

EXHIBITION HALL 15

THE WEIRD WEST



EXHIBITION HALL - NOVEMBER 2010

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JAMES BACON - LONDON BUREAU CHIEF, RIC FLAIR - WHOOOOOOOOOOOO!

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Well, October was one of the stronger months for Steampunk in the public eye. No conventions in October, which is rare these days, but there was the Steampunk Fortnight on Tor.com. They had some seriously good stuff, including writing from Diana Vick, who also appears in these pages, and myself! There was a great piece from Nisi Shawl that mentioned the amazing panel that she, Liz Gorinsky, Michael Swanwick and Ann VanderMeer were on at World Fantasy last year. Jaymee Goh had a piece on Commodification and Post-Modernism that was well-written, though slightly troubling to me. Stephen Hunt's Steampunk Timeline was good stuff, and the omnipresent GD Falksen (who has never written for us!) had a couple of good pieces.

Me? I wrote an article about how Tomorrowland was the signpost for the rise of Steampunk. You can read it at <http://www.tor.com/blogs/2010/10/goodbye-tomorrow-hello-yesterday>. The second piece is all about an amusement park called Gaslight in New Orleans. I'll let you decide about that one - <http://www.tor.com/blogs/2010/10/gaslight-amusement>. The final one all about The Cleveland Steamers.

This much attention is a good thing for Steampunk, especially from a site like Tor.com, a gateway for a lot of SF readers who aren't necessarily a part of fandom. Some folks see any tie to fandom as automatically disqualifying it from importance or seriousness. This is something that I have never understood myself. I think I've gotten more out of fanzines than I have promags for years.

Rikki Donovan has started a Steampunk Challenge! You can read more at <http://www.rikkidonovan.com/index.php/steampunk-challenge-2/>. I think it's a great idea.

TeslaCon, the convention that Linda and I were so intrigued by when we hung around

their party at WindyCon last year, happened. Sadly, we didn't get a report from it.

Of course, this issue is being done as a lead-in to SteamCon II: The Weird, Weird West. If you saw Jonah Hex, you may not be interested in what the Weird West sub-altern of the Steampunk sub-genre has to offer. That's a shame because some great stuff has come out of the Wild West and made for very good reading.

So, what's in this issue? There's that article I wrote, a piece from Ariane Wolfe, a review of one of the best books of the year, *The Half-Made World*, a bit of my interview with James P. Blaylock from Nova Albion, and more and more!



VOX-HAUL & I

As has become tradition, let us begin with Lloyd Penney!

Dear Chris, James and Ariane:

The 14th Exhibition Hall is extant, hurrah! That's either a Martian war machine or a fancy light standard on the front cover, so I will have a look inside...CQ...CQ...

War of the Worlds is one of my faves, too. Add to that radio drama, and the hopes that one day, I will have the opportunity to perform it. That imprinted Wells and Welles onto my subconscious, and anything that can shock an audience the way that did has my admiration and respect.

Those guys are awesome!

You're right in that the Mercury Theatre did not sneak their performance of War of the Worlds onto an unsuspecting audience. Every so often, the broadcasting station broke for identification and a description of what was being performed, but the American public did not listen well enough, or were listening to other programs on other stations, and were terrified. I wish there was interest enough to justify more radio drama, but with radio being so formatted, only a specialty station could broadcast it. I think there's something on one of the satellite stations, and I know there's lots of radio drama broadcast on the British digital station BBC7. The CBC has an advanced radio drama studio in its downtown studios here, but unfortunately, there is less than an hour's worth of radio drama created there every week.

Welles, probably better than anyone else at the time, understood the timing of radio and I'd be shocked if he hadn't timed the thing out to the second to make the most of the



audience turn-arounds. He was a seriously strong observer and it's the kind of thing he would take advantage of.

I will add something I didn't see mentioned in the essays on War of the Worlds...The War of the Worlds by H.G. Wells was published in 1897, and to capitalize on its popularity, the Hearst newspaper group commissioned its science editor, Garrett P. Serviss, to write a sequel. Edison's Conquest of Mars was published the next year, 1898, and Serviss got none other than Thomas A. Edison himself to assist with his own ideas on how to get revenge on those Martians by invading Mars itself. Many of the ideas within, like battles in space, alien abductions, hand-held phaser guns, asteroid mining and spacesuits, saw light for the first time in this book, and many of those ideas came from Edison's fertile mind, and Edison is also the main character, spearheading the noble mission to Mars. Apogee Books, better known for all the space program books it has published, produced this book some years ago, the first reprint since the original 1898 publishing.

Funny, I just got Edison's Conquest of Mars for my Sony eReader. It's good reading so far. I'd have gone further, but as always, there's too much reading to do for this here rag!

The review of The Asylum reminds me that work continues apace on the Canadian National Steampunk Exhibition, coming up in April of 2011. Some guests have been announced, including some displays that were at Burning Man this year, courtesy of the Site 3 Colaboratory of Toronto, and memberships are available for the buying, and hotel rooms can now be booked, at the Holiday Inn Markham, just over the northern border in the east end. Yvonne and I will be in charge of the green room, but we have also been acting as advisors to the senior committee. For all information on this special event, www.cnse.ca.

I'm thinking about going to the CNSE, though it's a tight fit with a tight schedule for the year already.

Just made the page, and have to think about going to work. My old job at the Law Society of Upper Canada resurfaced, so I have applied for it, and with luck, I may be returning to my old job very soon. Positive thoughts, and fingers crossed. Thank you all for another interesting edition.

Always good to hear from you, old boy!

Yours, Lloyd Penney



ARTISTS THIS ISSUE - COVER BY JOEY VEGAS ([HTTP://JOEYVEGASICS.DEVIANTART.COM/](http://JOEYVEGASICS.DEVIANTART.COM/))
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THE WEIRD, WEIRD WEST

