagonist of the story is Al Rider. A mage who used to work for the Incumbents, one of the factions of the magical/undead using hu-

mankind for their own diabolical purposes, but now works for the Opposition in its defense of humanity. While collecting raw essence of pain from the trauma ward of the hospital one evening, he discovers that many of its critical patients—in particular those whose identities cannot be ascertained—are mysteriously being transported to a brand new hospice facility even though the trip could kill them. When he convinces the rest of his Opposition cell to investigate, they start uncovering a plan by the Vulture Cult, one of the most sadist magical cults on Earth, to gain power in the greater San Francisco area.

What the Vulture Cult didn't plan on was the strength of the Opposition. Made up of an eclectic group of individuals—each memorable in their own unique fashion—their complimentary talents provide a basis that allows them to unite in their belief that they must defend humankind. Yet, the relative strength of all their personalities results in frequent head-butting (metaphorical, not literal) and in antagonism toward

one another. This antagonism results in much of the humor that appears in *Bad Magic* as they frequently engage in verbal sparring and flat-out insults. Yet, they manage to find a way to work together, and smooth over the differences that their abilities cannot overcome.

As the novel unfolds, it's clear that Zielinski is liberally paying homage to Lovecraft. Aside from the "From Beyond" element, he gives us a brief glimpse the gods in the incomprehensible, horrible splendor as well as providing a crew of various supernatural and other-worldly creatures, some of whom would find themselves at home with any other Lovecraftian creature. However, unlike Lovecraft's characters, who frequently go insane as a result of witnessing otherwise incomprehen-



**Bad Magic**  
by Stephan Zielinski  
ISBN: 0-312-87862-1  
Tor: New York  
December, 2004  
\$23.95, 256 pages, hardcover

sible events, those humans who witness supernatural events but are without the benefit of knowing how to use their third eye often just completely forget the experience. That's not to say that some aren't irrevocably harmed, but rather that experiencing the incomprehensible is not necessarily a life-altering experience.

While Zielinski obviously likes to play with some of Lovecraft's tools, he is not attempting a pastiche of any sort. For starters, the members of the Opposition are more than capable of fighting most of the supernatural elements they encounter. In addition, the gods only make a brief appearance and are not a driving force for the action in *Bad Magic*—the various competing groups on Earth have their own agendas that they eagerly pursue without external prompting.

The other thing that sets Zielinski apart is his style. He uses rather fast pacing which only adds to the sense that events unfold quickly. While his characters attempt to plan and contemplate their moves, they frequently lack the time they would prefer. To accentuate the immediateness of the action, Zielinski rarely uses long, intricately constructed sentences. In fact, he frequently uses very brief compact lines that occasionally drift into the realm of fragments. As for the humor, most of it comes while the verbal interplay between Rider and the other members of the Opposition—very little of the story itself is actually humorous. Indeed, fighting zombies, vampires and their undead and supernatural brethren is serious business.

So why did it take so long for me to get a

handle on this novel? Because Zielinski takes some time to introduce all the main characters and establish their roles, the verbal sparring that makes up most of the humor isn't very obvious at first. I also believe the confusion is, in part, intentional; the characters don't know what is going on initially, which makes it difficult for the reader to get properly oriented. This also prepares you for the fact that the action does careen wildly at times.

However, the payoff is worth the effort of muddling through the initial confusion. Once you breakthrough the setup, Zielinski places you on a wild coaster ride that entertains you with its unexpected turns and heavily genre-reliant humor. Some of the jokes devolve into an obvious punch line—for example, a scene where one of the characters engages in mind control ends by saying, "These aren't the druids you are looking for"—but that doesn't make them any less charming.

As far as first novels go, Zielinski's effort has a lot going for it: humor, memorable characters, fast-paced action and interesting plot twists. Given the structure of *Bad Magic*, it wouldn't surprise me to see Zielinski return to this particular world, and it certainly wouldn't be a bad thing.

Oh, and one more thing. Make sure you take the time to read the Appendix to the novel. While it has little to do with the story or the characters involved in *Bad Magic*, it contains another superfluous Lovecraft reference and is a wonderfully humorous look at the lifestyles of those who consistently seek the perfect tan and physique.

## Goats: The Comic Strip by Jonathan Rosenberg



goats: the comic strip jan 10, 2005

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## A Really Quick Rant concerning *Light* & The Tiptree Award Committee

By Jessica Darago

Dear Reader:

The editor and I discussed the possibility of my writing a paper on M. John Harrison's *Light* for publication in *Some Fantastic*. I'm afraid that I won't be able to provide said academic review. Instead, I present to you an unvarnished reaction to this critically lauded novel.

[Clears throat.]

Seriously? No, *SERIOUSLY*? There was something praiseworthy about this piece of crap? Because I'd like to know what the hell it was. It certainly wasn't the bundle of clichés that served as a plot. It certainly wasn't this so-called *science* fiction novel's weak grasp on quantum physics. Do I even have to mention how flat and predictable a sexually dysfunctional serial killer is? Or a slacker boy who spends all of his time trying to crawl back into a literal or metaphorical womb? Virtual reality addicts? God-like aliens? Neurotic, Oedipal clones? I'll just go ahead and assume that the blatantly sexist resolution of the sexless-yet-

incestuous Adam-and-Eve theme isn't what blew away *The Tiptree Award Committee*, for Pete's sake.

Speaking of which, I have a couple notes for the Tiptree folks:

1. When your hero ends the book with the keys to the universe and the heroine ends it being "made beautiful again," this does not "expand or explore our understanding of gender."
2. Neither does a female character who gives up her body to merge with her spaceship because of a horrible tragedy in her past, when that tragedy is...oh, come on, you know what it is, don't you? Yeah, you do.

Writing sex scenes isn't the same thing as writing about gender. The latter requires nuance. *Light* has none.

Rather like this review.

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## Letters of Comment

That's one damfine fanzine you got there, compadre. ;) I read the whole thing. That act is notable because I haven't read any of the *Potter* books (I must be one of the last Americans able to say that), seen only the first *Terminator* film and snippets of the second, haven't seen *Sin City* (yet), don't follow baseball, and I haven't read any of the books reviewed in this ish. But I *have* seen *I, Robot* and read the Asimov stories, though not the Ellison screenplay (some day, though, some day...).

I was yammering to someone the other day that there are only three sercon fanzines active today, but I think I should add *Some Fantastic* to the list.

Regards,

**Jan Stinson**

***Peregrine Nations***

**tropicsf@earthlink.net**

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As for something I just noticed in Issue 2, and only one reply in Issue 3, I must reply in three parts:

1. The goals are the same height as the nosebleed seats. Enough said

2. I actually have a few of here real sources and I believe the is a book out on here varied sources (She does have an advanced degree from the equal of an ivy league school.) Vol (sound or voice) da (the often seen d') and Mort (death) = Voice of Death. This goes with the endlessly heard moniker of "He Who Shall Not Be Named."
3. I can write a dissertation on the Goblins but mostly they are oppressed but figured they can work around things doing the banking, running the gambling and other such things. If this is matched with the cultural concepts put down by Stengel it would put them equal to the late Victorian and early 20<sup>th</sup> century view point of Jews. Again there is so much more and an entire paper can be written on this subject.

**Joe Carpenter**

**eogwulf@yahoo.com**

**Editor's Note:** Given M. Valdemar's "condition" in Poe's tale, the name clearly fits him as well. It's certainly possible that both authors derived the name in a similar fashion.