

exhibition hall



DECEMBER · EXHIBITION HALL · 2012

If you're like me, James Bacon regularly makes you smile. My UK counterpart and co-editor often sends me things, and they are always awesome. Last week he sent me a book, and that book had things that made me think of other things, and one of those other things made me think of other things that I love and haven't written about. In this case it's a Dr. WHO novel that James sent my way from England. It led me to think about Dr. Who the series, and the novels thereof, and of the world of magic.

David Copperfield-type magic, not Harry Potter-type magic.

And it turned into an article that is the majority of the issue.

See, once again, James Bacon makes things happen!

One of the big deals coming up is the Nova Albion Steampunk Exhibition! We might not have another issue before it happens, but we know the business so far and here it is! Writer Guest of Honor? Why it's Gail Carriger! It's running April 26, 27th and 28th in Santa Clara at the lovely Hyatt Santa Clara, right by Great America! I really do like that hotel. The theme is

Steampunks in Space! I'm kinda hoping that we can get out the next issue of Exhibition Hall in time for the con, because it's gonna be a Once We Went To SPace issue, with a look at all the things like Space: 1899, Anti-Ice and the Melies film. I talk about him a lot, don't I?

So yes, ExHall will be in the house at the con, and I may even be wearing my new vest, the one I got at Steamcon! I hope they'll have me on Programming because I've got a Steampunk presentation on the Stage Magic of the 19th Century, which may well be complete with someone to show one or two of the tricks I'd talk about!

Also, Unwoman's vinyl album made it's way to my mailbox on Tues-

day. I WAS PSYCHED! It's a great listen, and if you like her stuff in general, you'll love this one. She's my all-time favorite cellist (suck it, Yo Yo Ma!) and this is new my favorite of her albums. There's just something so real to listening to her on vinyl...

ON the books front, Mike Resnick's second sequel to The Buntline Special, The Doctor & The Roughrider, is coming out. It's a fun little book where a young Teddy Roosevelt has to go and open up the West. These are fun books, and some of Mike's best writing. I'll have a lot more on this later, methinks!

There's the new Gail Carriger book, the first of the Etiquette & Espionage series, that's coming out in February that is a great read and I can not wait for the second.

By the time you read this, it'll probably be a week or two until Her Majesty's Steampunk Symposium in Long Beach, CA. I'm not able to attend (man, there are so many different cons nowadays!) but Unwoman, my hero and one of the most frequently played things on this MacBook's speakers, is gonna be there along with Lee Presson & The Nails (not the Nails who recorded 88 Lines About 44 Women) and

Steam-Powered Giraffe. It sounds like a good time. There's also an event the next weekend in San Antonio, but they haven't gotten back to me with any more info!

Anyone know what the deal with Steampunk Magazine is? I don't see a new issue after the one they put out the beginning of 2012, which was a good one, but I haven't seen anything new in ages. SPM is a great mag, wonderful stuff, but I'm a frequency freak and love having new, non-blog material and haven't seen that of late from SPM. It makes me miss Gatehouse Gazette, which was awesome, if a bit oddly political for my tastes. Then again, I could say many of the same things about Steampunk Magazine, so there's that.



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MY EXHAUSTIVE DELVING INTO OF DOCTOR WHO AND THE TALONS OF WENG-CHIANG BY CHRISTOPHER J GARCIA

James Bacon often changes things for me. It's rare that someone can throw my plans into the works, but James can do it, and almost always for the better. We've been lucky enough to work on various projects together for ages. He's a good guy, and once in a while, he'll send me stuff. A luchador t-shirt, a bookmark, any number of things, almost always with a note that says something along the lines of "Saw this and thought of you. James."

This package, the one that arrived on December 10th, 2012, had a note that said "Hope all is well. Saw this and thought of you. Clash of Cultures! James." In the package was a book. Not just any book, but a Doctor Who book.

Now, I like Doctor Who quite a bit, though I've never been a big Whovian. I hang out with tons of Whovians, folks who know who everyone who ever appeared on the show is, what they did, who wrote them. I'm lucky if I can identify who the Doctor is in any given episode. It's a fun show, always has been, but I'm not that kind of viewer for it. Not like I am for *Community* or *Twin Peaks* or *The Simpsons* or *Archer*. I'm a fan of specific Doctors. I especially like David Tennant and Matt Smith is cool. I guess the first one I ever saw was Tom Baker, and Sylvester McCoy was the one that I got to know a little. Still, I'm not a big who fan, but from the moment I saw the cover, I knew this was a novel just for

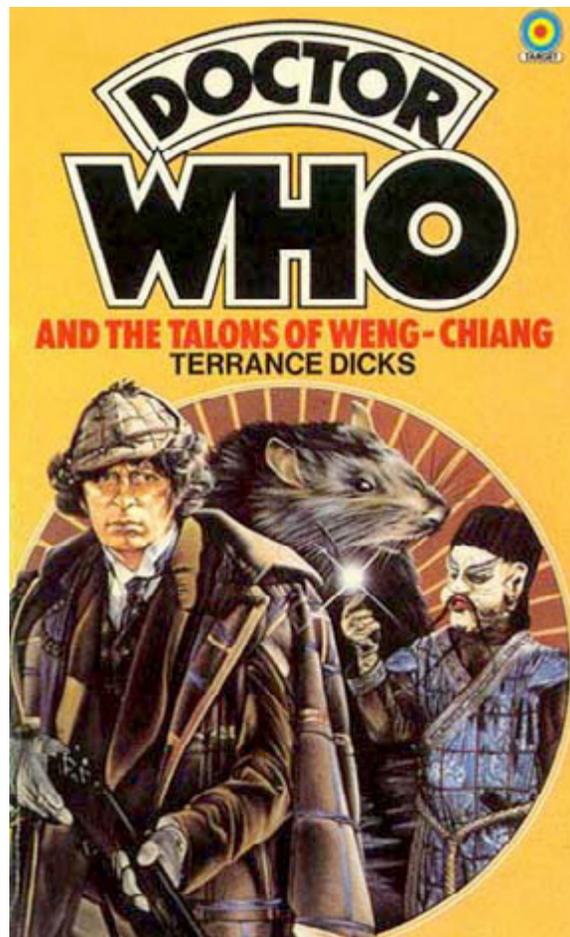
me.

