



Brought to you by: K.D. Wentworth, Uncle Guido, Warren Brown & Chris Merle

Special "Columbia" Issue • January 2003

*** HELLO, OSFW ***

While the GPIC often tries, and sometimes succeeds, to maintain a less than reverent tone, and is sometimes even humorous, yesterday's shuttle tragedy defies humor.

SF writers as individuals tend to be about as different as people can be. Politically, personally, and just in general we can disagree at the drop of a hat.

But one thing we all tend to agree on is our collective dream of the stars, the dream that someday humankind will be out among them. Hopefully, it will be a better humankind, more tolerant, less willing to kill, more able to solve problems of pride and prejudice in less hurtful ways.

Columbia and her crew were a part of that dream, and as with all good dreams we mourn the loss of even the smallest part. But the dream imagined lives. In our minds, in our hearts, and in our writing it goes on.

The loss of one group of brave and talented people cannot quell it. The loss of one space ship in our small and diminishing fleet cannot keep it from soaring.

We mourn Columbia and her crew. But we need not mourn the dream.--ED

IN MEMORIUM SPACE SHUTTLE COLUMBIA AND HER CREW February 1, 2003

February Meeting

The February meeting will be held on Saturday, February 15th, 7:00 P.M., at the Melissa Tatum residence. Address: 5317 S. Delaware Ave. Directions: From Harvard, turn west on 51st St. Go through the traffic light for the I-44 off-ramp, then turn left at the second turn that's actually a street (Columbia PL) and not a parking lot. Go down to the stop sign to 53rd. Turn left (east). The next street on your right will be Delaware Ave. The house will be the third one on the left, yellow brick with maroon shutters. Members are invited to bring snacks and beverages.

Local News

There was a large turnout for the January meeting, which was held at the Wentworth/Kearns residence.

Elections for 2003 were held with the following results:

President: Melissa Tatum
Vice President: Randy Farran
Secretary/Treasure: K.D. Wentworth

Official Dog: Bear
Official Squirrel: Millennium Squirrel
Official Word: "Official"
Official Eddy: Himself

Congratulations to all. OSFW will be well served by this able body of officers.

An Inauguration Address by Mel Tatum

I am informed by our esteemed GPIC editor that I must write an inauguration address or risk impeachment. (Does that make GPIC the legislative branch of our organization? Whatever happened to separation of powers?) In any event, rather than risk such dire consequences, here goes.

Thank you to all who elected me to serve a term as president of this august group. I know you had a choice (elect me or nobody), and I am deeply humbled to have beaten Nobody to win office. I promise to serve faithfully and to ask the Five Ritual Questions with appropriate reverence.

I suppose that in the grand scheme of inauguration addresses, this one falls somewhat flat, as it does not (yet) contain any sweeping vision for reform or call to band together to fight evil. So here goes. We have nothing to fear from rejection but rejection itself. If you do not submit, you must acquit (wait, sorry, the law intruded somewhat irrationally – but doesn't it have a tendency to do that?) I promise to wage war against the evils of rejection and campaign for great acceptance for us all. (Wait, you ask, where are the details of how I will accomplish this? Slap yourself on the forehead – this is a political speech. No details are allowed.)

Finally, on the premise that all politicians should make at least one promise they may or may not keep, I hereby solemnly promise that if Amanda and Paul host another meeting during my term as president I will seriously consider attending. I may even get as far as the door. I may even make it through the door, provided 1) my gaze does not land on anything even remotely resembling a snake; 2) no one grabs my ankle or makes hissing noises; and 3) no one separates me from the gold foil emergency resuscitation kit (otherwise known as the Godiva Chocolate Box).

Thank you.

*****And How Did This GPIC Thing Get Started?*****

A Long Time Ago by Brad Sinor

(Cue the John Williams recording of the Star Wars Theme!)

A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away....

No, wait a minute, it only seems like a long time ago and the galaxy in question wasn't that far away. Unless you consider Oklahoma City "far away."

Anyone who has been a member of the Oklahoma Science Fiction Writers for even an hour and a half has heard the name GPIC, not to mention seen the banner that appears on the first page of every issue. You know the one I mean, with Godzilla rampaging along and the name Great Pagoda Insurance Company underneath.

There are few still among our number who know what the name means and where it came from. (Kimmel, Brown & Sinor. Hmmm...sounds like a disreputable law firm.)

To make a long story short (I know, too late) as many of you know, OSFW was the brainchild of C. J. Cherryh. She started gathering names of people who would be interested in forming a writers group at a con in OKC. She did the initial mailing and even held the first couple of meetings at her house.

