

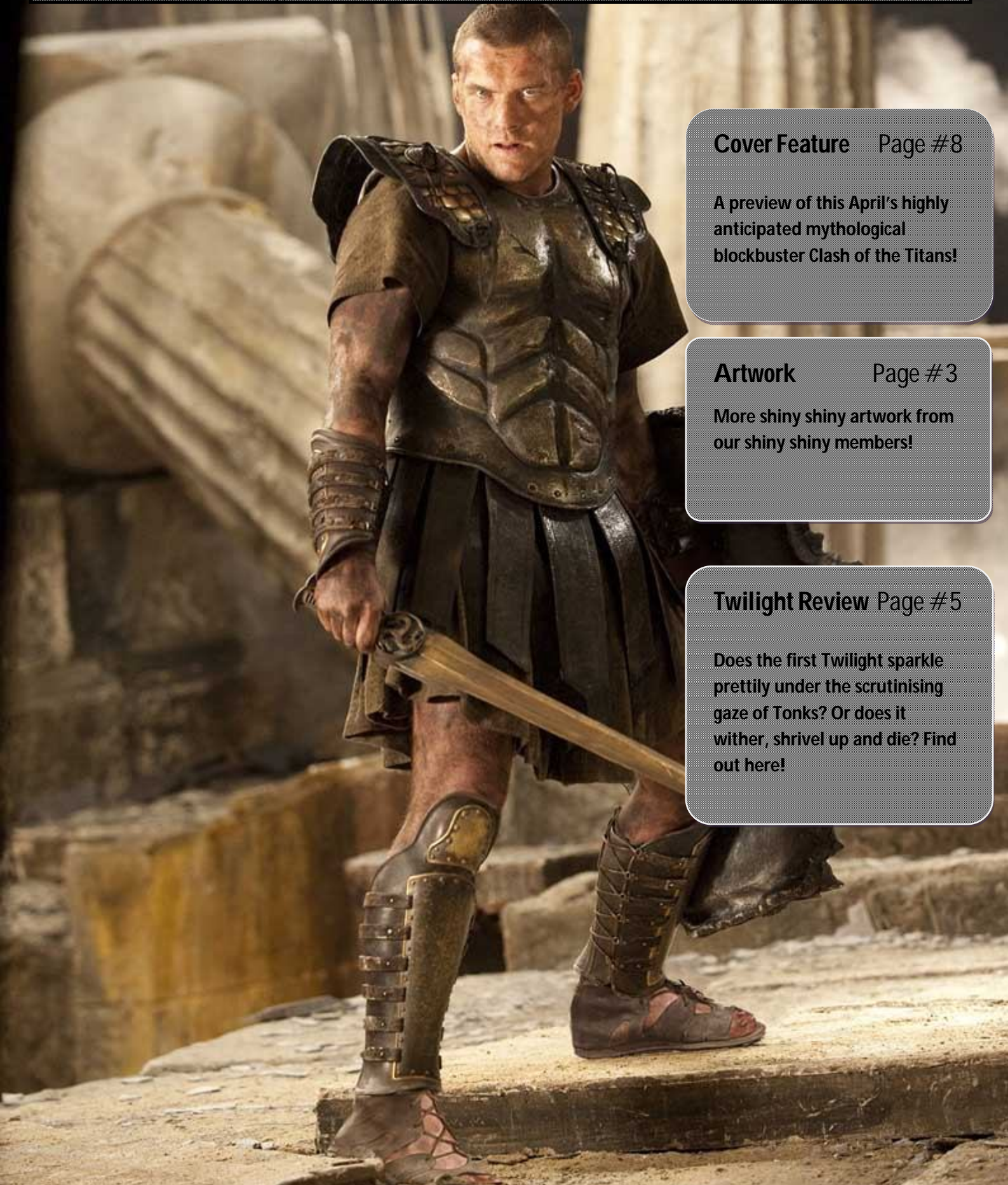


UNIVERSITY OF NOTTINGHAM SCIENCE
FICTION & FANTASY SOCIETY

the zine

The latest in Scifi, Fantasy, Anime & Cult... free!

Issue #1: SHINY!



Cover Feature Page #8

A preview of this April's highly anticipated mythological blockbuster Clash of the Titans!

Artwork Page #3

More shiny shiny artwork from our shiny shiny members!

Twilight Review Page #5

Does the first Twilight sparkle prettily under the scrutinising gaze of Tonks? Or does it wither, shrivel up and die? Find out here!

Contents

Captain's Log #1

Can't Stop The
Serenity #2

Artwork #3

Reviews #4

Poetry #6

Cover Feature #8

Story #1 #9

Story #2 #12

Story #3 #15

Welcome!

Captain's Log

My fellow Geeks,

It is finally here. No doubt you have been pacing up and down wringing your hands and crying out for the latest issue of the new society magazine. Perhaps you have written strongly worded letters to your MPs. I am sure you have found our lack of Zine disturbing. Well hold off on your force-choking, my friends, for the hour of Zine is upon us at last!

Firstly, an apology. This Zine really should have made its way to you earlier, and it's really quite ridiculously late. For that I am sorry. However, might I offer a limp and ineffectual excuse? See, we promised it would be out termly ... and this IS the end of the second term ... right at the end ... but still in the term ... so ... yeah ... it DID come out this term ... just a bit late. Er, yeah. So technically I suppose we fulfilled our promise and have nothing to apologise for. Huzzah!

On to the President's Address, then. This will be my last time working on The Zine (granted it's only my second time, but sssh) and indeed my last week as President of this fine society. I've banged on about it enough in the run-up to the AGM, so suffice to say that it's been a pleasure and an honour to be involved in the running of the society we all love – and I suspect I am speaking for everyone on this year's committee when I say that. We're not just a group of people with similar interests; we're a community and this magazine is born out of our sense of community.

This issue contains stories, poetry and more besides. I hope you find something that interests you in the pages within – and hey, if you don't, write it up and send it in! Remember, this is OUR magazine, and that means it's YOUR magazine. YOU call the shots!

That's quite enough waffling from me. Without further ado, I present to you the first proper issue of The Zine. Long may it and this wonderful society regin!

