A Note from the (temporary) Editor

As many of you undoubtedly noticed, there was no December, 2000 issue of Dark Matters. You may have been wondering why this interruption occurred.

In short, Darkstar lost its second-to-none newsletter editor -- Kat Hedges -- to the demands of work and school. As much as she loved editing Dark Matters, those other priorities came first.

I took over temporary responsibility for newsletter production, and quickly found the demands of LosCon and the holiday season conspiring against me.

Starting with next issue we will have a new newsletter editor, and I’m sure they will learn the same lesson I’ve learned this last month: producing a newsletter, especially one as cleanly designed and with as much content as Dark Matters, is no simple task. (And please accept my apologies in advance for the rough appearance of this issue -- I’m not a DTP expert the way Kat is!)

Kat, thank you, and we’ll miss you!

-- Adam Tilghman

p.s.: Kat won her class at the LosCon masquerade contest this year. See elsewhere in this issue for photos!

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SELECTIVE MEDIA
by Bob Evans

Okay let’s play a trivia game boys and girls. You get one point for each right answer to the first part.

Who wrote the following genre novels: RINGWORLD? STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND? MISSION OF GRAVITY? THE FOUNDATION TRILOGY? DUNE?

What, did you think the first part was too easy? Okay part two is tougher and you get ten points for each right answer.

Who wrote the Screenplays for the following genre films: FORBIDDEN PLANET? INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS? THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL?

Hmm, was that too tough? Perhaps if I made the films more modern it would get easier. ALIEN? GATTACCA? PITCH BLACK?

Isn’t it strange? Fans can talk at great length about the styles, strengths and weaknesses of their favorite writers, but rarely can they name the writers of their favorite films. Even amid the special world of fandom, screenwriters are treated almost dismissively, as an afterthought, if at all.

We all know that Steven Spielberg directed E.T. THE EXTRATERRESTRIAL, but only a few of us know that it was conceived of and written by Melissa Matheson. The great part of the blame falls on the mass media. When you go to Barnes & Noble, you see two major elements on each and every cover: a title and an author. Films credit the writers, but they are very, very rarely used to sell a film. They don’t do interviews to promote the films and their pictures are not snapped on

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Polyphemus
by Ahmad Abdel-Hameed
aabdelhameed@hotmail.com

Since the ’40s, you can find a linear accelerator in nearly every home in this country. It hurls electrons at tremendous velocities not to rearrange the sub-atomic components of the average American family, but to cause them collide with a phosphor-covered wall of glass. Doing this in a precise and controlled fashion allows a picture to be painted on the screen; a picture that can be made to change so quickly that it is indistinguishable from actual motion.

Of course, I’m talking about television. It’s typically scoffed at, and no one ever admits to watching it, but it’s the main medium of cultural exchange in our society. It’s true that the vast majority of television is intellectual refuse by just about any standard. It also often panders to the lowest common denominator. For that reason, it is frequently denounced by leaders of every part of the political spectrum.

I may scandalize some, but I suspect that the same probably holds true for science fiction writing and likely in similar proportions. If you doubt this, go to your local bookstore

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### January / February 2001 Calendar

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<th>Sunday</th>
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<td>Library Committee Meeting, Leucadia Pizzeria, 6:30pm.</td>
<td>Darkstar Business Meeting, Stu. Ctr. #2, 7:00pm.</td>
<td>Open Gaming, Stu. Ctr. #1-3, 7:00pm.</td>
<td>Dinner Meeting at Ichiro Restaurant, 4344 Convoy St., 7:30pm.</td>
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<td>Irregular 2001 and Hayloft, 7:30pm.</td>
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<td>Dinner Meeting at Troy's Greek Cuisine 10450 Friars Rd., 7:30pm.</td>
<td>Gaming Night at UCSD Int'l Ctr., 1:00pm.</td>
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<td>Classic Film Series: Star Men 10-12 and His Island Earth.</td>
<td>Yoga, Stu. Ctr. #2, 5pm.</td>
<td>Open Gaming, Stu. Ctr. #1-3, 7:00pm.</td>
<td>Dinner Meeting at Eva's Cocina, 6690 Mission Gorge Rd., 7:30pm.</td>
<td>Dinner Meeting at Callahan's Pub, 8280 Mira Mesa Blvd., 7:30pm.</td>
<td>Long Gaming Night at UCSD Int'l Ctr., 1:00pm.</td>
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<td>Yoga, Stu. Ctr., North Conf. Room, 5pm.</td>
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<td>Darkstar Business Meeting, Stu. Ctr. #2, 7:00pm.</td>
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<td>Dinner Meeting at Leucadia Pizzeria, 7748 Regents Rd. 7:30pm.</td>
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<td>Irregular Blade R, Ghost in Hayloft, 7:00pm.</td>
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<td>Library Work Party, Darkstar Office, 00pm.</td>
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<td>Speaker (SETI Inst.) followed by Contact (1997). UCSD Price Ctr. Theater, 7:00pm</td>
<td>Dinner Meeting at Leucadia Pizzeria, 7748 Regents Rd. 7:30pm.</td>
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**Note:** This schedule is prepared in advance, so it's always a good idea to check our web site for updates at http://darkstar.ucsd.edu. You can also subscribe to our mailing list from the web site to receive reminders and notices of last-minute changes, as well as discussion of various topics.