I had no idea that this had previously been a regular story arc in Doctor Who. It was a Doctor/Leela story and it featured John Bennett, who I always liked. They later did a sequel to it, but since I hadn't seen the original episodes, I figured it was safe to start there!

First off, the cover is by Jeff Cummins. He's done some great album cover for the likes of Paul McCartney, which is a good name to have on your side. Instantly, I knew what James was thinking. There was Dr. Who, the Tom Baker version, with a fowling rifle, a deer-stalker cap and heavy coat, standing next to a giant rat and a strange Asian-esque character. The face seems to be in some sort of heavy make-up or mask, and a blue Chinese wrap of some sort. It's an interesting look. Opening up to the first page, I saw why.

I started reading and right away, there is was, the proof that James is a smart, smart man. The scene opens on the Palace, a theatre, where a Chinese stage magician, Li H'sen Chang . He does an act and early on we realize that he's in league with something much bigger than himself.

What's so interesting is that he is a Chinese magician. There's a long tradition of Chinese magicians in the West. The first real Chinese magician to make it big in the West was Ching Ling Foo. Now, there was an entire school of Chinese stage magic and close-up magic, hard to say when that started, but





Sam were the only Chinese Magicians, though they may have been in the minority as actual Chinese Chinese Magicians. Various white folks portrayed various Chinese magicians, including one of the most outrageous of them: Chung Ling Soo. You see, Ching Ling Foo was in New York and did a trick that was so over-the-top unbelievable that he offered a grand to anyone who could show how it was done. First, Foo would produce a water-filled bowl from a cloth. Then, after a flourish, he'd produce a small child from the bowl! This was BIG TIME, David Copperfield making the Statue of Liberty disappear, next level-type stuff. A magician named William Robinson decided to give it a go, but for some reason Ching Ling Foo rebuffed him and turned him away. Anyone who has seen *The Prestige*, or who knows anything about the egos of actual magicians, will understand that Robinson could not take this sort of thing lying down. So, as one is apt to do, he created the Chung Ling Soo persona. He did a lot of the tricks that Foo did, including the child from a bowl trick a few times. He developed one trick that made him hugely famous. It was called *The Execution by the Boxers*. He'd have a few people wrangle him into position to face a firing squad. They'd shoot and he'd have several bullets palmed and ready to go, pretending like he caught them when they

in the 1890s, it was a new thing to have a Chinese magician in the West. While Ching Ling Foo was the first, another magician was also starting to make the rounds. Long Tack Sam, born Lung Te Shan, he came to the US, and the rest of the world, during the early part of the 20th Century. He was a big star, mentored Orson Welles in magic.

I'll pause for moment to talk about that. Orson Welles is better-remembered for his movies and his wine commercials than for what he was really best at: magic. He was a helluva magician. If you watch his final completed film, *F for Fake*, you'll see his work, and there's a lot of footage of him doing magic in various venues. He considered Long Tack Sam to be the best magician he'd ever seen. George Burns considered the Long Tack Sam show to be the best piece of Vaudeville he'd ever seen, and he'd seen more than nearly anyone else. He was a star, and his Great-granddaughter, Ann Marie Fleming, did an awesome book and documentary about him, *The Magical Life of Long Tack Sam*.

Now, neither Ching Ling Foo nor Long Tack



were firing blanks. Sometimes he would spit them out of his mouth. Sadly, the last time he did the trick, an actual bullet was in the chamber and he was shot through the chest. Now, as long as he'd been performing as Chung Ling Soo, he'd never spoken. Other fake Chinese Magicians, especially those operating where there wasn't a Chinese person for a hundred miles, would create a Chinese-sounding language of their own and use it on stage. Robinson didn't, and his last words were "Oh my God, something's happened. Lower the curtain." His last words, and the only time Chung Ling Soo spoke with an audience around.

Like I said, there were many others, most notably big stars like Fu Manchu, played by both a father and son from the Bamburg family. Long Tack Sam was a big star, and his story is so great. Sadly, he wasn't well-remembered because he didn't make any appearances on TV, and that is one of the best things for preserving the history of magic. The documentary is a great introduction. His best trick, and one that I've never seen performed by anyone else, was so simple. He'd start standing with his cloth, and then he'd conjure up an empty bowl. That was cool, but then he'd do a forward roll, and suddenly the bowl was full of water and a goldfish! This is a tough trick that requires incredible timing.



Now, back to the novel, it was against the backdrop of 1890s English theatre that a Chinese magician is introduced. It's pretty early, that would have been the point where we were first seeing Ching Ling Foo appear on western stages, but it's certainly of the most interesting aspects of stage magic in the 1890s.

The casting of John Bennett as the Chinese magician Li H'sen Chang was controversial, though in a way, it seems appropriate. There were so many different Westerners (and not just Brits and Americans, but France had a couple, and all over South America as well) who played the role of Chinese magicians that it would make sense. I read that tidbit before I finished the novel and I had hoped that they'd reveal him as a Westerner, but alas, I was once again smarter than a writer..

So, the story goes that Li has a little friend: a ventriloquist's dummy Named Mr. Sin. Now, here is an interesting point. The Palace in London is hugely important in the history of Ventriloquism. The tradition of Stage Ventriloquism, which is really only about 150 years old, started with performers using a variety of figures (and one famous trick that many used was called The Box, where they would make it sound like someone was talking to them from within a box) and that'd be the whole act, a few minutes with each figure, really just the performer showing off. It was at the Palace in London where a certain Mr. Fred Russell started performing around 1886. He settled on a single figure, a Cheeky Boy figure called Coster Joe. He was a big success, and he forever changed the way things were done. He was the first of the Knee Sitting figures, and that was his act. Coster Joe was as big a character in the act as Russell was, probably more, and that became the primary form for Ventriloquists forever more. I'm betting author Terrence Dicks knew about it and that may have been the reason to choose it over the hundreds of other London theatres from the 1890s.