Yours totally-hoping-to-submit-stories-for-many-years-to-come,

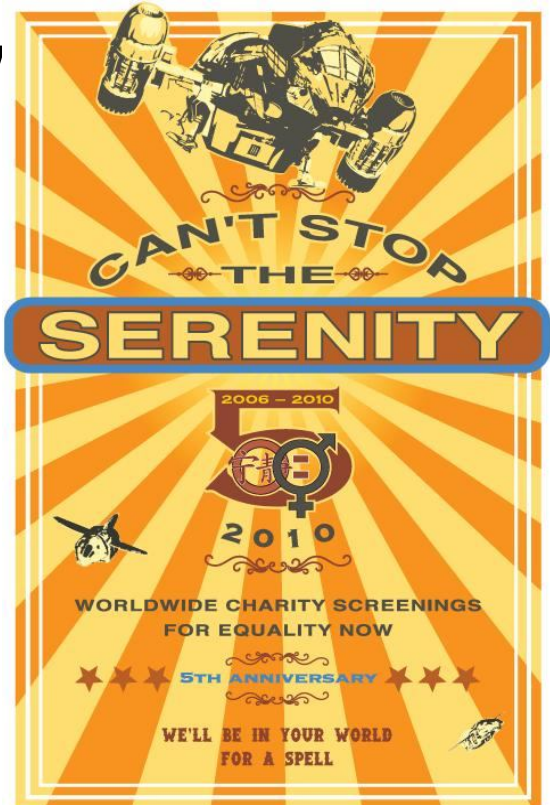
Sam Kurd

Can't Stop The Serenity

Well, we're doing it again! After last year's rollicking success story, we'll be Can't-Stop-The-Serenity-ing it up all over again this year!

'We Aim to Misbehave' by
Sam Kurd

For those not in the know, Can't Stop The Serenity is a yearly global charity event in which the film *Serenity* is screened (often with internet sensation *Dr. Horrible's Singalong Blog*) in order to raise funds for registered charity **Equality Now** (<http://www.equalitynow.org/english/index.html>) which combats injustice and gender inequality around the world. Last year we attempted to host an event for the first time – and I'm glad to report it was most successful!

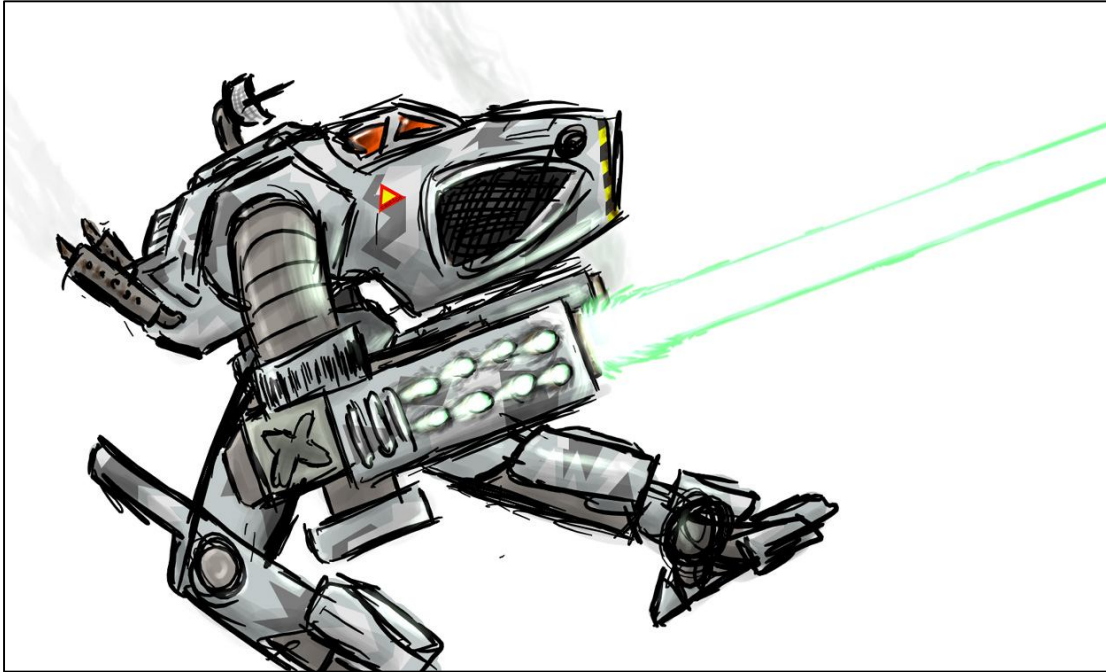


This year we're aiming for bigger. We're aiming for better. And we're aiming for double the amount we raised last year (which, as I'm sure you recall, was just over £300). You may be interested to know that last year's global efforts raised a wonderful **\$137,331.14** (roughly **£91,772.249**) for women's rights charity Equality Now. We're all very proud to have done our bit for them, and we're hoping that this year's event will be even more successful.

This year's arrangement will be slightly different. We'll still be having the screenings of *Firefly* and *Dr. Horrible* **on the afternoon of Saturday 12th June in Room A48 of the Sir Clive Granger Building**. However, you may want to keep your evening free as we're planning to have a very shiny **Shindig** in the evening, complete with *Firefly*-themed party games and other geekeries! All times and Shindig details are tbc at the moment, so do be sure to keep an eye on our website (<http://su-web2.nottingham.ac.uk/~scifi/csts.php>) for details; worry not, we'll keep you posted – watch this space!

If you'd like to lend a hand in the arrangement of this fantastic event, then please contact James Titmuss (lastof@gmail.com) who is organising it all this year; he will need every helper-minion he can get his hands on to make this the best event it can possibly be!

Artwork



KABOOMSPLODEY!

"Snow Mecha"

Drawn by Ben Sandum



**Blimey, wouldn't
want to run into her
in a dark forest...**

"Rebel Red"

Drawn by Constance
Armitage

Reviews

Moon Review

by Sam Kurd

We watched this on a Wednesday night this year – and I’m damned glad we did! This really is an amazing film. I know there’s been a lot of hyperbole about it on the internet, so I’ll try to avoid over-hyping it – but it certainly deserves a hefty percentage of the buzz! It’s classic science fiction given a nice shiny plating.

Sam Rockwell plays lone astronaut Sam, coming to the end of his three-year mining contract on the moon. His only company a helpful Hal-lite computer played by Kevin Spacey, he starts to suspect things are a bit weird when ... but that would be telling. Suffice to say that the plot is perfectly serviceable and is supported by admirably fine acting from Rockwell (whose lack of an Oscar Nomination for this role is *criminal!*).