**Key:** To save space, the following icons are used to represent events run by other organizations we feel Darkstar members might enjoy. Consult the calendar listing for a full description. 🚀 = convention; 🏷️ = bookstore event; 🎵 = performance; 🎥 = Rocky Horror
Club Business
Tuesday ~ 1/9/2001 ~ Darkstar Business Meeting, 7:00pm, UCSD Old Student Center Classroom #2 (2nd floor, above the Grove Cafe.) This meeting makes up for the delayed December 2000 meeting. Open to all interested members. Contact: Elisa Sheets, 858 586 9452

Wednesday ~ 1/31/2001 ~ Darkstar Business Meeting, 7:00pm, Classroom #2 (as above). Contact: Elisa Sheets.

Library Meetings
Monday ~ 1/8/2001 ~ Library Committee Meeting, 6:30pm, Leucadia Pizzeria. Contact: 'Lissa Ackerman, mackerma@ucsd.edu.

Sunday ~ 2/4/2001 ~ Library Work Party, 1:00pm, Darkstar Office. Help integrate newly donated books into our library. All interested members are welcome to help out! Contact: 'Lissa Ackerman or Elisa Sheets.

Gaming Meetings
Wednesday ~ 1/10/2001 ~ Open Gaming, 7:00pm, UCSD Old Student Center Classrooms #1-3. Short board games, card games, etc. Contact: John Davis, jdavis@envy.com.

Saturday ~ 1/20/2001 ~ Regular Gaming, 7:00pm, UCSD International Center Conference Room. Our regular 1st/3rd Saturday gaming session. We’ll bring some games and we encourage you to bring some of your own! Contact: John Davis.

Wednesday ~ 1/24/2001 ~ Open Gaming, 7:00pm, UCSD Old Student Center Classrooms #1-3. Contact: John Davis.

Saturday ~ 1/27/2001 ~ Long Gaming, 12:00pm, UCSD International Center Conference Room. We’ll bring our favorite long-haul board games and we encourage you to do the same! Contact: John Davis.

Thursday Dinner Meetings
For over 20 years we’ve gathered on Thursday nights for dinner and discussion. Come along and join in! We meet at 7:30pm at the appointed restaurant. Need a ride from UCSD? Join us at the Darkstar office, Che Cafe building, at 6:45pm for a 7:00pm departure. Contact: Marjolijn Bekken, 619 232 7819.

Thursday ~ 1/11/2001 ~ Ichiro Japanese Restaurant, 4344 Convoy St, S.D., 858 565 8603.

Thursday ~ 1/18/2001 ~ Troy’s Greek Cuisine, 10450 Friars Rd., S.D., 619 281 7741.


Thursday ~ 2/1/2001 ~ Callahan’s Pub, 8280 Mira Mesa Blvd., S.D., 858 578 7892.


Movies

Sunday ~ 1/21/2001 ~ Classic SF Movies, 1:00pm, UCSD International Center. Watch the conclusion of Radar Men from the Moon, Episodes 10, 11, 12 (of 12), starting at 1:00pm. At 2:15, we’ll follow with 1953’s This Island Earth. Radar Men eps. 7, 8, 9 will be re-shown beforehand at 12:00 noon. Contact: Adam Tilghman 858 586 9452.

Monday ~ 1/22/2001 ~ 5:00pm, Old Student Center Classroom #2. Gentle stretching and relaxation under the direction of our very own Holly Ourso. Bring a blanket large enough to cover yourself, and wear loose comfortable clothing. Contact: Holly Ourso, ourso@san.rr.com.

Monday ~ 1/29/2001 ~ 5:00pm, Old Student Center North Conference Rm.