And there were hundreds.

You see, not only was London a HUGE city with an entertainment demanding population, but in addition there were a giant number of theatres which catered to a specific ethnic group. There's a great record of this in the US with the Godfather Part II showing the Italian theatres of the time. Music Hall theatres were all the rage, and the Big Five of the time are some of the most famous theatres to exist. The Alhambra was, without question, the most significant theatre in London. It wasn't originally a variety theatre, but after a fire it was rebuilt and became the Big Deal up until the 1920s. There was The Strand, later called The Gaiety Theatre,



which lent it's name to a kind of musical theatre performance. The First Gilbert & Sullivan performances took place there. The St. James Theatre was probably the best managed of them all in the 1890s, and it had a big following. The Adelphi was a very popular location, and then there was The Palace, whose fame at the time probably doesn't match that it received for being the starting point for so many performers, including early appearances of Charlie Chaplin. It was also one of the most important of all the early Movie Houses.

There are hundreds of other theatres that would have various performances on any given night. It was not unusual for there to be a performer at one for a weekend matinee, who would then whisk off to another theatre for an evening booking under another name. Theatres at the time were battling for, well for everything. You'd see performers trying to hold-up theatre managers for money by saying that they'd been offered x-pounds from x-rival theatre to appear and they'd leave unless they got their pay upped. This actually becomes a plot point as the theatres manager, Jago, tries to ensure that Chang doesn't leave by offering him a higher percentage of the gate.

That's a big deal.

Theatres of the 1890s would seldom offer a percentage of the gate, save for the really big names. It was typical for performers to get a weekly amount that was

pre-set. A big act, like Houdini or Will Rogers, would get two or three percent of the gate. There are stories that Houdini got ten percent sometimes, which is nuts. I mean, 10 PERCENT!

Anyhow, it was rare for a non-National Level Star to get any sort of percentage gig. This was exactly the same as in the old days of wrestling. You'd get a set fee, and then you'd make your bets on the side to make money. This is why wrestling is worked, by the way. You'd have wrestlers betting on the other guy and then he'd go in and throw the match. Well, if you were in on it, you could break a bookmaker, and the promoters figured out they could work it smart and determine the finishes and then use that as the way to make money. Of course, bookies came to know they were doing it and that ended that, but they also realized that this technique allowed them to do planned finishes and that would allow them to build story lines.

And wrestling was often a part of a night at the theatre in the 1890s. They'd often do challenges where a 'shooter' would offer ten dollars for anyone from the audience to try and stand with him for ten minutes. This was much more popular at faires and carnivals, but it did happen on the stage as well. Some wrestlers also became popular for other acts, including Farmer Burns, the man who was the Hulk Hogan of the pre-1900s, who had an act where he'd have himself fitted with a noose,

a LEGIT NOOSE, and then take the dive off of a legit gallows. His neck was so strong, he'd be able to withstand the drop. Others like William Muldoon, George Hackenschmidt, Leo Beeler, and even early baseball stars found their way to the stage.

In the episode, the Doctor specifically mentions hoping to see Little Tich, real name Harry Relph. This is, perhaps, the most important name to anyone who really knows the history of early film comedy. He was probably the best known Music Hall Comedian of the late 19th century. His most famous work was his character Slapshoes, which he did wearing 28 inch boots. He was a major figure who influenced so many, including Chaplin and the entirety of French Cinema. There is a single film of his Little Tich act, which is noted as being really significant for the development of comedy in French cinema. As it goes, The Doctor would have been EXACTLY the type who would love to see Tich in person!



So, I'm three or so pages into the book and three pages into my In-Depth look at Doctor Who and the Talons of Weng-Chaing. Go figure.

So, it should be no surprise that a Chinese magician should be the focus for an adventure in Victorian London because the Victorians were crazy deep into Orientalism. There's good and bad to talk about in that matter. You can look at it as British artists discovering the techniques and styles of Near East and Far East nations and began incorporating them into the popular design of the time (and look at Brighton Palace, an exceptional example of the Chinoiserie style) and that is respectful (though not all applications were). On the other hand, it was completely brought into the Western style, taken and applied in any way that the Western artist wished without consideration of the traditions, styles, or truth, of their original application. I think a lot about this when it comes to Mexican motif in American Art. It is far better to be represented, even if it's by

clueless American artists, than it is to be completely absent. On the other hand, Orientalism also led to the serious ruin of a lot of grave sites with stuff being brought into the US, and out of their countries of origin. That's tougher.

The Doctor brought Leela to Victorian London with a very good reason: to teach her manners. That's a good idea because she was supposed to be a savage young warrior of the Sevateem tribe who descended from a crashed Earth ship. She often wore leather outfits, the famous one being a sort of Leather Bikini. I've only seen one or two of her episodes and I really enjoyed her character. Rough, violent, smart, and so very different than any other companion I've ever seen. Bringing Leela to Victorian London to learn some manners is a weird choice, but it says a lot about The Doctor.

You see, while we tend to think of Victorian England as the peak of manners, the concept of modern manners really formed among the French in the late 17th Century. The English were actually late to the traditions that they would become known for in the 19th Century. In actuality, if he'd wanted to get Leela a deep understanding of manners, he may well have taken her to Japan in the 1890s, where there was a community who were living by the Western code of manners. They were far more rigid than the Brits were at the time.