The thing that makes this film seem like classic sci-fi is the pacing. This is no gunfight-a-minute popcorn-guzzling blockbuster effects-fest. It’s closer to *2001 : A Space Odyssey* in style; it’s a slow-burning quiet mood piece. There are long scenes without dialogue (or explosions), only the haunting music and Sam driving across the ethereal landscape of the moon in his moon buggy (excellent modelwork here, btw). The emphasis is on Sam’s isolation and growing sense of unease. It doesn’t need a punchy rock soundtrack and a square-jawed hero to tell its story. And this makes me happy.

It’s not for everyone; there are those who snoozed their way through it. Fair enough. It takes all sorts and so on. But for those of us who like our scifi unembellished, restrained and elegant, this is a real treat.

It’s the perfect counterpoint to the Biggest Scifi Film Of Recent Years Wot Has Got Lots of Oscar Noms But Only Won The Effects Ones (that’s *Avatar*, in case you couldn’t get). It’s quiet where the other is loud, slow while the other is zoomy (oh you know what I mean), understated while the other is overblown. And they’re both immense amounts of fun for very different reasons. Simply put, it’s an absolute must see. Thumbs up.

Masters of Horror Series Review by Alan Smithee

I’ve been spending a lot of time ~~obsessively watching this anthology series~~ working very very hard indeed with this anthology series playing in the background. Yes. Yes that’s better.

Masters of Horror is a TV series celebrating, oddly enough, the horror story. Each episode is an adaptation of a short story. None of them are particularly famous stories (by which of course I mean I’ve only ever read two of them – psh, I bet you’ve not read more than that either!), but there are some real gems here. Um. Unfortunately you kindof have to sift through the rest of the dreck to find them.

The episodes are mostly rather cheesy and contrived, heavy on the gore and the unintentional laughs. One was actually offensive on nearly every level (it was about a virus triggered by sexual arousal that turns men into religious zealots and killers of women – besides the occasional bit of random Islamophobia, the single gay man in the story was immune, so apparently homosexual people don’t get sexually aroused?) – very funny, though! The show’s dud stories get more ridiculous with each passing episode (A killer clown giving kids ice-cream that melts their parents when they eat it? A society of cannibals founded by George Washington?) and the real shame is that they could have been redeemed by better scripting and directing. The acting is fine, many of the stories themselves creepy, they’re just let down by the execution.

It’s not all gloom though – the occasional appearances by famous faces are always effective and there are some fantastically creepy stories here (Lovecraft, apocalypses, mind-controlling insects, a Japanese Ghost story, psychopaths aplenty!), all done well enough to make me want to seek out the original stories. So, in the end, mission accomplished, right?

Though it occasionally feels like they’re throwing in sex and gore and swearing just for kicks, and though there are (hilarious) dud episodes it’s certainly worth checking out.

If you’ve ever wanted to see Meat Loaf skin himself, create a snazzy skin-vest and try to get a stripper to wear it, this is the show for you!

I read this book to see what the fuss was all about, and to be perfectly honest, I wasn't impressed.

I found the characters two-dimensional and boring. There was nothing about the protagonist Bella that I could identify with in any way. The details of her life at high school didn't interest me in the slightest. Nor did I find the other high school kids at all interesting; they seem to exist only to make Edward Cullen seem more perfect by comparison.

Edward was another character I failed to identify with. His only defining personality characteristic is that he is 'perfect'. I found him boring. I don't want to read about perfect characters; I want to read about good people who are fatally flawed, or bad people with interesting reasons for what they do. Edward is neither of these, and therefore boring to me.

This is a love story, and Edward is the love interest, so I should at least be attracted to him, but there the author failed. I should want to be a part of the love the main couple experience, but I found their relationship fake, and Bella's constant proclamations that Edward is perfect became quickly annoying.

What the novel also lacked for me was the proper build up of tension, climax and resolution. There are two incidents early in the novel where this could have been used to great effect, but wasn't. The incident where Edward saves Bella from being hit by a truck being an example.

And then we come to my biggest issue with the novel; the abusive, control freak, stalker behaviour displayed by the 'perfect' Edward Cullen. And the thing that makes me sick? The fact that fans of the books either don't notice this behaviour, or they explain it away as 'okay because he loves her' or that 'it's romantic'. Utter codswallop. Not only is there absolutely no chemistry between the two main characters, but never once does Edward give me the impression that he loves Bella at all.

In fact, if my memory serves me correctly, Edward actually fills all five of the criteria for being an abusive boyfriend. The first warning sign should be the fact that there is no relationship between the two leads until Edward *decides* that he is her boyfriend.

He just decides that they're together, and she obediently accepts it. She's being trained to be an abused spouse, mark my words. I seriously don't understand why this book doesn't get more bad press from feminists and women's rights groups, because this book puts the women's rights movement back to the fifties. After this point in the book, Edward constantly checks up on Bella, won't let her do anything for herself. Abusive boyfriend behaviour, but remember 'it's okay because he loves her' </sarcasm>.

I'd also like to point out that a boy entering a girl's room to watch her sleep without her permission is stalking. It is disturbing and it is wrong. And it sure as hell isn't romantic. Even more so since he was doing it for two months and she's only been in his town for a month. Not only is this book badly written, it was shoddily edited as well.

After about 280 pages of pointless high school drama and nauseating abusive behaviour from Edward which Bella (and everyone else in the book) seems utterly blind to, the plot finally kicks in. Yes, it really does take that long for Meyer to get round to doing anything more than writing out her personal fantasy. And after all that build up, the plot is little more than an excuse for Edward to be 'noble' and prove his love by saving Bella from a very implausible climax in which she is utterly useless. Also the 'climax' isn't very climactic since Bella passes out. I blinked at the wrong moment and missed the high point of the story. As if there could possibly be a high point in this waste of paper.

This book is badly written (too much purple prose), the two main characters are two dimensional and have an abusive relationship and the plot doesn't appear until the last quarter of the book. There is no build up of tension, climax or resolution, mostly because Meyer doesn't seem to want any tension in her perfect little fantasy world. I think she read the book on how not to write novels and did everything she wasn't supposed to. It is honestly a waste of time, money and paper.

I understand why people like it; it's an easy read. It asks nothing of you, and gives nothing back. I will be blunt; don't bother reading this book. Read Dracula instead. And then watch Buffy, because at least in Joss Whedon's world the women have a backbone.

Poetry, Etc.