Yoga
Monday ~ 1/22/2001 ~ 5:00pm, Old Student Center Classroom #2. Gentle stretching and relaxation under the direction of our very own Holly Ourso. Bring a blanket large enough to cover yourself, and wear loose comfortable clothing. Contact: Holly Ourso, ourso@san.rr.com.

Thursday ~ 1/11/2001 ~ Ichiro Japanese Restaurant, 4344 Convoy St, S.D., 858 565 8603.

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Club Constitution Update Update
by David Tabb
Work on the Darkstar Constitution has been progressing rapidly. Since the October constitution committee meeting, the document has gone through fourteen drafts. Some changes in the constitution have been purely cosmetic, but many are more fundamental.

Perhaps the most important change has been the redrafting of the Officers and Elections section. There has been substantial debate about the extent to which officers should be empowered to manage affairs between business meetings. In addition, dividing club responsibilities among the officers has been an interesting challenge. The newest draft tries to strike a compromise between centralized and distributed power and to leave as much power in the hands of the voting membership as possible.

Two major new sections have been added to the constitution. The earlier drafts did not provide for amendments, and so a new section provides a means by which constitution amendments can be made. Another section provides some guidance for the creation, removal, and functioning of
Constitution Update Update, Cont’d.

Darkstar committees. Of course, amendments should not be confused with the Addmentments, which were recently added back to the constitution with some updates.

Major changes to the constitution appear to be tapering off. Minor tweaks to the balance of power for officers and principal members and voting membership are still taking place, but a final draft should be produced by the committee by January’s end. At that point, the document will be sent to the business meetings for final changes and hopefully approval.

If you have ideas or just curiosity about the constitution, take a look! The drafts are downloadable at http://darkstar.ucsd.edu/~dtabb/const/ in PDF, HTML, and LaTeX format. If you would like to write the constitution committee, send your email to ds-const@darkstar.ucsd.edu.

Blast from the Past
by Robert Leone

The Worm Ouroboros
by E.R. Eddison.
Dedication dated 1922,
first publication 1926.
Many subsequent editions.

"So when the Prince La Fireez saw that he might not move the King by soft words, he took up his fair crystal goblet, egg-shaped from the movie Ghostbusters.

"They don’t write them like that anymore."
"Peter, they don’t write them like that EVER."

The reader has to put up with a lot for the sake of this story. First, there’s the prose. Eddison’s love of description goes too far. Take the sample sentence, eliminate "egg-shaped," "topazes" and all the words between, and read it again. Aloud. It now has grandeur, doesn’t it? There’s an insanely great book lurking inside. Unfortunately, it leads with its worst idea. The story is initially presented as a dream of an English gentleman, Lessingham. His slumber in the "Lotus Room" has made him an observer of a war between Demons and Witches on the planet Mercury. Forget the connotations of those words. The Demons are the "good guys." Goblet-tossing La Fireez is a Pixy! Most of the Witch dramatis personae are male. And not all of the Witches are "evil."

Laxus, the admiral, is respected. Middle-aged, hearty Duke Corund is universally beloved. He’s even raised his brood of rough sons right: They may take liberties with kisses, but when a woman says "no" they believe her. On the other hand, Witchland’s other dukes, young Corinius and old Corsus, demonstrate why society has laws against drunk, disorderly and lewd conduct. Renegade Goblin Gro is brave, resourceful and intelligent, but he’s also a "manifold traitor." And then there’s Gorice XI, or XII (Witchland’s top job has a turnover problem), whose pride and ambition started the whole mess.

Mercury’s last best hope against total Witch domination are the lords of the Demons. There’s the oldest born, leader of men and experienced battle commander, Juss. His brother Goldry Bluszco is a “brick” in the comic book hero sense of the term, and an excellent general in his own right. The youngest, Lord Spitfire (he does), is a great marshaller of armies but too impetuous for his, and their, own good. Their cousin, Brandoch Daha, is number one with a sword, but DOESN’T take "no" for an answer (to his sorrow).

Add a cast of thousands, most of whom are killed off by the end, and let the non-stop, heart-throbbing action begin!

And heart-throbbing it is. Eddison’s mountain-climbing scenes may be the best in all fantasy, if not all English-language fiction. If you make it past the first hundred or so pages you’ll probably be hooked.

Aside from its intrinsic merits, why should fantasy fans care about The Worm Ouroboros? J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis. Both men read and were influenced by Eddison. ERE.’s books included such fun features as pronunciation guides, timelines and even (in the later books) maps!

If I were to compare The Worm Ouroboros to any mythology, it would be to the great Hindu epic, The Mahabharata.