We first find The Doctor with Leela, but he's wearing a coat and deerstalker cap. He's supposed to be Sherlock Holmes, and when I mentioned the book to a few friends who love Who they called it the Sherlock Holmes story. He's like Sherlock in a lot of ways, but this is very much not a Sherlock Holmes story. It's a bit like one, with the trappings of a Holmes story, but really it's an adventure tale, and with a couple of exceptions, Holmes' stories are seldom adventure tales. He's actually doing something of a My Fair Lady/Pygmalion (and don't bother writing in that Pygmalion was first. It was the far inferior of the two!) , But there was hardly a mystery. If this is supposed to be a Sherlock Holmes style adventure, then ALL the Doctor's adventures are Sherlock Homes stories!

Leela as a character is fascinating to me because she's both so very different and very much the same as the companions I'm familiar with. When she and the Doctor are attacked by members of the Tong under the direction of Li H'sen Chang, she actually kills one of them with a Janis thorn, I believe.

And, of yeah, the Tongs.

You see, Fighting Tongs, as they were often referred to in US papers of the 1880s and 90s, are very much more an American thing than an English thing. Well, they're first a Chinese thing, of course, but the way they're presented in The Talons of Weng-Chiang, they behave more like the traditional depiction in American media of the Tongs. The best example of that in US film

is Big Trouble in Little China, though that is also exceptionally flawed. Yes, many Tong were involved in illegal activities, well illegal in the US activities, but many were just associations that were kinda like a cross between the Rotary Club and a Mutual Aid Society. There was a fair amount of violence between the various Tongs of San Francisco in the 1870s and 80s, including a famous War that led to the deaths of more than a hundred people.

The Tongs were in London, mostly in the two major Chinese enclaves. There was the East End, where Chinatown would eventually be founded around 1900, with both major Chinese immigrant groups. The smaller of the two was from Shanghai and settled in Poplar. By 1890, they were a pretty vibrant community. The Cantonese community was found largely in and around Limehouse in London, was much larger, and had more of a reputation for opium dens, gambling, and prostitution. Now, this was true of all poor areas of London, you were seldom far from a hooker, a dice game, or a dealer, but opium was largely found in the Chinese areas of Limehouse and Poplar, largely because it attracted a clientele that was largely sailors. The first Chinese Laundry in the UK was founded in 1901 in Poplar. The US had Chinese Laundries dating back to the 1850s, since it required little capital to start-up, but it hadn't made it to the UK until 1900. The Chinese as a 'Laundry Race' was wide-spread in the US by 1890, and there was a famous moment with Long Tack Sam. Another Magician, fur-

ther down the ladder than Sam, thought it was wrong that Sam got top-billing over him on a bill. He then, at the end of Sam's act, brought his dirty clothes on stage and said "Here, and not too much starch." Long Tack Sam's reaction? A fight-ending upper-cut that put the other guy down.

There was no encore.

The idea of secret fighting Tongs is much stronger than any of the Tongs outside of San Francisco. Yes, there were wars and they were criminal organizations, but at the same time the Mafia was much stronger in almost every part of the world where they both appeared.

So, the Tongs were at the service of Chang, who was at the service of Weng-Chiang, who turns out to be Magnus Greel, a Future Tyrant-type. I went looking for Weng-Chiang and came up empty-handed, but then I discovered Wenchang Wang, as close an approximation as I could figure. Is it the same god of Chinese myth? No, I don't think so, though I think like with the Mr. Sin

dummy, Terrance Dicks had a bit of knowledge that was put to good use. Wenchang Wang is considered the God of Culture and Literature. A pretty good god to have in a book about a magician, no>

Still, none of the attributes that are applied to Weng-Chiang are present in Wenchang Wang, so I was saddened.

The two other characters who have had a long lifespan are Jago, the theatre manager, and Litefoot, a police

pathologist. This pair had great chemistry in the episode and eventually were spun-off for a bunch of audio adventures. This was a GREAT idea and Big Finish started them as a regular series, with the original actors from The Talons of Weng-Chiang, in 2009. They're still doin' them and they're mostly Jago and Litefoot investigating paranormal occurrences.

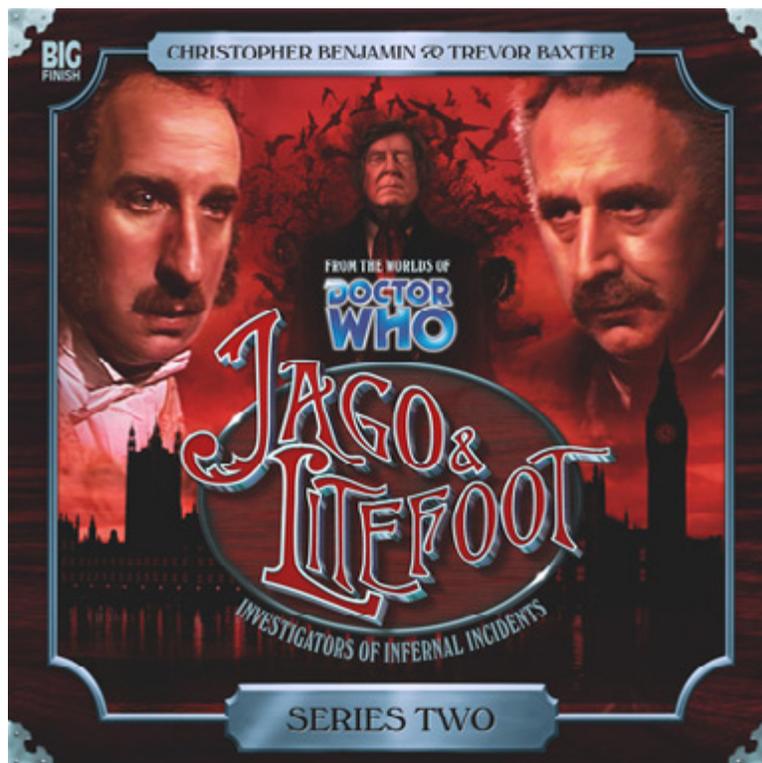
Of course, that's another thing that was GIANT in the Victorian Age. Paranormal investigation as we know it today from the various TV Shows that purport to be such is a great deal different than what they were