The Lemon

By John Steele

On hallowed fields grows grass like black lightning

Amongst the heathers of silver thunder

Here dwells the lemon

For a dangerous beast is it

It hungers for the dreams unbidden of the morning child

Against the setting sun of fabulous cacophony

In the maw of rapturous justice

Here dwells the lemon

Slowly eating your soul

Twice upon the sun drenched sky

With juice and fire and holy rancour

Did the lemon war upon the Sea

For the fate of the world

And over what to have for tea

The Stars, Our Destiny

By Sam Kurd

There was a time when we could not travel amongst the stars.
We could not play in the blazing comet's trail, nor tease black holes and run away.
So primitive we, chained to our earthly prison, unable to touch the sky,
We could but dream of spreading wings and taking flight.

There was a time when we could not travel amongst the stars.
We glared through telescopes with impotent fury, determined to overreach ourselves.
So crude our first attempts, our explosive failures so galling,
We could but grit our teeth and return to the drawing board.

There was a time when we could not travel amongst the stars.
We worked ourselves mercilessly, creeping advancements elevating us to new levels.
So determined we, we dragged ourselves from lowly depths upwards,
Until we could take our place amongst the skygods and legends of old.

There was a time when we could not travel amongst the stars.

Clash of the Titans – Will It Be Epic?



Medusa. Insert joke about hairdressing here.

The next big blockbuster to get critics' pulses racing is Greek-flavoured mythological epic Clash of the Titans, which will be battling its way to our screens on April 2nd. But what's it all about?

As if you didn't know (and if you didn't know, may I express my sincere condolences over the obvious death of your internet access?), Clash of the Titans is a remake of a stopmotiontastic film from 1981 called ... er ... Clash of the Titans.

It follows the mythological journey of Perseus, demigod son of Zeus (otherwise known as Him With The Lightning Bolts), as he battles monsters such as Medusa (pictured left) and the gargantuan Kraken in his attempt to overthrow Hades, lord of the Underworld.

Is this plot faithful to the original film's? I have no idea, I sadly haven't seen it. Is it particularly faithful to the original Perseus

myth? I have no idea, but I know how you can find out (besides, you know, reading it); watch it with Susan and gauge how inaccurate it is by the volume of her cries of 'oh HELL no!'.

If you've seen the trailers (you've not seen the trailers? QUICKLY! TO THE INTERNET, BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE!), you'll know that this film a) is very shiny-looking indeed, b) has GIANT SCORPION MONSTERS and c) has a rather fine cast featuring Liam Neeson, Ralph Fiennes, Pete Postlethwaite, Gemma Atherton and Alexander Siddig. Oh, and Avatar's leading man Sam Worthington as Perseus, but with any luck he won't be quite as bland as he was in that one.

If a good old-fashioned gods and monsters fantasy film is your cup of tea and you don't mind your fantasy mixed with heavy dollops of action and adventure, then I suspect this film will be just the thing for you! And by you I mean me. I'm looking forward to it! We may have to disengage our brains before entry, as with most blockbusters, but one thing's for sure ... this is going to sell a HELL of a lot of popcorn!

UNLEASH THE KRAKEN!

...

Please?

Somewhere out there in the gathering velvety dusk; a city is on fire. Burning with great crimson and orange flames that dance like merry little children. Somewhere out there a man in a tattered weather cloak stands in the lee of a tree as the gathering storm whips about him. Cowled and cloaked he can only smell the ash on the damp wind; a warm, dry smell delightfully counterpoised amidst the clear smell of cold rain.

The coals of a crudely rolled cigarette flare like a dying star. The man knows about the fire. He smiles a guiltless smile. He *knows* about the fire. By his hand and his hand alone was it wrought and birthed. And here in the lee of a gnarled and ancient ash tree stands the man. The poetry of it all is not lost on him. Thousands will die this night, all because of him.

And he couldn't give a damn. That is, after all, exactly what is supposed to happen.

Mr. Callis has, in his time, been called many things. Revolutionary, murderer, hand of fate, mad, instrument of justice. But he knows the truth. He knows himself to be nothing more than a chain smoking arsonist with financially malleable morals.

To call Callis an assassin would denigrate the art of what he did. With but a single carefully floated ember he had the power to bring governments to their knees and plunge whole countries into darkest civil war. If anything he was merely a facilitator of accident, misfortune and circumstance. That is not to say he did what he did out of the kindness of his heart or any sociopathic menace. The financial compensation for his artful strokes of incendiary brilliance was substantial; but then again so were many of the risks. But Callis did so enjoy money.

The westward horizon flared into pastel peaches shot through with tart pinks. Another building spewing hate into the night with its mournful death throes. Callis cast off the withered stub of his cigarette into the pooling damp around the base of the tree. Sodden ash fell limply from its end as it spiralled downward, finally coming to rest in its watery grave, cold and alone. Callis sighed. The stub was so like himself in so many ways, save that he was not dead. Not yet at least. That he would be burnt to cindered ash before the end was in no doubt. How would they find his blackened shell? Burnt to an unrecognisable marionette beneath a collapsed beam? Or smoked like a fine kipper? It was a conundrum that provided his diseased and fevered mind with hours of pleasure. A mind like a blighted harvest; from afar it looked so wholesome. Only when you drew near did you glimpse the putrid, mouldering stains that ran so deep.

Drawing his cloak about him like the shifting scales of some great leviathan the man who was Callis strode out from the slight embrace of the canopy and into the rain, striding towards the descending twilight of the eastward horizon.

By a battered and bent farm gate, lashed to a mouldering wooden pole, waited a simple cart of two wheels hitched to a horse that could be only described as a foul shade of equine pestilence. Thin, tattered, emaciated and imbued with a temperament most appropriately categorised as malignant. Deft hands clad in fingerless gloves of cracking leather untethered the reins from their decaying mooring. The foul horse whinnied angrily and snapped ineffectually at Callis' hand, missing by a shameful distance. Reins in hand Callis turned to the beast and calmly punched it square between the eyes. The lashing fist slid through the air as if it were an oiled viper. Dazed and subbed the horse whickered pitifully. With the hand that had so recently meted out violence upon the horse Callis grasped it firmly by the chin and stared into its eyes.