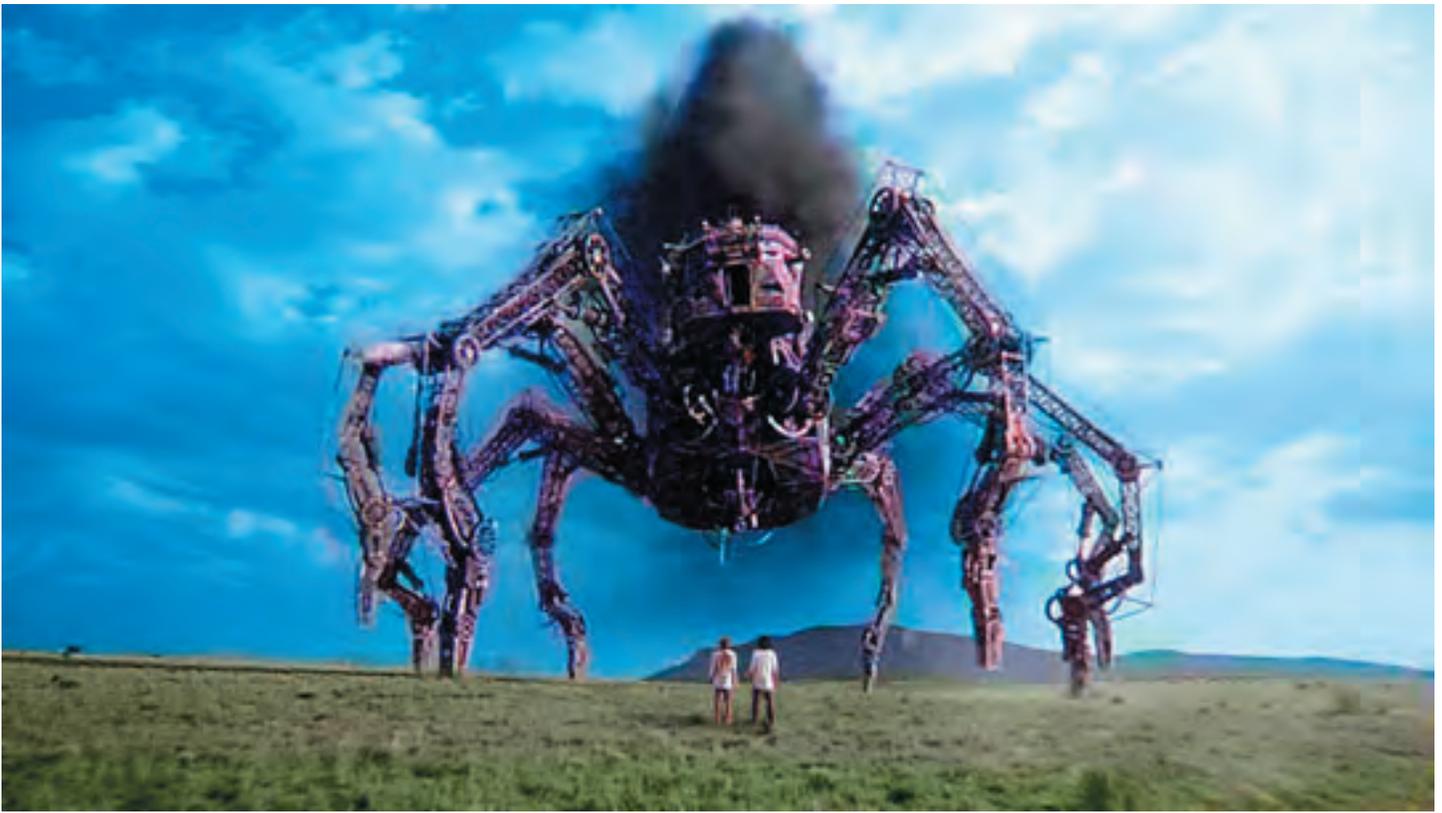
As someone who spends a lot of time explaining steampunk to people of diverse backgrounds, early on I came to the conclusion that the giant mechanical spider from the movie *Wild Wild West* was our poster child. If they knew nothing at all about science fiction, Jules Verne or H. G. Wells, they almost invariably knew about that blessed spider. Dr. Loveless with his diabolical machines and Artemus Gordon with all his wild invention were part of the human gestalt now. Steampunk was firmly represented in their minds as a wonderful giant mechanical spider. No other movie was as universally steampunk. *Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow* is decidedly dieselpunk and *City of Ember* is really too technologically advanced. *Van Helsing* is close, but is so cheesy that we hesitate to own it. So *Wild Wild West* it is. Then I began to hear controversy over whether steampunk was steampunk if it was based outside of Victorian London. I immediately thought “Of course! Whoever said that it was based in one spot?” With my poster child, the spider being based in early America, I already had a huge motive to feel deeply that steampunk was global. Time period based, yes, but anywhere in the world during the reign of steam and of course Queen Victoria. For that matter anywhere within that basic technological time period, since it could also take place in an alternate universe. Were they saying that there couldn't be completely made up worlds that were entirely steampunk? Getting back to the west, another really good example of steampunk is the little remembered television show *Legend* starring Richard Dean Anderson, as a novelist who ends up fighting crime and John De Lancie as the mad scientist who assists him with outlandish inventions. Or the third *Back to the Future* movie with Doc Brown's mad science and time travel, the original *Wild Wild West* television show, or even to a



BY DIANA VICK

lesser extent *Brisco County Jr.* on occasion. Aside from *The Secret Adventures of Jules Verne*, these are probably the most steampunk shows ever on television.

I decided to make the theme of the next Steamcon® “weird weird west”. I did some searching and didn’t come up with a lot of books that weren’t mostly supernatural. Kurt R. A. Giambastiani has a series beginning with *The Year the Cloud Fell*. It is definitely steampunk with airships and General Custer. *Zeppelins West* was a weird western steampunk tale, populated by many of the famous folk of the old west, but it was not a great book and a bit too risqué for my tastes. Cherie Priest’s new novel *Dreadnaught* was rumored to be weird west, but it was a bit too far off to read at the time. It’s definitely on my reading list. There weren’t many books on the topic yet, but I still felt that steampunk ala weird west was going to be popular. Captain Robert of Abney Park approached me about Steamcon’s theme; saying that he had a feeling it might be the next big thing. Happily his band Abney Park will be playing at Steamcon II as will our theme appropriate band Ghoultown. Gamers will be excited to learn that our games guest of honor is Shane Hensley who wrote the popular RPG *Deadlands* which is also very in keeping with the theme. And we are also introducing *Riverboat Gambler Night* this year. There will of course be panels about the steampunk in the west and I think it will be very entertaining. So giant mechanical spiders aside, there seems to be a bit of need for more steampunk in the weird west, but I foresee some fun stories in the future; the future that never was



Kevin Smith: The studio - they said they liked it, but they didn’t like it. They kept pushing the giant spider in the third act. They wanted Commander Courage to fight a giant spider in the third act.

Donald Swan: Literally?

Kevin Smith: Literally! A giant spider. And I didn’t get it at the time because I still lived in Jersey. Now I live in Los Angeles, I get it. Spider’s a good idea. Wasn’t then. But I was young... and straight.

~ **Comic Book: The Movie**

THE WEIRD WEST: FROM 19TH CENTURY JOURNALISM TO JONAH HEX

It must have been nice in the 19th Century. You could be a fiction writer and make a living writing fiction... as journalism. It's not entirely true, but it's close. There were few standards back then, truth was far less important than selling papers. Many journalists were among the greatest fiction writers of the day: Edgar Allen Poe, Ambrose Bierce and Mark Twain all plied the trade. Fiction was also published in newspapers, making celebrities out of their writers like W.C. Morrow, but often more fantastic tales were told in the 'legitimate' sections of newspapers. Poe was probably the most famous for it. His most famous hoax was the 1844 Balloon Hoax, originally appearing



in the New York newspaper *The Sun*. It was a claim that Monck Mason had designed a balloon and had made a trip across the Atlantic. It was a sensation, though it was not nearly as major a break as the Great Moon Hoax which the same paper had broken a decade prior. Thirty years after Poe's stroke of genius, the *New York Herald* did what might have been the most successful Mass Communicative hoax until the 1920s: the New York Zoo Escape. The claim was that the animals of the Central Park Zoo had escaped, were eating people and running wild. It was a major hoax and caused something of a panic. That was the power of the newspaper in the 19th Century.