doing in the 1890s. The investigation of the Paranormal in the 1890s featured a lot more spiritualistic investigation, but there was some science. A lot of guys were working on things like Phones to talk to the dead (that was being developed by a dude named Thomas Edison) and there were others trying to come up with other spirit investigation items. In the Jago-Litefoot adventures, they aren't really so much investigators as they are adventurers. They, in some ways, are like the Doctor; seldom looking for an adventure, but often finding them. I find it interesting that these guys ended up with a series of audio adventures. Jago, the theatre owner, is a kind of character who isn't typically interesting. He's well-written, funny, and most importantly, he's pliable. There were a bunch of great and legendary characters who owned theatres or acted as bookers. Most bookers lived large, often trying to figure ways to screw performers out of their pay. Some were exceptionally honest, and they were more notable than those that weren't. One

famous booker used to give every performer an envelope at the end of the night. You'd always feel the envelope to see if it was thick enough. After a while, you always opened the envelope to make sure they'd put actual bills in there.

Pathologist George Litefoot was a great character, arguably my favorite of the novel. One of the reasons I liked him so much is that I know a little about pathology in the Victorian era due to several panels I've at-

tended, which sent me on to a research binge. The 19th Century had seen Rudolf Virchow beginning the world of Microscopic Pathology in the UK in the 1860s, and Cohnheim as the first real Experimental Pathologist. With that, Pathology, a study that was already several centuries old, really came of age. There were new techniques coming up all the time, and it was pathology that saw great advances, and the field of Criminal Pathology was a new one, but it was maturing quickly. Forensic pathology was also fast-growing, and that led to the modern forensic sciences we see used in CSI. Basically, it was





the best time up to that point to be a pathologist. And Litefoot is one, and apparently he's pretty good!

OK, the story unfolds with Chang serving his master Weng-Chiang, who is really the future displaced monster Magnus Greel. The Doctor was there in the battles of the 51st Century. The specific one he references was the Battle of Reykjavik where the Filipino Army defeated the Supreme Alliance's forces, of which Magnus Greel was the Minister of Justice. The 51st Century is also where we first encounter the idea of Captain Jack Harkness. He was born in the 51st Century, and it isn't clear if he or his parents were a part of the War, but there's a chance, certainly.

And the fact that this time frame, among all the timeframes from the history of Doctor Who, was chosen for so much follow-on material is telling. This episode was a season ender, so it would have gotten a fair deal of attention, but it was also a Tom Baker Adventure. The fact that they did a novel after the fact, something they did with many of the adventures, though certainly not all, is also telling. The Talons of Weng-Chiang is one of those stories that is well-remembered, and it's a fun story. Part of that is the richness of Victorian London,

I think, and the quality of the writing. Terrance Dicks does a great job with the novelization, and I think it's a better story than how it's told in the episodes.

There's more, of course, including the Fleet River. According to the story, The Palace is apparently sitting right on top of where once the Fleet River ran free, exposed to the air. It was eventually covered-over, though where it flows into the Thames it can still be seen sending water forth from Blackfriars Bridge. Over the years, several centuries actually, the Fleet went from being a major river, one of the largest feeding into the Thames, and eventually it became largely used as a sewer, which led to people thinking many of the areas abutting the Fleet being thought of as polluted. In the 13th Century. If people in those days thought someplace was polluted, you have to know that it's SERIOUSLY polluted. Over the years, the river got more and more covered up, bridges and such, and then there was the Great Fire. After that, Christopher Wren planned it out as the New Canal, but it didn't really take, largely because it still stank to high heaven. There were plans to make the Fleet a sorta greenery space, but it didn't happen. Eventually it was all culverts and now is the longest and most

sewery of all the underground rivers of London. If you go to Hampstead, the ponds there are the source of the Fleet and are wonderful for walkin' around. There are a lot of great photos of folks who have traveled the walled-in river. There is talk, from Boris the Bold, Mayor of The City of London, to open some of it up and expose it to the world. It was only fully contained in the 1860s, in one of the biggest urban planning projects ever undertaken to add it to the sewer system. There's a lot to be said about the Fleet being uncovered. I'd love to see that...

Of course, The Doctor mentions that the last time he was on the Fleet he caught a salmon that would have hung off either side of the table, a good six or seven feet long it would have had to have been. This is pretty unlikely, or maybe not. You see, he said he enjoyed the fish with "The Venerable Bede", who would have been alive from 673 to 735. At that point, the Fleet River was still very active, and not yet polluted. But is also only fed into the Thames, and was not likely deep enough to handle a large Salmon of that type. In fact, would Salmon at all have inhabited The Fleet? Well, it is likely, as it was a tidal river, that it would have attracted salmon, but at the same time, would it have attracted LARGE salmon? If you look at the salmon areas of North America, the really big ones tend to stay out at sea longer, and tend to

frequent large, flowing waterways.. The concept of the 'Lunker Stream' is a falsehood brought about by fishermen who may catch a single large fish in a small waterway, but often it's only because the fish will use that waterway as a path between two strong-flowing waters. Is it possible that there would have been large salmon in the Fleet? Yeah, sure, but it's more likely that a fish of that size would have been caught in the Thames, though as the Fleet's entry into the mouth of the Thames was at least 100 yards wide at the time, the outflow must have been very significant.

And, of course, that does bring us to the Bede. I knew nothing of him when I read his name, so I fired up Wikipedia. Turns out he's sorta an English master thinker and writer whose writings truly transformed the English church of the 7th/8th Century. He's a saint, as I understand it, in just about every Christian sect, both pre- and post- reformation.

So, the Novel is a lot of fun, a good read, but really, it's Victorian London and all the weird ties to the things in my mind and history that set my brain on fire. I highly recommend giving it a read, finding a copy of *The Magical Life of Long Tack Sam*, watching the episode *The Talons of Weng-Chiang*, going out of your way to find *Big Trouble in Little China*, and totally diving into the world of Victorian London!