"You never damn well learn do you?" Callis' words were parched, almost dusty. He spat on the ground with a contempt that seemingly bordered on the habitual. Seating himself upon the small bench at the cart's front Callis snapped the reins and the still dazed horse set off onto a track stirred into a thick soup of mud and grass by the lashing rain. As the horse plodded forward its hooves sank deep into the mire, their removal making a sound like a toothless mouth sucking on an ancient boiled sweet. A chill wind howled out of the north tearing leaves from the trees and setting stout hedge rows swaying and bouncing as if they were nothing more than long grass. Callis swayed as the wind buffeted around him, swirling and embracing him, and trying to carry him off into the night. The horse resolutely plodded on, seemingly refusing to admit the existence or even the mere suggestion of wind. Callis tightened his cloak about him and began to whistle. It was shrill and jarring dirge, barely audible over the howling wind. The notes could not truly be heard, were anyone in a position to hear them they would more have felt them; the emptiness they left in the air, a bitter sweet sorrow that lingered in the heart and instilled a sense of forlorn whimsy. The notes soared up the scales to glorious warming heights to only come cascading down to mournful lows. Callis leant a feeling of wearied age to the tune, he made it sound worn out and lethargic, as if he'd whistled the selfsame tune a thousand times before. The dirge was interrupted by a thunderous crump from the city and once more the sky was lit with fiery hues. Callis spat over the side of the cart and began to whistle again. And with that, Callis rode into the night and all its gathering gloom.

It rained long into the night, yet Callis and his horse forged onwards away from the scene of his latest work of art. He was not fleeing, fleeing would imply some measure of speed or admission of guilt. Neither of these things entered his mind. Speed ever so often aroused suspicion, even toward those who otherwise seemed perfectly innocent; in fact, more often than not, the innocent would appear more guilty than a guilty man ever could. It was a small and delightful psychological bent to which the human mind so kindly clung. It was for this reason that shortly before Callis had set in motion the events that would swallow the city in the marvellous conflagration which now raged he had hired a man to deliver a letter to the far north, pertaining, of course, to a matter of great urgency. The letter was blank. The recipient did not exist. And thus was the blame so expertly diverted to another. It was always the smallest of the details that gave Callis such delight.

There came a faint fluttering and almost before the presence of the sound could be registered a crow had landed on the bench beside Callis. It turned its head toward Callis, its feathers glistening a slight purple, almost imperceptible in the darkness of night. The crow turned toward Callis and cocked its head quizzically. Small, black eyes gazed at Callis. The errant moon shone through an intermittent gap in the roiling clouds above and a passing white flash shot across its eyes as the moon light caught their surface. Callis spat and turned to regard the crow.

"What do you want?" said Callis brusquely.

"Caw!" replied the crow.

"Of course it's done"

"Caw!"

Callis glared at the crow from beneath his hood, his eyes boiling with a barely contained anger.

"I don't care for your tone hag"

"Ka-caw!" came the crow's reply

Callis' fist lashed forward and grasped the crow around the neck. Raising his hand he brought the crow to eye level and into his withering gaze.

"I don't answer to you crone, and I never will". Without even a barely perceptible flinch his hand tightened and the crow's neck snapped like it was nothing more than a tinder dry twig. With a casual flick of the wrist Callis cast the crow's body into the muddy road. Callis spat at the corpse and muttered to himself.

"She never damn well learns, does she?"

The promise of dawn hung heavily upon the eastern horizon, a faint and elusive hue that haunted the sky. It put Callis in mind of a distant fire, not too dissimilar to the one he had left behind him; this was surely a good omen. It would take at least a week of arduous travel before he would reach his next port of call. A city wouldn't burn tomorrow, but it would burn soon enough. Callis spat and a crooked smile stalked across a face where no love dwelt; but for now, the passing residency of delight had descended.

Chapter 1

The silence was a thick ominous blanket that enveloped the entire ship. The emergency lighting cast a dim glow that somehow deepened the shadows throughout the craft. They'd been running dark for weeks now. Their engines and communications were shot, so they were effectively stranded in Sector ΣΦ, the back end of Corporation Space. They had shut off all non-vital power consumers to keep the distress beacon running as long as they could. Someone was bound to pick up the signal eventually.

Shem lay on her bunk thinking back to her history indoctrination; apparently the books she held so dear were once individual physical objects and not flickering text on a screen. She wondered what other amazing and ingenious things they had to amuse themselves before the entertainment modules had been invented. The 'Modules had everything you needed, books, both written and recorded, films, games, SocMes (a collection of virtual friends) and Selections. This forced inactivity sat uncomfortably with everyone, normally you were working, sleeping or plugged into a 'Module. What the hell else were you supposed to do?

Her musings were cut short by an almighty crash that echoed through the ship. She jumped up and dashed to the source of the sound. Without the Intracom, she had no way to know if it was a serious accident or not without checking. Add that to the list of annoyances caused by the powerdown. She arrived just before her crewmates. The silence was shattered again, this time by raucous laughter. Salme had fallen face first over a container in the hold.

Salme lifted himself up on his arms "I don't understand what's so damn funny!"

Fernan tried to explain through hysterical giggling and gasps of air "You managed to find... the only damned... container we hadn't... stacked... and fall over it!"

Salme pulled himself to his feet, while assiduously avoiding the container. "It's not like it's even funny! Something like this would never be on the Comedy Selection." Still grumbling, he stalked out of the hold.

"Try not to fall over anything!" Fernan yelled after him.

"You know, that's the most entertaining thing that's happened since we shut the power off." Commented Shem, wiping tears of laughter from her eyes.

Once they'd recovered from their fits of laughter, they paused awkwardly before quietly making their ways back to their quarters. The uncomfortable silence settled over the ship once more. Shem decided to go and apologise to Salme for laughing, because although it was hilarious, the last they needed right now were tensions between the crew. She went down to the Med Bay where she saw Salme sitting at a desk, apparently concentrating on something in front of him.

"Hey Salme, I jus—" She started, but was cut short by Salme jumping back from the desk, spinning round and holding a MedPop like a weapon.

"By Harotha's Fist Shem! Don't sneak up on me like that!" He stormed towards the door and slid it shut with a ringing slam.

Fernan was restless, she wasn't used to being disconnected from the ship for this long. She had taken to pacing through the eerily still halls. She walked slowly towards the hold, trailing her hand down the wall, habitually feeling for the familiar vibrations of her beloved ship. She sighed, unable to detect even the smallest hum. She was feeling her separation keenly as she wandered into the hold.

"What in Harotha's name are you doing Gis?!"

The small man was rummaging through one of the larger containers. He dropped whatever he was currently holding back into the box. He looked up, turned his head sideways and gave Fernan a winning, if slightly unnerving, smile.

"I was just seeing if there was anything interesting in here. It's just so boring sitting around waiting to be towed."

Fernan strode forward and grabbed Gis by the shoulders. She was quite a bit taller than him, and considerably stronger, so she lifted him easily.

"You might be bored, but that's no excuse to go through the shipment." She walked to the door, set him down and pushed him slightly forwards. "Go on, find something else to occupy yourself with."