The first thing a group did when they set up a new town was found a newspaper. OK, that's not true: they'd found a church and then it would put out a newspaper. Plus, maybe a bar and a whorehouse before they got around to publishing. Nevertheless, a newspaper was always a part of the plan. Tombstone had two of the most famous Old West newspapers: *The Nugget* and the *Epitaph* (which had the better motto: Every Tombstone needs an Epitaph). The *Dakota Democrat* and *Black Hills Pioneer* were also very important papers for the time. *The Territorial Enterprise* was where Samuel Clemens became Mark Twain. Twain and his partner Dan De Quille would come up with great hoaxes, supposedly starting with the two of them 'creating' much better obits for people who died than the lives they led. *The Enterprise* gained great popularity and continued to be published for more than a hundred and twenty years.

The Mono Index had a famous editor who they called Lyin' Jim.

Often, two or three papers would pop up, leading to circulation battles. One sure-fire way to win one of those was to come up with a great fake story and then print a retraction on page six a few days later. Tombstone had a couple of those battles, and they apparently ran a famous article that is still debated to this day. The *Epitaph* had an article about a group of men who had shot and killed a Thunderbird, and then displayed the dead creature.

The article, which ran on April 26th, 1890, was real, has been found on Microfiche in the collection of the University of Arizona, but doesn't include a photo. There was supposedly a photo that folks say of the Thunderbird leaning up against a barn with six guys with arms out-stretched beneath it. That photo is famous, even though no copy of it has been seen for almost fifty years... maybe. One Old West enthusiast was said to have a copy of the photo in the early 1960s, but he lost it when he lent it out to be copied. The photo, drawings of which are abundant, has never really been confirmed, though there are folks still alive who say that they have seen it.



BY CHRIS GARCIA

REPORT MYSTERIOUS AIRSHIP.

SAYVILLE, L. I., Dec. 9.—A mysterious balloon, which the two men who saw it say appeared to be propelled by some motive power other than wind, was seen yesterday at Moriches. The men who saw the balloon were H. L. Terry, of Sayville and Alfred Chichester of Centre Moriches, both of whom are reputable business men.

They say that there seemed to be issuing from the balloon either smoke or steam from either side like the exhaust of an engine. Both gave the same description of the mysterious object. They say it had every appearance of being propelled by some kind of an engine. There was not a cloud in the sky at the time, and they insist that they could not be mistaken in thinking the object they saw was a balloon.

It approached steadily over the ocean, passed across the Great South Bay, and disappeared from view in the northwestern sky.

There were a great many more. Furry Trout was a popular hoax found in papers in Idaho, Colorado and Utah between 1860 and 1910. The Jackalope has survived and was almost certainly an invention of a newspaper man. There were a series of articles about a Giant that lived in the hills surrounding Sacramento. Sac-town was also the site of one of the coolest of all the journalistic hoaxes ever: the Airship Hoax of 1896.

In November of 1896, hundreds of people saw a series of strange lights over California's capitol. It was the first of a long series of reports of weird lights over California over the following year. While there certainly were lights seen over the skies of NorCal, but the reporting certainly embellished it, and many of the other cities that reported airships had no actual

reports at all, simply a reporter who had heard rumblings about Sacramento and were willing to write it up for another paper. This spread around the West and even as far east as Texas. It probably sold more papers than any other single story at the time.

What we see as the Wild West today was formed largely by the writings of the journalists who reported on the various events in East Coast papers. Many of these reporters never went anywhere near the West, and coupled with popular magazines with their Western stories. That established the Western genre and made it the most distinctly American of all literary genres. OK, maybe Detective Fiction, but that's neither here nor there.

The development of Science Fiction and the American variations on Horror and Fantasy that happened in the early 1900s all started to show up in Western fiction. Robert E. Howard wrote a wonderful story in 1932 called *The Horror from the Mound*. It's not the first of the Weird West tales, but by appearing in *Weird Tales*, it was one of the first to get wide attention and probably where the Weird got added to Weird West. There were several stories in the fifties and sixties, and many of these were impressive.

Movies got into it pretty early. *The Phantom Empire* was a serial that ran in 1935 and starred Gene Autry. It was a really funky little serial, part-musical, part western, part science fiction movie. It was a successful one, too. You could always tell the ones that did well because they recut them and released them as features, which Mascot Pictures did as both *Radio Ranch* or *Men with Steel Faces*. In 1937, *Riders of the Whistling Skull* was released. This was a part of the *The Three Mesquiteers* series of films, which included John Wayne in several of them. Films like *The Beast of Hollow Mountain* and *Curse of the Undead* were B-Movie entries that certainly influenced the Weird West Genre.

Two films in particular that deserve mention, and could be seen as pre-saging our current literary mash-up phenomena are *Billy the Kid vs. Dracula* and *Jesse James Meets Frankenstein's Daughter*. The combination of real Historical figures and Universal Monsters was a winning combination and certainly had a serious influence on what was next.

The 1960s saw the introduction of a Weird West TV show, though I'm also fairly certain there was an Outer Limits that took place in the West. *The Wild, Wild West* was an important point in the history of early Steampunk

and Weird West. While never a massive hit, it was a solid performer and many of the folks who were creating the Weird West stuff later certainly found themselves influenced by it.