THE PASSION FOR WENG-CHIANG

BY KIT COX

Well what a fantastic honour to write about the Doctor who episode that still makes me smile at the mere mention of its name. I was only six years old when this episode hit British television and I am so glad to say I was there to see it. Too put the episode in historical context it was the year of Star Wars, Jimmy Carter became President of the United States and Fleetwood Mac released "Rumours". It was a good year and Tom Baker was showing there was life after John Pertwee. So a quick review of the episode and were about to

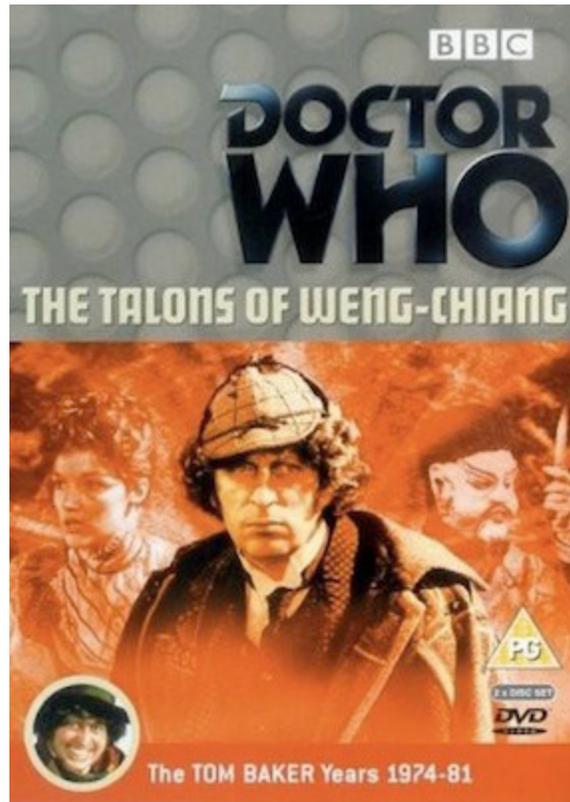
wrap up the 14th season with the fourth Doctor. The Beeb have decided to go all out on a good old Victorian Period, Earth adventure. Doctor who was always at its best with the BBC mixing its huge period costume department into the weave of the imaginative show and with Talons, they went to town so well you felt you were really there. No dodgy quarry, alien planets or wooden sets, the whole episode felt real and a bit epic.

The episode starts with the Doctor dressed as Sherlock Holmes and Leela dressed as the finest Victorian lady, no shammy leather bikini here dads. Leela gets into fine spirit complaining about her dress before it all kicks off with an

attack by the Tong. The whole incident sees the Doctor and Leela arrested and the only non escaping Tong member poisoned by Scorpion blood. This is Doctor Who at its best. Already the establishment doesn't trust our hero and in his best, your all foolish insects way he proves that he is invaluable and within minutes is almost in charge of the whole investigation. This is in the days before Psychic paper where the Doctor just brow beat any doubters into submission and at that Tom Baker was the best. His disarming grin and bag of jelly babies throwing everybody into believing "what harm can this

eccentric do?"

If you're a fan of Victorian literature or films set in the era then this is the adventure for you. Straight away you see the retelling of the Sherlock Holmes stories as the Doctor ditches his scarf and hat for the stereotypical Holmes attire and then he is teamed up with a Doctor sidekick of his own, who is so close to Watson it's scary. Professor Litefoot (as this Watson is known) also reveals a housekeeper called Mrs Hudson, just in case you weren't getting the parallels.



The nods to other Victoriana doesn't stop there either. The Doctor is quite clearly on an Eliza Doolittle training plan with Leela, trying to make his savage into a proper lady not realising her charm comes from what attracted him to her in the first place.

At First you think our bad guy will be the mystical character of "Chang" and his devil doll Mr Sin but this episode will have more twists than you can shake a stick at. Chang does his best to tick every Fu Manchu stereotype, as do his Tong and in a modern age you can often feel yourself squirming under the unveiled racist content.

However the story takes

its first big turn when the titular character, Weng Chiang turns out to not be the god that Chang the magician seems to worship but instead a despot from the 51st century with his own time machine and a taste for the life-force of young ladies (cue Jack the ripper overtones as best a family show can offer).

So without wanting to spoil the enjoyment of this great adventure by giving it all away why do I believe you should watch it again and again.

First off the characters and I'm not just talking about the Doctor and Leela. This adventure gives us the Victorians Litefoot and Jago and they are such well rounded creations they have inspired several books since and a series of their own.

The bad guys (despite the racism) are sinister to the extreme, real hide behind the sofa scary and Mr Sin the Peking homunculus, is more than likely responsible for more than one fear of ventriloquist dummies. Steven Moffat realises that the best monsters are the things we see around us and plays on the whole weeping angel, scarecrow and toy motif and Mr Sin (played by Deep Roy) is an early version of this fear.

Add to that Giant Rats in the Victorian sewers, the Doctor happily going in with an Elephant gun and you have an adventure that just keeps on giving. Every member of the cast plays to the best of their abilities and the sets are so nicely turned out you can't help but smile. The Dialogue is witty and engaging at best and cheesy but entertaining at worst.

There's a lovely moment where it's realised that they may lose the dad audience and Leela runs through the sewers in just her under ware (all be it Victorian bloomers and vest) the garments are white and the sewer is awash with

water, that Leela often falls into so you do the maths. Anyway the results will keep Dads in the living room.

All in all it's like a checklist of everything that makes Doctor who great. English tweeness, Time travel, recognisable monsters and memorable bad guys.

Of course you have to look at the adventure with nostalgia in your eyes. The giant rats are close to laughable in their interaction with actors and most of the special effects are made up of light effects played over the screen so none of it is a patch on the epic special effects of Star wars but then television science fiction of the time had very little budgets to work with.