Gis muttered something under his breath, then glared at the much taller woman.

Fernan looked a little bemused “You know for a fact that I could punch you into next week, why did you go and say something like that?”

Gis chuckled a little, spiteful laugh “Because if you do, you’ll only prove how right I am.”

Meanwhile, Natten was lying on his back on the bridge looking up through the panoramic window which stretched across the front and half the ceiling of the room. He was cushioning his head with his hands, his legs bent and casually crossed at the knee. As he gazed at the stars, his body relaxed, his mind calmed and he felt himself resonate with the universe. He allowed a slight smile to settle on his lips.

TO BE CONTINUED ... if the author can be arsed!

Caption Competition



Sadly we've only received one caption for this – how disappointing! Hopefully the next one will be met with more pithy heckling!

Well done to Jen for the winning (solitary) caption : “String Theory in Action!”

I'm no scientist but I'm not sure that's how String Theory works, Jen!



Aaaand here's the new one! Sit and ponder, stroke your chin, mull it over ... or just submit the first thing that comes to mind. There's a new thread on the forum for submitting, in the Zine sub-forum. Check it out!

Zombie apocalypse, what's not to love?

Penny had been missing for five days when her mother was released from her temporary room of incarceration, an event for which she felt somewhat ambivalent. She had little to go back to once she was freed, no greatness in her life nor joy in her heart, she found some relief in being separated from her existence the three days she had been locked away. Of course, she had not been apprehended by the local officials, there were no police, was no justice for people of her status, they were left to their own in the hopes that the poor would slaughter each other and take responsibility away from the politicians who despised them. Penny's mother had approached the police herself, in her grief at the loss of her daughter she was greatly inebriated, looking to report her child as missing. Rather than receiving assistance she was, of course, taken as a rambling drunkard and was thrown unceremoniously into a cell. Those officers placed in charge of her processing seemed resentful of the task, as they undoubtedly were and left her a day longer than she was informed she would be kept, with no apology forthcoming when she was finally set free. Penny's mother walked slowly home, she was released in the early morning but she would not finalise her return to her abode until long into the evening. She became tired quickly, being undernourished before she found herself jailed and not fed but only watered, like a neglected plant, hence she faltered soon in her journey and made the often and familiar decision to scout for an empty and if possible secluded doorway in which she could rest and sleep, if necessary completing her journey the following morning. She found herself a hide away and lay down her weary body and reminisced. Her thoughts fled quickly to her daughter, Penny, to take her mind from her pain.

Penny's mother watched her child playing from the door of their home as Penny tossed stones across the street from one side to the other, her mother couldn't make out if she was aiming for anything but she was certainly focussed and entertained. Penny's father had died three years before from cholera, her mother had a job, dressing dolls, that paid poorly, the two of them living just barely in a room with twenty other people. Penny's mother now lived only for the brief instances where she was afforded the singular luxury of watching her child play, although these moments were tainted by the despair that she knew her daughter's life would never improve. Even so, Penny's mother allowed herself to believe, if just for a little while, that her daughter was happy and it was made easy by the smile on Penny's face. They were poor, tired and dirty but in the occasional slither of sun light that penetrated their street, Penny's little blue dress looked bright and beautiful as the day she first wore it (when even then it was second hand but clean enough and with no holes in it, Penny was the envy of every child in her building).

While she watched, Penny's mother earned her tuppence, making decent a small army of little,

naked, porcelain girls. Recently the dolls had become dishevelled, the hair loose and discoloured, the paint work inexact to an extreme and the materials with which Penny's mother was supplied to make the clothes and dress the toys was of a quality so low as to make even her blush when working with it. As such, sales were low, the extent of the clay regiment had diminished and Penny's mother's pay had decreased with it. Times were particularly harsh. Once dressed, the dolls were placed into a small box and, once the box was full, Penny was called over by her mother to take the shipment over to the toy shop's store. The vessel was the height of Penny at least, she had to drag the full boxes by a rope tied around the centre all the way through town to the store room of Mr Jones' shop at least two or three times a day. It was a difficult journey for a girl of six years to make but already she knew every back alley way and shortcut there was to make the walk as short as possible, although she always got a bit stuck at an alley not a hundred yards from her home. The lock to the gate through which she had to traverse was well out of her reach but Penny was a resourceful girl and she quickly befriended a young man who slept in the doorway of one of the buildings that backed onto the alley way who, for a penny of her wages once a month ('A penny from Penny', he was fond of saying although he only took the wage as protection to her pride) he would open the portal that lay on her route. He, Mark, was no doubt a kind man, but he was a poor man and on this day, to the greatest misfortune of Penny, his price had been paid. At the behest of one better off, old man, he would not be there to assist the girl on this day. A child of little more than half a decade can put up no resistance to man, even a man of advancing years and in seconds Penny was gagged and bound and blindfolded, taken from her mother and her life.

When Penny was calm enough to open her eyes, having been freed from the blindfold for some time already, she found herself in a tiny room, lit by a single, dim lamp. There was a small pile of hay in the corner and a dirty bucket, the intended use of which was made obvious by its smell, a plate of something that appeared to have once been food lay uncomfortably close to the bucket. There was no window and the only entrance to the room was a heavy wooden door which, even if it wasn't bolted from the outside, Penny would stand no chance of moving the least fraction of an inch. There was a noise from behind the door that rang thinly through the room and the door moved open just enough to allow the easy passage of a box into the child's cell. The voice of the old man could be heard by Penny, though she did not see his face, instructing her, "You'll be fed again when they all have hair." This was said in such a harsh, uncaring manner as to send Penny over the edge and she began to cry relentlessly as the door was shut on her and she was left alone with her mysterious task alone to occupy her. Once she had tired herself out from crying, Penny looked towards the box, dragging herself towards it like a lame dog might towards the scrag ends of a bone,

not because it wants to chew, but because the chew toy is all it has. Penny managed to pull herself up and open the box, which was at least as tall as she was, and, standing on the tips of her toes, she examined the interior of the vessel.

Inside, it looked as if it was full of flea infested horse hair but after thrusting her hands in to take a handful, Penny discovered that underneath this was a pile of naked and bald dolls, and the tools with which she was supposed to wig them. With no other course open to her, and acting with a logic that only children can possess, not having yet developed the destructive forces of pride and ego that mar the sensibility of adults, she took up the tools, one of the dolls and a handful of horse hair and began working. Of course, this was a task that Penny had never before undertaken and so she was far from adept at it, but the functions she had to perform seemed as self explanatory as the bucket and Penny turned all on her concentration onto the activity, quickly getting the hang of it. After a few hours of doing nothing but wiggling these dolls in fact, she had become quite expert in the task, and though her first attempts were abysmal and there was not enough hair to go around all the figures, so they ended quite thin on top, her results quickly became passable enough for the purposes of commerce.