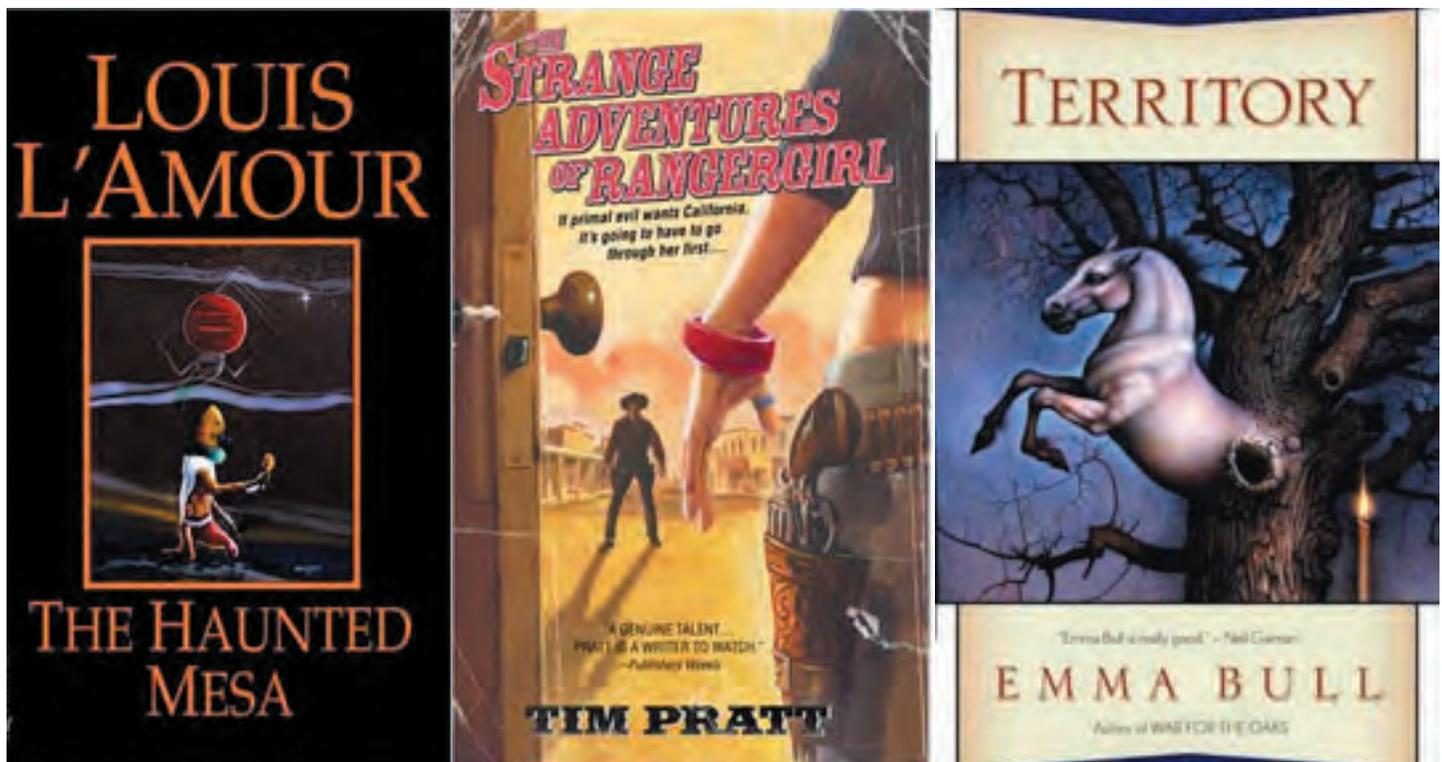
It was in the 1970s that perhaps the greatest comic book of all time appeared: *Weird West Tales*. While never the top-title for DC, and at times a poor-selling title, DC understood the value of Western characters (despite Marvel having several good ones, including the Rawhide Kid) and John Albano created the greatest Western comics character of all-time: Jonah Hex. *Weird West Tales* was originally *All-Star Western*, but changed titles with issue 12. *All-Star Western* is also a great title, if for the Bat Lash stories alone. Hex took up most of the issues, along with other western characters like Scalphunter. Eventually, it simply became *Jonah Hex*. The story of Jonah Hex's life, both the fictional life portrayed in the pages and the real trials of the character within DC, is among the most interesting out there. A white man who took up with Indians, only to be betrayed and disfigured. Then finding a family and losing them. He was even sent into the future when the series simply became *Hex* in the 1980s. Hex had a run as a Vertigo title, which was very cool, and it's been a couple of other re-launches.

Stephen King's *Dark Tower* series was hugely successful and many point to it as the piece that popularized the Weird West concept beyond Western and Horror fans. The series took off and we've been threatened with a film version from various directors even since the release of the first book back in 1982.

Louis L'Amour wrote a great novel called *The Haunted Mesa*. It's got the Anasazi and portal travel and much more! I read it when I was 14 or so and it was wonderful and got me reading L'Amour novels, something I will never forgive myself for!

There were tons of other Weird West novels published in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Alan Dean Foster's *Mad Amos* short story collection was well-received. Nancy Collins had a couple of good ones. Joe Lansdale is probably the most well-known writer of Weird West material since his first entry into the field in the mid-1980s. The Ned the Seal books are great (OK, I've only read *Flaming London*, but it's awesome, so I'm extrapolating), and *Texas Night Riders*, Joe also wrote a couple of Jonah Hex stories and a great Lone Ranger and Tonto title. His *Zombies in the Old West* stuff is pretty much glorious and is some of the best stuff that you'll find in the Weird West genre.

Three that I say are exceptional and that folks should climb aboard and ride to town are by authors I don't normally go for. *Ghost Town* by James Swallow was one that I found and enjoyed the hell out of. While it's not exactly the most complicated story, and it's the start of a series that I haven't gotten around to finishing, *Ghost Town* was one of those books that kept me reading. *The Strange Adventures of Rangergirl* by Tim Pratt is a fantastic novel and how could I do anything but love it since it takes place in Santa Cruz! The last of the three is



an Emma Bull novel. That's right, Emma Bull. I've never been a big fan, but I can't deny that *Territory* is one of the great novels about Tombstone. The way Bull treats Wyatt Earp (who is buried in Colma, CA!) is probably the best I've read and I've always loved Wyatt Earp!

A recent of my personal faves is Felix Gilman's *The Half-Made World*. It's another Weird West tale that isn't of our West, it's a new world that shares a lot of details with our world, but not all of them. The story details the battle between two forces: The Line and the Gun, and a general from an old army called The Red Valley Republic. An awesome read and one of 2010's best novels.

It's probably comics that have done the most with Weird West. Jansdale has written a bunch of great comics, especially things like *Dead in the West*. One of my less-favorite *Elseworlds* Graphic Novels was *Justice Riders*, a look at the Justice League as an Old West Posse. *The Rawhide Kid* has been around for decades, but the most recent version is even better than any other I've read. They put together a massive team of Western All-Stars! *Preacher* qualifies, as does stuff like *Trigun* and even a couple of *Lobo* issues.

The Sixth Gun is a current series and one that's really good. It's a series that feels like it's telling a story that will end up being much bigger than you'd expect. I whole-heartedly recommend it.

The journalism of the 19th century was nearly as strange as much of the fiction that has been written about it. This tradition, which is only gaining strength now that Steampunk has taken off so quickly, is one part influence on today's authors from a century of storytelling influenced by the tales that settlers would tell and the journalists who reported on them.



AN INTERVIEW WITH JAMES P. BLAYLOCK



There were three writers named in KW Jeter's letter to Locus that gave Steampunk its name. One was Jeter himself. Another was Tim Powers. The third was James Blaylock.