To sum up Talons of Weng-Chiang is a fantastic bit of television nostalgia that still holds up today, mainly due to a strong story, convincing characters and the BBC playing to its costume drama strengths.

Make a gap behind your sofa, close the curtains and make a nice pot of tea. This is a British Classic.

Kit Cox under the pseudonym "Major Jack Union" is the author behind "How to bag a Jabberwock: a practical guide to monster hunting" and its upcoming sequel.



THE BEST STEAMPUNK READS OF 2012

BY MIKE PERSCHON

First appeared on the Steampunk Scholar blog
(<http://steampunkscholar.blogspot.ca>)

My apologies for promising a Doctor Who series this Christmas, and producing nothing. End of term marking was brutal this year, and then I fell ill and spent my holidays convalescing. I can only hope the next year is better for the blog.

As always, my list is somewhat incomplete, given that I have not read every work of steampunk released in 2012. I no longer purchase steampunk books, for the simple fact that the entirety of the ARC stack remains unread every year. Nevertheless, of the books I chose to read (and even that is a statement about the books that remained unread, is it not?), these are the best and brightest. While this year produced so much excellent steampunk I could easily have made this a top 10 list, I prefer the exclusivity that a top five list provides. This year is an anomaly, in that it contains Brian J. Robb's, *Steampunk*, which is not a work of fiction, but is, for my money, the best coffee-table book on the history of steampunk.

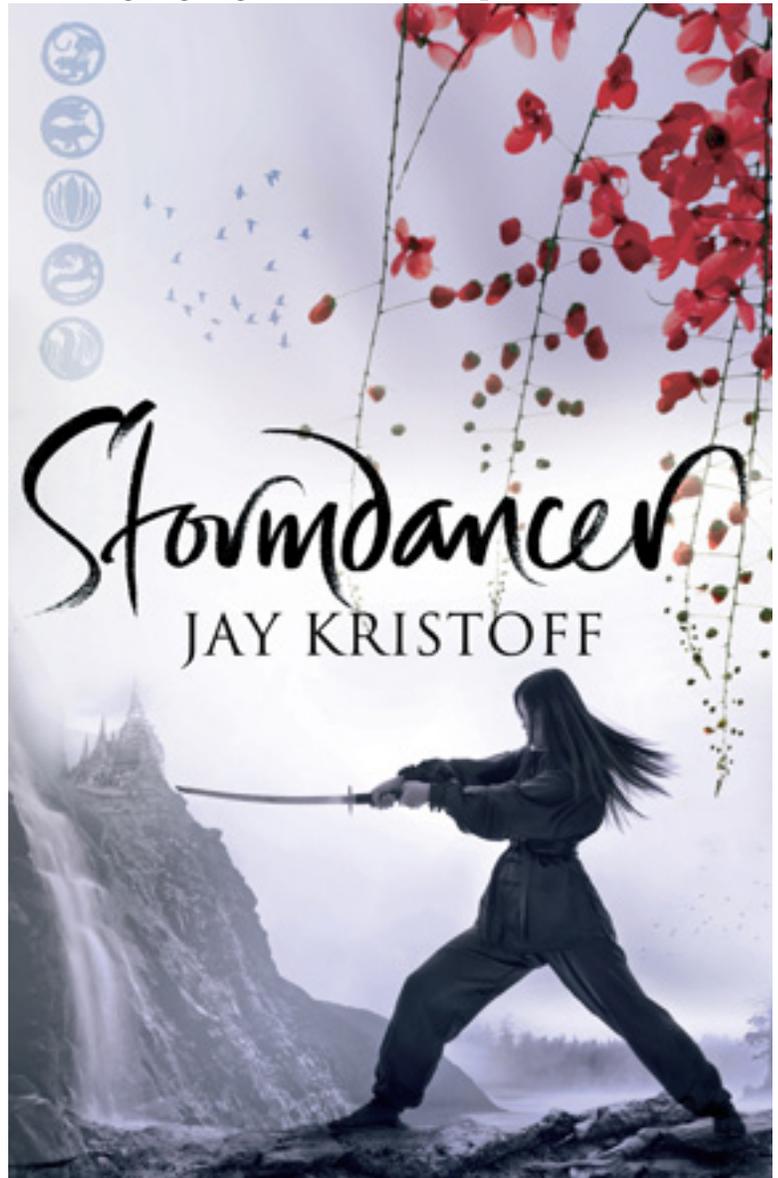
1. *Stormdancer* by Jay Kristoff.

I love this book. I've been waiting for some kick ass Asian steampunk since I wrote my "Steam Wars" paper in 2008, and was glad to finally get the chance to read some. I know there are other examples out there, but Kristoff hit all the right notes with me. I read *Stormdancer* right after I submitted my thesis, and was fed up with reading anything steampunk. Despite that aversion, the story dragged me in immediately, and I don't get to say that very often. I love Kristoff's writing style, which some may find too florid or dense. I love the symbiotic relationship between the female protagonist and the magical griffin, which evoked shades of Naomi Novik's *His Majesty's Dragon* at its best. I loved that Kristoff is willing to kill his

characters, since an adventure story without cost isn't much of an adventure. And I'm dying for the sequel.

2. *Timeless* by Gail Carriger.

If you haven't read this by now, go away, because I'm going to gush about all the spoilers I couldn't when



I reviewed this book for Tor.com back in March. I have loved the entire Parasol Protectorate series, and this book was no exception. Every major character was given their due, and while some of those moments were tragic, from Lyall's exile to Floote's betrayal, there were so many more which were gorgeously satisfying: Ivy's death and subsequent undeath, which would have seemed ridiculous upon meeting her in Soulless, was perfect, but only because of how Ivy has proved herself over the series. Biffy's rise to Beta made all the sense in the world, and his deft tongue-lashing of Felicity Loontwill was one of my favourite moments in the whole series. Carriger even carried off Maccon's death convincingly enough to have me up late one night, furiously turning pages to find out if Lord Woolsey really was dead. Alexia finally got to be terribly, terribly wrong, which her character needed, but remained true to her character to the very end. Carriger has set the board well for the upcoming sequel series, and while I was sad to see this first series end, I'm glad she finished strong, and didn't drag the story out until it went out with a whimper instead of a bang.