Penny's mother finally made it home the day after she had departed from the police station, the state she was in unnoticeable as she had never appeared as an oil painting. She fell into the room in which she and now fifteen other people slept, the number varying with such ferocity, people dying, minor arrests being made and other vagrants wandering in from whatever street they original frequented on a day when they could scrape together enough money to afford what little shelter the sty that was Penny and her mother's home could provide, that Penny's mother had taken to counting heads out of habit whenever she entered. She had assumed that Mr Jones would have found some other person willing to do her job for what little she got paid after she had been unavailable for so long, there were certainly more than enough hapless souls in need of instant remuneration, no matter how small, but she was surprised to find a box waiting in the room for her in the area where she and Penny usually slept. Upon opening this little gift that life had granted her she found half a week's wages waiting inside. It was evident that one of the others in her room had undertaken her responsibilities while she was gone. The thought of such generosity almost brought her tears, the site of an empty space, one that seemed wide as a gorge, where Penny used to sleep drove her beyond tears and she passed out rather than fell asleep. The morning brought Penny's mother a new challenge, that of survival. Penny was gone and life seemed bleak but her mother still held up a futile thread of hope, not in true belief but out of necessity to prevent herself dying from the inaction that the depression of dealing with

the truth would bring. Still, while Penny was finding her way home to her mother, she would no doubt need to eat and for that Penny's mother would need to earn. She summoned up her resolve into her dirty but delicate, and currently clenched, fists and set about the box of her trade. The dolls that she extracted from the container were exquisite. Mr Jones had never produced such fine work in the last five years that his and Penny's mother's arrangement had existed. The hair was soft and glowing and the usual glassy stare that extrudes from the eyes of dolls seemed to have a glint of life in it that Penny's mother simply couldn't explain. Though perhaps, she thought, the gaze of the doll may have been enhanced by the delicate smile that Mr Jones had crafted. Penny's mother was excited by this, though she was never a great lover of art, she realised that these would sell well, and that would mean at least a small increase in her pay. Her excitement was quickly dampened however, when she discovered the new fabric with which she was to dress the dolls. It was bright blue and reminded Penny's mother so much of her daughter's dress that she couldn't help but be brought to tears by it. Truly, these would be the prettiest dolls in the city, and she would call them each Penny.

The second box of dolls was delivered through the heavy portal to Penny with new orders to produce better work or not be fed. With it came the meal she had been promised for her earlier efforts; though it was not a great morsel, even for a small child like Penny, it was well received by her as she was verging on the point of starvation. Penny tried to eat quickly but the sheer poor quality of the food was enough to force her to stop and wash away the decaying taste with the dirty water with which she was supplied after just the second mouthful. On this time around what was to become the cycle of the remainder of Penny's life, Penny had slightly more strength and rather than attempt to reach over into the box as she had done with yesterday's batch of toys, she simply pulled the box over and down onto its side, allowing some of the contents to spill out onto the floor. It was immediately obvious that there was, once again, not going to be enough horse hair to apply to every doll a full head. But the old man had asked Penny to improve on her original performance and this she intended to do as continuing to be fed, as her mother had taught her, was the most important thing. To that end, as Penny worked, she attempted to improve her technique, applying the hair to the dolls in such a way as to attempt to conceal that fact that the covering was not as thick as a customer may like. Not one of the dolls looked up to scratch, even to Penny, and she began to become scared that she would not be fed. Various attempts at rearranging and redistributing the hair allowed for no improvement, even the few hairs she found on the floor made little difference to the presentation of the toys. Then a realisation struck Penny, that some of the hairs she scrounged were hers and blended perfectly with the rest of the dolls' manes. Penny was a young child, and appearance can be very important to young

children, but mother's teachings rattled around inside her head and she grew more than a little peckish. With a burst of courage, Penny bunched up a handful of her own hair in her little fist and pulled.

The Davenport's youngest daughter accepted her birthday gift with a beaming smile and outstretched arms. The colourful wrapping paper was ripped away in seconds and the girl Davenport made short work of the box that lay underneath, so much so that she almost dropped what lay inside, her father moving to steady her and catch the gift. The child grinned all the more upon seeing the doll. "She's beautiful." Miss Davenport said, which of course was true although the entire congregation summoned to celebrate the child's birthday were similarly struck with awe, quite unexpectedly so for adults. "It looks so life like!" The mother exclaimed, her sisters nodding in agreement. The toy was passed round the party with similar reactionary statements being emitted from each who gazed upon her. The same story was occurring in homes throughout the city and soon word spread out of those borders and into the rest of the county. Mr Jones' dolls quickly became the stuff of legend. It was the general consensus that the brilliance behind the beauty of the figures was the glint behind the eyes, that spark of life that did not belong, although this was accentuated by wonderful features, marvellous dress and a fine head of the most gorgeous hair. Little Miss Davenport was so impressed with her gift that it was placed at the head of her dresser, replacing her previous favourite doll as the pride of her collection with no hesitation on her part. When she slept, the doll slept with her but at all other times it was on display for all to see, the tiny lady Davenport being too nervous to play with lest she in some way damage its perfection. And she named it Penny.

As word spread, good business went with it and Penny's mother's lot in life became much improved. She now slept in a bed, in a room of her own, nothing fancy of course but she was healthier, better fed and alone in her grief, as she needed to be at that time. She continued to dress the dolls but her pay had doubled, which she considered very generous of Mr Jones, of course his revenue had increased substantially more than this. Penny's mother was no fool and was well aware of the fact that she was not receiving what might be considered by some as her fair share, however, she was in no mind to argue, she had known poverty and this beggar chose not to return to it. Penny's mother grew more excited for her future every time a new box came in for her, each containing more and more impressive creatures to be made up and shipped off to those families, growing fewer in number every day, that could afford to buy one of Mr Jones' dolls. It was an unfamiliar sensation to anyone in the position of Penny and her mother but eventually Penny's mother understood what it was; hope. She almost cursed herself for becoming so content with life when her little girl was still missing, there was no doubt that her new found bliss was tainted with guilt as she

would go back to her old hovel day after day in the hope that her Penny had come home, which of course, she never had, but so long as Penny's mother had hope she could spare some for her child. Mr Jones also had hope. He hoped that his business would continue to expand, that he could find more help easily in the form of poor women willing to work for a pittance, he hoped that his house would fetch a fair price so that he could move into a grander abode but most of all, he hoped that no one would discover the secret of his success, the little girl stashed away in the back of his shop. He had not dared to gaze upon Penny since he had abducted her, he simply threw in the boxes and the food and took out the finished dolls, making sure that she was well away from sight before he entered. Mr Jones knew that so long as he didn't see her his conscience would not be an issue. The dolls came out more and more beautiful, more and more popular and he could concentrate on that without much difficulty at all. Mr Jones had been very good to Penny's mother, putting resources and manipulating connections to organise searches for her daughter, the facade helping to ease his mind, but he always had the secret locked at the back of his mind and there were times when it worried him so. Still the dolls kept coming and he kept his secret.