It was my distinct pleasure to interview James Blaylock at the Nova Albion Steampunk Convention in March of 2010. I was also lucky enough to have Chris Lester recording said conversation and sent me the result. The interview, a full hour, was one of my personal highlights for Steampunk in the year 2010, and I am excited to see James again at SteamCon II as the

Author Guest of Honor! Mike Perschon will be interviewing James and I'm sure he'll do an even better job of interviewing him!

On the Early Years of Blaylock

Chris Garcia – First, let's delve deep: where did you grow up?

James Blaylock – I grew up in Anaheim, California. Wonderful place down south.

CG – So, Orange County born-and-bred?

JB – Well, I was born in Long Beach, California, which is just across the border, but I've lived in Orange County most of my life.

CG – And most of your characters have lived in Orange County, or so I've noticed.

JB - Yeah, I got to a point where I thought I should write about things close to home. You have to actually have been living there long enough to know what Orange County's really about, under the surface. What you see on TV's not really real.

CG – Were you a huge reader as a kid?

JB – I was a huge reader.

CG – What were you reading back then?

JB – You know, I can't remember what I was reading before I was 8 or 9 years old, but I've still got a collection of the complete short stories of Mark Twain with the date in it that I was given it by my aunt and uncle for my birthday I think I was ten. At that time, I was reading Twain and Steinbeck pretty heavily. Rooting my mother's library. I remember I read Ivanhoe, didn't get a lot out of it. I read Mrs. Astor's Horse, which was weirder than any science fiction for a ten year old boy living in Orange County. Sherlock Holmes from a very early age. My

mother had a lot of books, and also she would drag me to the Stanthon Library every Tuesday afternoon and I'd grab Edgar Rice Burrows and Howard Peas and Walter Farley.

CG – One of the things I think Twain gets over-looked as an influence on the writers of the 20th Century, the Fabulists as it were. You ask anyone, you ask Tim Powers, you ask your invention, Mr. Jeter, and they'll all mention Twain.

JB – Yeah. When I was ten, Twain was great, let's say Huckleberry Finn was great because it was an adventure book. I don't think I got how funny it was until I was a little bit older, and then at the University, I was supposed to get excited about its symbolism and other things like that, which I kinda pitched out later on. Now I just read it for the funny aspect and the adventure.

CG – We've whipped through the early years. See how easy that was? When did you actually start to write?

JB – First one I remember I was in fifth grade. What is fifth:grade ten, eleven? I go the idea to write a story when I was talking to a friend of mine who saw a movie called Macabre, which most of us remember. I had never seen it, I thought it was spelled 'McCob'. It's spelled weirder than that, but I didn't know it at the time, and so I wrote a story about a walking skeleton in a top hat that smoked a corn cob pipe and terrorized a family in a farmhouse. He had no motivation, except skeletons don't need any motivation, they just do what they please, so that worked out pretty well. Called it McCob.

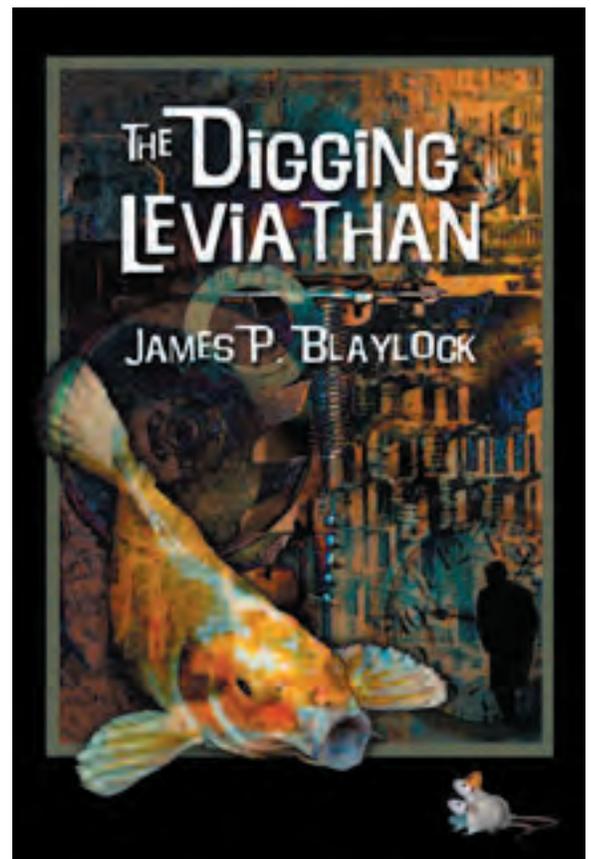
CG – Wow, I now really want to read that!

JB – I remember it being really, really good, but I haven't seen it in fifty years, so...

On the Origins of The Digging Leviathan

CG – I read something about an early novel you wrote and revived later.