There was quite a lot of interest and within a few months the tradition of moving the meetings around to various members' homes had begun.

At one point we were gathered in an upstairs apartment in downtown Oklahoma City, the home of a member named Floyd. (His last name has long since deleted itself from my memory). In that company were Carolyn Cherryh, Mike McQuay, Ann Silas, myself and a number of others.

Somehow the subject of Godzilla movies came up during our conversation that evening. Floyd was a huge Godzilla fan and even knew the bios of a lot of the actors. McQuay was laughing about how cheesy they were and the fact that they reused lots of scenes from one movie to another. Floyd said "Yeah, Godzilla steps on the same pagoda in every movie. It's rebuilt in the next movie."

Then someone, it might have been McQuay but I don't remember for sure, chimed

in with the comment "Just think how much money the Great Pagoda Insurance Company has to pay out every time the big lizard comes to town."

We had been discussing a name for the newsletter, McQuay, who had just taken over as the editor, said, "Why don't we call it The Great Pagoda Insurance Company?" Everyone thought it was a good idea.

After that we got serious, in other words made a dive for the snack table.

CONTINUUM

By M. T. Reiten

Welcome all to my quarterly contribution to continuum. I have been rather distracted lately with the real threat of war hanging over our head. It's one thing to read and write about it and quite another to participate in the "interesting times." I feel that action is the death of writing, because if the writer is busy having the adventures, there is little time for introspection. Only later can one write, but then it's over and in the realm of history rather than the potential of the future. Or perhaps fantasy.

Anyway, that's my excuse. I shall carry it before me like a reliquary filled with the bones of procrastinators of purer faith of times past to ward off recrimination and disappointed looks.

To the best of my knowledge we left off before the October 2002 meeting. Condolences to Melissa Tatum for "Timeline" getting a rejection from F & SF. Ah, another scurrilous justification for such late submissions to the GPIC! A sufficient amount of time has passed to allow her wound to heal.

Matt Reiten read the complete novella "An Economy of Air." Apparently he did not bother to use the advice inherent in his title, causing Uncle Guido to comment, "Nice, but too many words." The novella followed the birth of a lunar civilization from the point of view of an unwitting antagonist. The troubles begin when one lunar geologist decides he is not willing to leave with the rest of the researchers when a rival corporation replaces the mission. The rogue geologist eventually destroys the main character's prospects on the moon. Then it's time for revenge!

Mark Carlson read his short story, "Ozymandias, Take II". A detailed Egyptian setting slowly unfolded to reveal that we followed the point of view character, Sesu, into the afterlife. The strength and existence of those who existed

depended upon the recorded information about their lives, and what modern invention has replaced hieroglyphs on tomb walls as repositories of written thoughts? True, Sesu receives a modern and cocky visitor, totally unversed in the etiquette of the land of the dead. An evocative story that left the reader wanting more. While a fine compliment, the investment in the set up was my greatest complaint. It felt like a beginning to an intriguing story rather than a completed piece.

Chris Merle performed another in his series of retellings of folk tales. "The Frog Princess" was truly a cynical treatment of a Russian folk story. He does poke holes in these stories with a modern sensibility. Consider a ten year old boy forced to marry. Yet another nightmare to read to a male child. Of course, it makes sense that he should find a frog and marry her out of spite. Many instances of the frog providing grand gifts to a blubbing boy prince follow, and then in the true fashion of many fairytales, meant to instruct, this just stopped. The humor and commentary asides kept my interest throughout the piece.

During the November 2002 OSFW meeting, we learned that Amanda Gannon unfortunately received a rejection of "Ishair's Winter." I apologize for the name, but cannot be held responsible for character names that I have never actually read. K. D. Wentworth had many things sold or published. However, I cannot decipher my notes. So you don't get to understand them any more than I do. I encourage the well-established writers to put in a little plug themselves to the GPIC. This is what I have down: Imaginings "Coldfire" Asimov's "All's Fair" sold mmpbk [sic] Del Rey & This Fair Land. I understand Mass Market Paperback and know that This Fair Land recently came out.

Sue Sinor read a short story entitled "What Goes Around." While the main character at first came across as petty and mean-spirited, she soon came alive for me when she discovered that the power of true loathing could be channeled into a Barbie voodoo doll. The premise was not unique, however Sue's treatment spun circles around my expectations as a fairly jaded reader. I especially enjoyed the controlled experiments performed on the voodoo Barbies as well as the twist to the ending.