3. The Rise of Ransom City by Felix Gilman.

Fans of The Half-made World might find Ransom City's memoir-style off-putting, but I applaud Gilman for being adventurous enough to relate the second book in this fantasy-Western in a somewhat whimsical first-person perspective. Seeing both the characters and the world of Liv Alverhuysen and John Creedmore with fresh eyes was a welcome change. Too many series fail for a lack of innovation beyond "the story continues," but that is not the case with Ransom City. In addition to being a strong addition to the Half-made World series, the book is an excellent example of self-reflexive fiction, complete with a somewhat untrustworthy narrator, a frame narrative reminiscent of Cervantes, nested tales, and ruminations on the nature of reality and fiction, which makes Ransom City an excellent choice for steampunk scholars.

4. Steampunk: An Illustrated History of Fantastical Fiction, Fanciful Film, and Other Victorian Visions by Brian J. Robb.

This is the first year that my top five list has included a work on non-fiction, but given that Robb's is not the first of its kind, a coffetable book seeking to take an encompassing look at steampunk, we may be seeing more in years to come. That would be somewhat

disappointing, since Robb's book strikes me as pretty damn comprehensive, focusing primarily on the literary and cinematic history of steampunk, with only two out of nine chapters devoted to steampunk as subculture. I'm certainly biased when it comes to this book, since my focus has been literary and cinematic, and I sometimes felt like Robb had been looking over my shoulder, cribbing notes from my blog or dissertation. But that's just my way of saying I agree with what the book has to say about steampunk. It's a gorgeous hardback with great choices for illustrations. Well worth picking up for neophyte steampunk scholars looking for a survey text.

5. The Friday Society by Adrienne Kress:

Some will find this last one an odd candidate for my top five, but if I've worked toward anything here at this blog, it's been to be fair in my reviews. If your brand of steampunk is Mieville or Hodder, you won't enjoy The Friday Society. This is a YA book. A YA grrrl power book. It features girls who kick ass. And it kicks ass. Shit blows up in this book. These girls give new meaning to the word "bombshell," given how much shit blows up in this book. It is on this list, because it won me over, despite me thinking I wasn't its target audience. Think Gail Carriger meets Charlie's Angels meets Sucker Punch meets shit blowing up (I suppose those last two were a little redundant). I know some of the more serious steampunks out there will revile its inclusion on this list, but all work and no play makes Mike a dull boy. And Adrienne Kress's Friday Society is anything but dull.

Special mention goes to Devon Monk's **Dead Iron**, which was published in 2011, but I didn't get the chance to read it until this year. It's an excellent page-turner set in a steampunk old-West filled with werewolves and Faeries. Think Holly Black meets Hell on Wheels and you have the right feel. Kudos also go out to **Rush for Clockwork Angels**, but I only add reads on this list, and while I'd like to bend the rules for Neil Peart's lyrics-as-poetry, I'll have to wait until I've read the accompanying book to judge whether Kevin J. Anderson's novelization belongs on this list or not. I'll be writing full reviews of these books in the weeks to come, now that the dissertation is behind and the blog alone ahead. Happy New Year, everyone!

VOX-HAUL & I

From Lloyd Penney!

Dear Chris:

While the young lady on her trapeze display her charms above the otherwise blank cover, I will admire the contents of Exhibition Hall 22, and see if I can compose an admirable letter of comment. Well, stranger things have happened...

This zine is about the graphics? You've got some good stuff here, and I suspect that we'll be seeing a lot more of it in future issues. The fonts are good, too...I can tell you the names of the steampunkish fonts I have, and you can download what you'd like.

Ooh, I love me some fonts! I've got a bunch of new imagery from teh Victorian Age!

The local...we were at the home of Yvonne's sister Denise in Oshawa again, this time for a Christmas nosh. Got a gift certificate at a book store, and an 8Gb USB stick. You didn't get to see Campbell House when you were here, but it was a distance away. I was laid off from the publishing job just north of Toronto yesterday, so we are definitely not getting to any Steampunk cons any time in the future. But, I have some good leads, and I am optimistic this time. This New Year's weekend is going to be a creative one, so I hope to create necklaces and earrings for our upcoming dealer's tables at Ad Astra 2013 and Steam on Queen 2. We are very pleased that you and Linda enjoyed SFCOntario 3, and we are looking forward to number 4.

Bummer, Lloyd! Here's hoping to a gainfully employed 2013! Sadly, I won't be in T-Dot for SFCOntario 4, but it's looking like I'll be there for SMoFCon!

Where are we going in 2013? There are a number of local conventions, but there is also a Steampunk festival in the village of Coldwater in August 2013, and I think we will be going this year. We need a Steampunk convention of some kind, and this would be our first such event since the Canadian National Steampunk Convention in the spring of 2011. However, we are finding some steamy vendors locally, with on Victoria Wilson Corsetry, and the best vendor for me, Kingpin Chic Gentleman's Wear Shop.

I am hoping to learn more soon about Bruce Boxleitner's Lantern City webseries. What have you seen about it? So far, Mira Furlan and John Rhys-Davies have been signed up to star in it.

Nalini interviewed Bruce and got all sorts of info on it, as I recall!

Done for the moment...for Christmas this year, you might have seen on Facebook, my Steampunk presents this year were a candlestick phone and a men's jewelry case, which came from Kingpin Chic. I am determined to enjoy this New Year's, and we may be going to a party with a steamy theme to it. I get back on the job hunt on January 2. thanks for another great zine!, and keep making them. Have a great New Year, hugs to Linda, see you in 2013.

Yours, Lloyd Penney.

Same to you and yours!