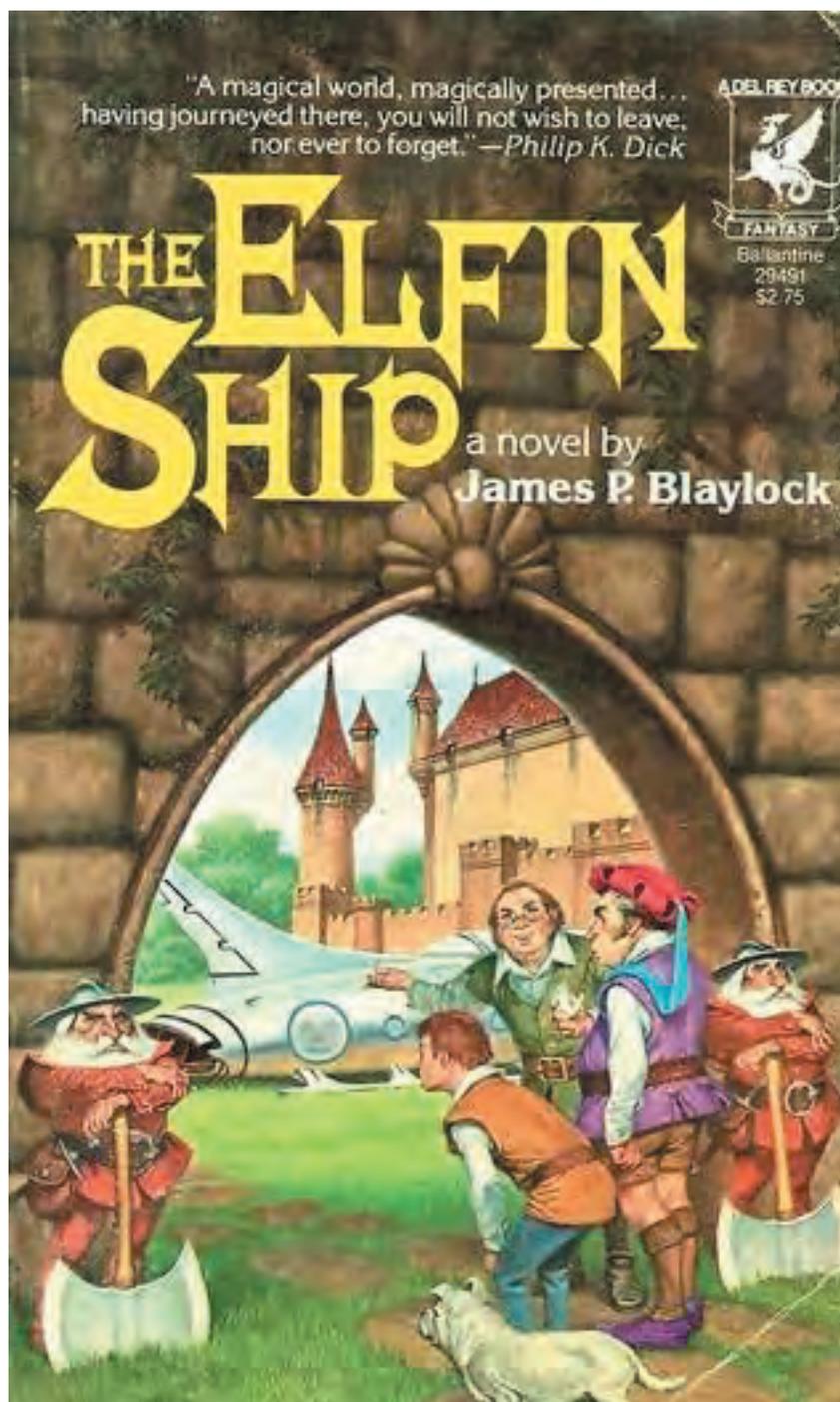
JB – Yeah, my first novel which when I finally put it away was probably 90 or a hundred thousand words, hand-written on lined notebook paper, and it later on became The Digging Leviathan. When I first starting to write it, I had no idea about plot, so it was very episodic. I had read Tristram Shandy, probably the single funniest book ever written in the English language, and decided that it was time someone wrote something like that again, which was good practice, I suppose, but the plot kept opening out and out and out until it was so wide open that it would have been impossible to have ever close it back up again. When that finally revealed itself to me, I put it in a drawer. Then, several years later, there was an incident of a guy in Long Beach, where I was born, I was very proud of this, my hometown, who strapped a bunch of helium balloons onto a lawn



chair, it's kinda become infamous now, and floated up, I think, ten or eleven thousand feet in the air, he was being passed by jets, and people were pointing and it was wonderful, and he had milk cartons full of sand and he'd let out a little bit of sand. Finally, he landed and was arrested, and the only thing they could think of to charge him with was failing to file a flight plan, which I thought was really wonderful. It was in all the newspapers and he was horribly sunburned, this was pre-sunscreen, and I was so wildly motivated to write again that I got the idea that I could re-write that early novel and use a scene of a guy who floats up on helium balloons, but then as soon as I started to write it, I realized that was simply a sort of a muse, and I pitched it out and wrote *The Digging Leviathan*.

The Digging Leviathan and Lester Del Rey

JB – When I intended to write *The Digging Leviathan*, it came into my mind how to make that book work, I had sold two books to Lester Del Rey, *The Disappearing Dwarf* and *The*



Elvin Ship, and I called Lester up and described it to him and he responded by saying 'You went to the same goddamn university Powers did, didn't you?' I thought this didn't sound... well. And he told me that, as far as he could see, it was a cultistic piece of crap that I had intended to write and he'd have nothing to do with it, he wouldn't even read it, and I thought 'Cultistic', I had never heard that word before and it had an appeal to me. Later on, it turns out, that if you're a cultistic writer you've got a readership of about eight people whose eyes spin like pinwheels. Then I sold *The Digging Leviathan* to Ace Books, which turned out to be a good thing for me to do, at about the same time Tim sold *The Anubis Gates*, I think it was, to Ace books. And there was an ABA convention in Orange County and Lester and Jody-Lynn Del Ray flew out and Vicki and I and Tim and Serena Powers picked them up to go out to lunch, absolutely great folks, and we're sitting around the table at lunch and the first thing that Lester said was 'I am certainly happy that you and Tim have found a publisher for your inferior books.' He was just full of that stuff, but you just had to love 'im.

Blaylock's Steampunk Influences

CG – I think definitely the stuff of your's that we call Steampunk has a

Stevenson sort of feel to them.

JB – Yes.

CG – And wow, what a great segue! So let's start with your Steampunk. So you had you, and Powers and Jeter are sorta the three pointed to as the founders of modern steampunk movemtn. Were you aware of the Moorcock stuff?

JB – No. Not really, No. In fact, I was entirely unaware of, entirely unaware of it until about a year ago.

CG – Really?

JB – And I still haven't read any of the Moorcock books.

CG – I haven't read them either, but I like to say I have. Let me ask you about whether you were specifically pulling from Wells and Verne and sort of... ?

JB – I was hugely influenced, especially by Verne, who was perhaps more colourful in certain ways than Wells, but I was crazy for The Time Machine and Wells. I even at one time read Mr. Britling Sees it Through, only because I thought the title sounded pretty cool. The title was kind of cooler than the book in many ways. I think Stevenson was the big inspiration at the time, though. In fact, I'll cop to this, my very first steampunk story was a thing called The Ape-Box Affair that was published in Unearth Magazine in, I wanna say, '76, I forget, but it was fairly early, and I'm going to say it was the first American Steampunk piece if in fact steampunk was something you can associate with me and KW Jeter. After that, of course, KW published Morlock Night as one of the Lazer Books, I think, and later on Tim came out with The Anubis Gates, and I came out with Humunculus, and it went on and on and on, KW came out with Infernal Devices.

CG – Yeah, that's one of my favorites.

JB – Yeah, that's a fun book.

CG – It's chew-worthy, it's worthy eating up and reading two or three times.

JB – I cribbed some stuff from Stevenson's novel The Dynamiters, which I'm gonna insist that nobody's read in the last 75 or 80 years but me. It had to do with boxes being mixed up, one of which is an infernal device.

On Langdon St. Ives & Science

CG – Let's talk about Langdon St. Ives as a character. Let's say you're sitting to write a story with Langdon St. Ives: what's going through your head?