Matt Reiten read another three chapters from the unfinished Gathering of Heroes. At this

point, the main character Hage loses his contract to a self-professed prophet during a short game of chance. The crazy old man displays an ability to see the future by calling a flipped coin ten times in succession. They fly off to find the next member of their gathering. The chapters were short, and the audience seemed to respond by asking the wonderful question, "What happens next?" Stay tuned for the next installment.

"The Gowk" is an excerpt from one of Chris Merle's longer stories. This section admittedly didn't quite stand on its own as far as plot was concerned, but we were warned. The section detailed a reluctant shuttlecraft pilot's discovery while wandering around a space station. He bumped into a strange device and met an interesting sentient, the Gowk of the section's title. The Gowk told her story. Too beautiful, and supposedly barren because of it, she left her home world to become a scientist. Now she is beset by suitors after discovering that she could bear children and her genes are considered a cultural treasure. But she has the life that she had already made as an assistant to a renowned researcher. The Gowk stole the section, in magpie plumage and that strangely alluring background that seems to resonate with at least this reader of science fiction.

The OSFW meeting of December 2002 was more focused on consumption of a bountiful Yuletide spread than reading serious works. Though I must add, there were many entries into the soon-to-be-famous fragment competition worthy of being completed.

[to be continued]

Reviews of Works and Happenings

Book Reviews R Us by Mel Tatum

Today's review covers Kage Baker's three novels of The Company:

In the Garden of Eden (1998)
Sky Coyote (1999)
Mendoza in Hollywood (2000)

I bought these three novels after reading and enjoying a number of Baker's short stories set in the same universe. Before I dive into the substance of the review, a word about order. The books and the short stories exist separately, and you do not need to read them together.

You do, however, probably need to read the books in the order they were published (that is, assuming you want to read them when you finish reading this review). The books build on each other, particularly for character motivation, and although they could probably stand alone, they stand better together as a set.

For those of you not familiar with this universe, it centers around a company known as Dr. Zeus, Incorporated. The Company created a slightly imperfect form of time travel and of immortality, but has used them in a creative manner to become fabulously rich. You can travel backward in time, and then forward in time back to your original starting point, but you cannot jump around. You also cannot alter recorded history. The Company, however, has discovered that if it sends scientists back in time, finds appropriate children no one will miss, and turns them into immortal cyborgs, the newly created cyborgs make great Company operatives. The operatives find and salvage great works of art, knowledge, botany, etc., which history recorded as lost, destroyed or extinct. Those items are stored for "discovery" in the future by the Company, which can then sell them for great profit.

In the first of the three books (I understand more are planned), we meet Mendoza, a young child in 1553 Spain who is about to become a victim of the Spanish Inquisition. She is rescued by Joseph, a Company operative, who sends her through the Company training system, including the cyborg implantation program. Mendoza chooses botany as her specialty, in part to avoid interactions with humans, who she essentially considers to be a lesser species. Her first assignment, however, takes her to England to save plants out of the garden of an eccentric nobleman. In the process, she falls in love and goes through the standard teenage angst, complicated by that pesky new immortality of hers. The plot and outcome of this novel are dreadfully shopworn and terribly predictable. Baker simply fails to use her universe to good effect in this book.

In the second book, the point of view switches to Joseph, the operative who rescued Mendoza and served as her supervisor during the England assignment. Even though it is now 1699, Mendoza is still pretty angry with Joseph about the outcome of the England project. The two are forced to work together on a new project to save a Chumash village in what will eventually be California, but the focus here is on Joseph and his story. The basic plot here is less

predictable and is better developed, but it still suffers from serious problems that run through all three novels, as discussed below. Baker does sow some interesting seeds for use in future novels.

In the third book, Mendoza again takes center stage as the viewpoint character and the main character of the story. We've again fast forwarded, with the story now set in 1862 and dealing with issues in the frontier. A few of the seeds sown in *Sky Coyote* get a bit of growth here, but not in a very satisfactory manner.

I did not enjoy any of these three books, as evidenced by the fact that I had no trouble putting them down for extended periods of time and my main identification with the characters was an intense and urgent desire to slap the living daylights out of Mendoza. Baker has created a great universe and she uses it to great effect in her short stories. She does not, however, possess equal mastery over the novel format. Her sense of pacing and plot development is abysmal. In the third novel, the plot doesn't get moving until something like page 100 or so. Perhaps some of the purpose behind this unevenness is driven by an overall plan for the series, but if so, it has backfired. I have no intention of buying any more of her novels, although I will happily and enthusiastically read more short stories in this universe.