If you’re a Tolkien fiend, or even a Fritz Leiber fan, you might want to check into checking out a copy (Dark Star doesn’t seem to have one, but lots of other libraries do).

Footnote: It’s in Section 22. I am using Dover Publication’s one dollar edition. Aristotle also warns that too many unusual words turns prose into jargon.

International Space Station Sighting Opportunities

Thanks to the first of four sets of solar arrays, the International Space Station (recently christened "Alpha") will be increasingly visible to naked-eye observers. While the station passes overhead quite frequently, it’s visible only when it reflects sunlight onto the observer’s location.

Sighting opportunities may exist in the early mornings of January 8th, 10th, 11th, 13th, 26th, and 30th. A rare mid-day opportunity will come up on Monday January 15th, and evening sightings may be possible on February 6th, 8th, and 10th.

Check with the NASA JTracker web site at: http://liftoff.msfc.nasa.gov for up-to-date station sighting times.
and figure out how many new science fiction and fantasy books you really think would be worthwhile reading and what proportion that represents. The main difference between the two is that TV, by its very nature, is ephemeral, and writing is not. It’s rare that you’ll see a show that’s even 10 years old and it would be difficult for most to find any of them that were much older than that. By comparison, I just read an obscure title of HG Wells and it would be trivial to find more of his works. The durability of writing allows for the conservation of the best works; television does not allow the same preservation of excellence.

One of the reasons that I’m interested in discussing shows with a science fiction or fantasy theme has to do with the fact that television forms much of what the average mundane perceives not only of the genre, but often of fandom itself. Fans may not care much about what the mundanes think of us or may affect not to care, but that perception can affect space and money for clubs and the ease and availability of the necessities a con needs to run.

In later issues, I’ll review one new show and one old one. If you have any shows that you’d like to see reviewed, let me know. I don’t promise to cover them because, of course, I never watch television myself!

In our interests, we will make better choices about which films to see and which to miss if we know who wrote the films. Oh, it is not a perfect predictor of a film’s quality -- even William Goldman has produced at least one script that stank -- but it works a lot more than it fails. It has been noted by some that even numbered STAR TREK films don’t suck. Why is that? Because STAR TREKs II, IV, and VI all had one writer in common. Nicholas Meyer is one of my favorite writer/directors. He has given us a range of films from the fun, like TIME AFTER TIME, to the thoughtful, like THE DAY AFTER. Dan O’Bannon has given us a number of interesting and quirky genre films. His script ALIEN started its own sub genre of SF monster films. He gave a new take on the zombie not once, but twice! First with the dark and moody DEAD AND BURIED, then again with the funny and off beat RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD. Mr. O’Bannon isn’t just a horror writer; he’s given us action with BLUE THUNDER and the adaptation of Philip K. Dick’s WE CAN REMEMBER IT FOR YOU WHOLESALE as TOTAL RECALL. (The quality of that film comes entirely from the script, and quality added by the director Paul Verhoven was purely an accident.)

When we pay attention to the writers of our movies, we help ourselves find good films and avoid bad ones. (In general) We also honor the writers. Film is a collaborative medium, but not all contributions are equal in value. The two most important persons in the quality of a film are the writers and the directors. In the films where they are the same person, then you are really talking about getting one person’s vision. But it starts with the writer. The person who takes 120 pages of blank paper and creates characters and plots and emotions for our enjoyment.

Sadly, in film the best writers can be undermined by bad producers and directors. This was the case with the adaptation of THE PUPPET MASTERS. The first two acts are very good, both as a film and as an adaptation of Heinlein’s classic novel. The third act, in a word, sucked! The third act was totally rewritten by the director, who had not read the novel and didn’t care to. So the work was flawed.

But there is a happy ending on the horizon. The two writers who worked so hard on THE PUPPET MASTERS are now working at Dreamworks on the screenplay for THE MOON IS A HARSH MISTRESS. I have heard reports from the writers say that the producers fully support making the film as Heinlein wrote it. A lot can happen between now and production, but now things look good.

So how can we find out about the writers before we see the films? Well, my friends, that is where the Internet is such a wonderful tool! The site to know is http://www.imdb.com. This is the Internet Movie Database. Here you can find out about past film and those in production. Best yet, click on an actor, director, or writer and find out what else they have worked on. The track records are there for your use. Learn who is making and writing the films you love. See their other films so they get a chance to make more. Become informed film fans.

Dark Matters is the regular newsletter of Darkstar, the Science Fiction and Gaming Club as UC San Diego. All articles and/or pictures are copyright their respective authors.

You may contact Dark Matters by email at:

newsletter@darkstar.ucsd.edu