JB – Probably that I desperately need to rearrange my clips and the things on my desktop, make myself a sandwich, whatever will put off the process, you know? You know, I think I had in mind a mood and a setting more than I had in mind a character. In fact, two of the characters I did write I cribbed outright from Stevenson's New Arabian Nights, which is something people also don't read, although they should. And I thought well, Stevenson's

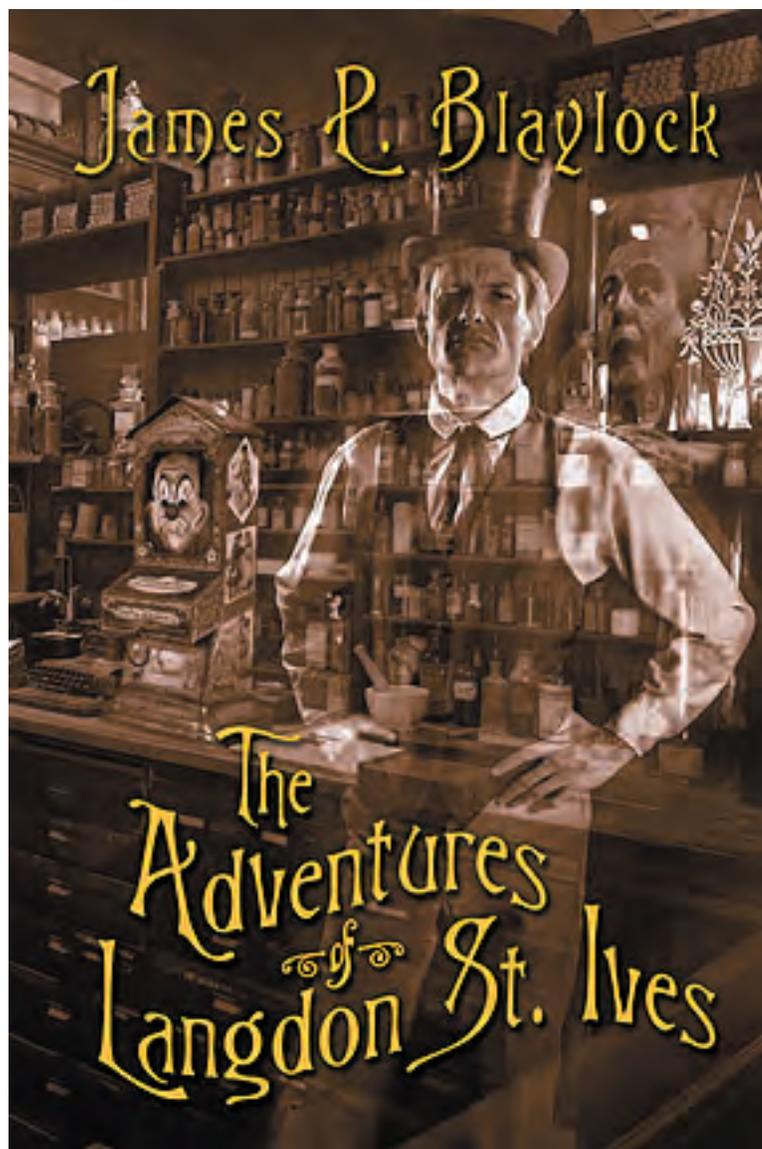
dead, he can't sue me. So I'll steal a couple of his characters and put them in the London of my book. I dunno, I guess I just had this feel more of an explorer than a scientist. You know, a guy who could make a spaceship out in the barn. I was pretty heavily influenced by *Out of The Silent Planet*. I love the idea of tinkerers out in the backyard putting together spacecrafts that'd have plants on board to provide oxygen and that sort of thing and you'd kind fly off in a floating greenhouse. And that's about as much science as I've got today, still. Whatever science Langdon St. Ives had in him, had to be invented science since I didn't know any myself.

On St. Ives & Narbando

CG – I like to look at St. Ives and Narbando as a sort of Holmes and Moriarty. Is it fair to say that Narbando is completely evil?

JB – I'd say so. I haven't found any redeeming qualities yet, although that's an interesting thing to explore.

CG – Good, I got that right. That scene at the end of *Lord Kelvin's Machine* is The Falls to me. I love that moment. Talk a little bit about Narbando, a character without any redeeming qualities.



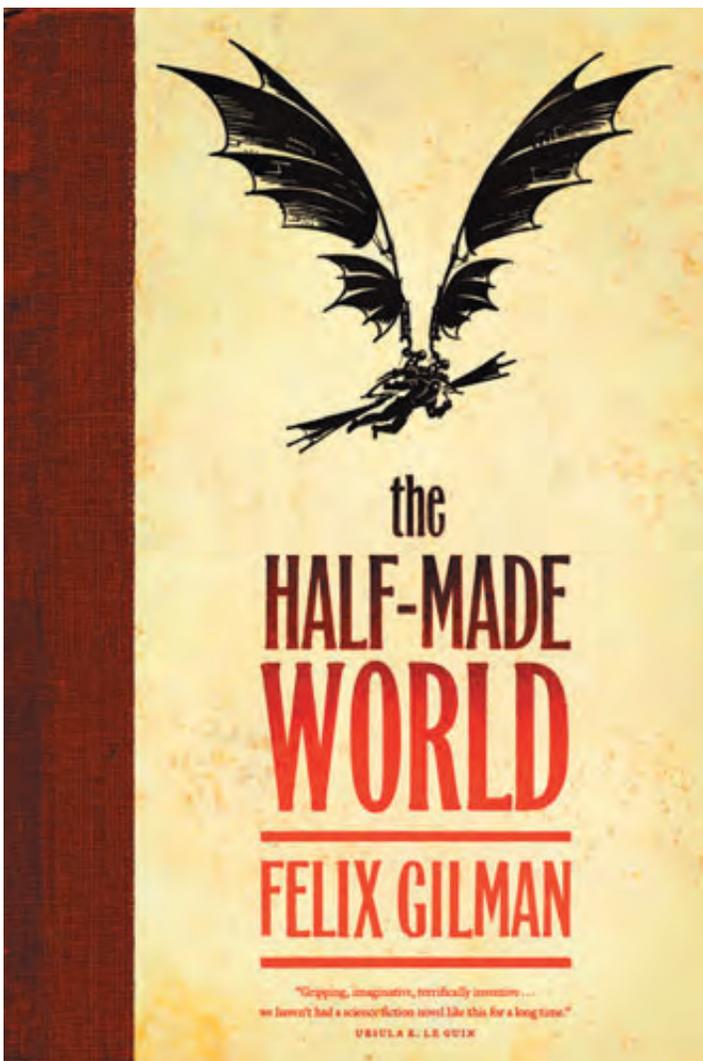
JB – I kinda wanted a Moriarty-type villain, and the problem with a Moriarty-type villain is that Moriarty never shows up, so we have to take it on faith that he's the mover and shaker that everyone says he is. Also one time I read a novel that doesn't get read too often either, *The Thirteen* by Balzac, in which the major theme is that there are these thirteen guys who are the movers and the shakers in the world, I think they're living in Paris. They control the workings of the world, which has always been kinda amusing to me and fun, and in fact, for years, every novel I'd start I'd call *The Thirteen* and if I couldn't find enough plot I'd throw in these thirteen guys and Narbando would be one of those guys, and I stole the name Narbando from a Cervantes novel.