Adventures in Alternate History: Nazis in Space by Greg Lower

Germany's World War II program for manned space flight was mostly designed around the A-4 rocket, popularly known as the V-2. Although the Reichenberg program proposed manned V-1s launched from He-111s for suicide missions, Wernher von Braun's real goal was to put a man in space.

Von Braun's mentor, Hermann Oberth, author of the 1923 book *The Rocket Into Interplanetary Space*, was scientific consultant on the movie "Woman in the Moon," and one A-4 rocket carried the movie logo.

When the first successful A-4 launched in October, 1942, von Braun complained "The rocket worked perfectly, but it struck the wrong planet."

The proposal was to put a cockpit in place of the

A-4's one-ton payload, with a bubble canopy for the pilot. The horizontal tail fins would extend all the way to the nosecone for a "strake" wing. This manned A-4 was designated the A-9. Von Braun planned to use it as the second stage, with an A-10 booster as the first stage.

Additional stages were the A-11 and A-12, making a four-stage rocket that could reach orbit. Unfortunately, von Braun talked a too freely at a cocktail party to a pretty young dentist who happened to be a Gestapo informant. In March, 1944, von Braun and some of his colleagues were arrested at 2 a.m. and charged with attempting to use spaceflight proposals to sabotage Germany's V-2 weapons.

Von Braun's military liaison, Gen. Walter Dornberger, convinced officials Hitler would have them shot for delaying the V-2 program. Once released, von Braun got approval for more research, but both sides had hidden agendas.

The first A-4 attacks on London and Paris came Sept. 8, 1944, and the Nazis code-named the A-9 the "Amerika Projektil." Radio signals from submarines would guide a manned rocket to attacks on New York or Washington. The pilot would either eject and be captured, or would die in glory for the Fatherland.

The proposed A-6 was an A-9 with a ramjet under the belly, so it could return to base from high-altitude reconnaissance missions.

Meanwhile, with the Allies nearing Germany's Peenemunde launch site, von Braun supposedly was increasing the A-4 rocket's range. Instead of the strake-winged A-9, he was working on an unmanned, swept-back wing rocket called the A-4b.

On Oct. 24, 1944, five A-4b rocket prototypes were ready for testing. The first attempt, on Dec. 27, either failed or was aborted. The second try, on Jan. 8, 1945, fell into the sea at 100 feet. The third attempt on Jan. 24 was successful, although a wingtip was damaged.

Ten solid-propellant rockets were delivered Dec. 9, 1944. The boosters were supposed to be strapped around the A-4b for a test in March. But before that happened, the Allies moved in. Hitler ordered the rocket engineers shot, so Von Braun sent his younger brother out to find someone to surrender to.

***An OSFW Xmas Party Photo
Album***



The last person on Earth sat alone in a room. There was a knock at the door. A voice said, "Are there any more little smokies?"



*** MANY THANKS TO ***

KDW & Guido & Bear
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RAL

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*** SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION ***

A subscription to Son of GPIC, the official newsletter of the Oklahoma Science Fiction Writers, may be obtained online or by mail. \$13 for the hard copy of the newsletter, \$15 for a family membership, \$7 for the electronic-only version of the newsletter. Mail a check or money order in the correct amount, prorated by quarter, to:

K.D. Wentworth, Treasurer
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Tulsa, OK 74136-2844
(Checks should be made out to K.D. Wentworth)

*** OSFW INFORMATION ***

The OSFW meets at members' homes the second Friday of every month to read, critique, and promote in general SF, Fantasy, and Horror writing. All willing to contribute and (after a couple of trial meetings) pay their dues are welcome. **There is no age limit but parents should understand that material with adult themes and language is read and discussed.**

*** GPIC NEWS AND ARTICLES ***

GPIC solicits news and articles from OSFW members. We prefer they be on disk or sent via e-mail. Pseudonyms are OK. We accept files on either a 3-inch Mac [well, maybe] or PC disk. We like RTF files or MS Word files compatible with Word 97. Always include a separate ASCII file just in case. Send any email to Warren at underland@aol.com, with "For the GPIC" in the subject line.

You retain copyright on material. If this is of special concern you might let us know who you really are along with your pseudonym. We reserve the right to edit (although we try not to).

*** NEXT GPIC DEADLINE ***

Pesky deadline for February issue: January 31. (Missed it, folks. But send articles anyway.)