REVIEWED: THE HALF-MADE WORLD BY FELIX GILMAN

Recently, there've been some pretty big blasts taken towards Steampunk by some pretty big names. Charles Stross had one, a blast that was part about the fact that Steampunk has gone too big and gotten too popular for its one good. Catherynne Valente basically said that almost all Steampunk that wasn't written by Cheri Priest or Neal Stephenson was garbage. I paraphrase and over-emphasize for effect, but really, she basically said all Steampunk was fluff. That's one take, an easy take if you've read the BIG steampunk novels of the last couple of years. The funny thing, the minute before I clicked to read her post, I had just put down Felix Gilman's *The Half-Made World* and that alone was enough to blow her entire argument out of the water.

The setting is pretty straight-forwardly twisted: there's a world that is much like the 19th Century Earth we know and love. There's a Northern part which is very much Europe, and there's a Western part, which is very much the American West. That much is recognisable, obvious. Beyond the familiar West there is... something. It's presented as a portion of the world which isn't 'finished'. It's where things change, where your thoughts can effect the way the world works. It's incomplete, and at the same time, formed and peopled by Hillfolk and unnamed. The land was once ruled by the Red Valley Republic, only to fall into the hands of the Line, a science-based group, and their rivals, the Gun, a demon-run bunch that fight the Line with mystical guns and outlaws.

You see, simple.



The story is of John Creedmore, an Agent of the Gun, who is sent to retrieve a former Red Valley Republic General. He meets a doctor from the North, Liv, who is sent to a Spirit-protected hospital on the frontier where the General happens to be. The two meet-up and Creedmore kidnaps her, takes her into the wilds on the run from Lowry, the leader of a unit of The Line.

This is the base, and it's a strong one.

Where this story is most satisfying is in its attention to emotional detail. The General doesn't remember who he is, but the feelings, those emotions, are still there and they sometimes come to the surface. Gilman plays with him as both a character in the present who is detached, and as a near-mythic figure in that beloved past. Liv has to balance having lost a husband and her hate/respect for Creedmore. Creedmore must balance a willful disobedience with an absolute dedication to his Gun demon masters. His is the most difficult rope to walk, but Gilman presents it brilliantly.

Perhaps it is in the interaction of the familiar and the new that we get the most pleasure out of *The Half-Made World*. The Frontier is so very familiar, populated by

demons and gunslingers and townfolks a moment away from fetching pitchforks to roust the monsters out. The towns that Creedmore takes up in are straight out of silent films, only richer in every detail. You could almost see William S. Hart sitting at a table, waiting for the fight to break out. The Unfinished West is strange, contrasting, but only slightly off. It's like a kaleidoscope, every moment it changes, never stationary, always moving.

The only problem I had with it was the ending. I had hoped for a clean ending, an open-and-shut case, but alas, the last chapter is designed to set up at least one sequel. As you'll obviously recognize, I'm not the kind of guy who wants series, and that was the only knock I could put against this emotionally fulfilling and incredibly intelligent novel.

There is another point in here that maybe I'm the only one who picked up. This is a novel about what it is to write a Steampunk story. The Line, the embodiment of science fiction, the change in the level of technology that makes a story possible, is clashing with a team of demons, a certain portrayal of fantasy literature. The conflict between the two in the story could easily be seen as the central problem with Steampunk, something that Stross and Valente might have over-looked. It's a battle between the Hyper-Real (and that's whay I've always looked at Science Fiction as) and the Fantastic, and how the two can not survive in the same space without conflict. Watching how the forces of science fiction and fantasy approach the central conflict is amazing, the kind of thing you just don't find in many genre novels.

Or maybe that's a little meta. I can never tell.



REVIEWED: STEAMPUNK TWELFTH NIGHT

In the 1990s, I used to go to the theatre a lot. Actually, in the BArea at the time, it was rare to see a play in a traditional theatre. I'd often see myself walking into a bar or an outdoor stage to see various performances of various levels of shows. Some of them were terrible, some were great, as always.

One that I specifically remember was a version of *12th Night* done in a strange sort of circular theatre area outside in a local park. It was great because it was completely lit with car headlights and the art direction was



for a Post-Modernist version, beautiful. It wasn't set in any particular time, but there was an amazing sense of pastiche whispered in the costumes (ranging from ornate Elizabethan to slick-New Wave, white shoes and all) and some truly, miraculously bad acting. It happens.

Thinking about it, Steampunk is almost the perfect Post-Modernist literature. It's a gift of time-consciousness mixed in with heavy illusion and, quite frequently, an emotional flatness that can be read as the state of contemporary society. Hence, I was freakin' psyched when I heard about San Jose State University doing a Steampunk Twelfth Night.

The show is one of Shakespeare's most beloved, and it's also utterly rick-diculous! How could you mistake Viola for her brother? It must have been easier when all the roles were played by men, and if you were lucky you could get actual twins and have them play the roles.

This production was very well-designed. When we entered, I thought that we were looking at the cover of Exhibition Hall issue 4! The colour of the backscreen was exactly the same and the Steam-y elements at the side made me think of Porkshanks' cover! I didn't get to ask the set designer about it, though. The costumes were much like the costumes in that Post-Modernist *12th Night*, some Zoot Suits, a bunch of corsets, a guy dressed like the lead singer of Abney Park, and, of course, goggles.

Always goggles.



The acting in this production was great, just across the board fantastic, though three of them stood out. Jessica Salans played Olivia and was just perfect. She played the emotion both subtly and when required to go over the top, she's able to hit high notes without going all Malkovich on it. I found myself completely taken by her performance. It also helped that Viola/Cesario was like six-two and Olivia isn't even five foot.

By far the best physical comedian was David Scott as Sir Toby. He was just amazingly fluid and moved so very well. While several characters got to play

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physicality, often to add comedy to more serious proceedings going on in the background. The interaction between Toby and Maria (a suitably HAWT-HWAT-HAWT Kayleigh Lerner) was positively constructed to place a lot of the overt comedy on.

My favorite, as is often the case with Twelfth Night I'm told, was Drew Jones as Malvolio. He was, without question, the guy who got to play with his character the most. At first, he reminded me of Agent Smith from The Matrix, but then, in cross-gartered switch, he provides the most joyously outré comedy moments. His specialty was facial reaction, and his attempt to smile tore the house down.

Downsides? A few. The portrayal of Orsino (Jason Kapoor) wasn't great, though I get the feeling that part of that was how he was presented within the structure of the production. There was just no way that Viola should have gone for him. Sebastian also sorta came out of nowhere. There was also a lot of falling down. Pretty much every scene had someone dropping to the stage hard. At one point, Orsino almost impaled himself onto a cog that was part of the set. The music might have been a tad over-used, but at times it punctuated the scene beautifully, but at other times, it was just blew over the audience a little much.

All in all, it was a great show, a good time, and the most fun I've had with Shakespeare in years and years. It was gorgeous, well-acted and the costuming was pretty great. If you're fast, you can get to see it Thanksgiving weekend in San Jose.