The parents of the family Davenport were awakened early by their child's scream. The poor thing explained to her parents how she had failed to fall asleep for the past three nights, once they had calmed her down a bit, and even then through a flood of tears. It took some time to finally get out of the girl what was wrong. "Penny's dead!" she said. Though at first stunned by the cessation of unconsciousness, Miss Davenport's father gathered his senses quickly and assisted his wife in the same purpose. Mr and Mrs Davenport hurried into the little girl's room. Upon entering, they shot one look at their daughter's doll and took it away, vowing to see Mr Jones as soon as they could the next day.

The dolls stopped coming. Mr Jones had been expecting this for some time, though he had hoped that any resistance Penny might have put up would have been drained from her by now, he had obviously fed her too much last night, given her too much strength. He was not particularly worried though, he knew hunger would break her eventually and told Penny as much. He took her failure to reply as a further example of her obstinacy, shrugged it off and set about working on other toys as the customers drawn to his shop rarely left with just a doll, the success of that item seeming to taint their views of his other products. This was very advantageous to Mr Jones, however they only came in droves to his little shop for one item and once word spread that his supply was gone then the crowd would significantly

thin, but more importantly, there would be questions and most probably discoveries. He could only hope now that Penny would buckle under the hunger soon, his supply would last for a few days but he was, if being honest to himself, unsure if Penny could endure that long without food or water. A day passed and still Mr Jones received no box of dolls from Penny causing him to grow more worried. The day before business had been good and the supply of dolls he had left would not last out the day.

Penny's mother was curious about Mr Jones' failure to deliver her another box of dolls that day. Her pay should have come with it for that week's work and she needed the money to pay her rent. After waiting till mid afternoon and realising that a box was not likely forthcoming today either, Penny's mother decided to enquire with Mr Jones what the delay was and whether or not this new arrangement would be permanent.

Mr Jones' establishment was bustling with a great throng of customers still when his supply of dolls finally sold out. There was something of a commotion as he spread the news amongst his clientele to the point where the only solution that seemed viable to Mr Jones was to offer everyone in the shop a discount along with the guarantee of them receiving their goods first thing upon the morning. The shop keeper was not pleased with this state of affairs and as soon as he had placated the swarming mob and managed to shoo them out of his door he locked up and turned his attention towards the heavy door at the back of his building. Mr Jones was in a rage. Greed begets greed, and even though he was more than comfortable financially now any loss of earnings were as a personal tragedy to him. Just as with the poorest of paupers; the richest of kings can not abide even the smallest of profit lost.

"You had better work! You had better not defy me any longer girl!" he screamed at the heavy wooden block before him. He paced up and down, awaiting a response yet none came forth. He banged hard on the door. "Do you hear me girl?!" he continued. The silence only aggravated Mr Jones further and soon his rage had surpassed his shame. In anger he hurled open the great oak door in a single motion, in shock he stopped dead, in disbelief he stared before him at what he now saw and in despair he dropped lifelessly to his knees.

Penny's mother discovered Mr Jones in the back of shop, kneeling at a doorway leading into a small room, his mouth was open, his eyes glazed and staring at something within. She walked over to the toy maker and looked into the little room, what she saw shocked her down to her very core. Within the room was an over flowing bucket filled a substance that was the inspiration of many words that a woman would only know if she were of Penny's mother's class. There was a box that was filled with figures that were once

Mr Jones' dolls. Upon taking in the scene before her, Penny's mother joined Mr Jones on the floor in a similar stance to his. The bell rang to announce the entrance of a customer. Like a zombie, and merely out of habit, Mr Jones rose and went over to the store front to greet the patron. Mrs Davenport stood at his door with a grotesque visage in her hands, behind her, a queue of customers with similar objects. They had once been Mr Jones' world famous dolls but something had occurred with the porcelain, they had wrinkled and shrank, as a result all the hair had fallen out and their eyes looked glassy and fake. One of these dolls was clutched in the hand of a body in the corner of the room at the back of the shop, the body was small, in a dirty blue dress, dried up like it had been mummified a thousand years ago and totally bald. It was immediately obvious to Penny's mother who the body once belonged to, she recognised the dress she had placed on dolls for the past two months. The eyes of the corpse stared out at her, they looked glassy and fake like a doll's.

That's All, Folks!

And so another issue of The Zine is brought to a close. I hope you've enjoyed it and are full of ideas for submissions to go in next term's issue!

As this has been the last one I've had a hand in putting together, perhaps the next issue will undergo a much-needed image overhaul. Perhaps it'll stay the same. Perhaps it'll both stay the same and change its image in a parallel world (sorry). All I can say is I'm looking forward to seeing where this goes in the next year or two; together we can make this an important paving stone on the way to becoming the best university Science Fiction and Fantasy society in the country.

Or not. No pressure!



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What? Still here? But I was going to leave this page blank! And now look what you've made me do, I've gone and spoilt the page. It was all shiny and unwritten-on. Bah! Well, I suppose I'll have to put something here now. What to do, what to do? How about some truly awful jokes?

Q: *How many Cardassians does it take to change a light bulb?*

A: *4. One to change the light bulb, and one to shoot him and take the credit, two more for disposing the body out an airlock, and 100 credits each to hire them.*

Two atoms are walking down the street. They bump into each other, apologise and keep walking. One stops, pats himself down and says 'Oh no, I've lost an electron!' The other says 'Are you sure?', to which the first replies 'Yes! I'm positive!'

Q: *Why didn't the vampire finish sucking the blood of the clown?*

A: *It tasted funny.*

Darth Vader: Luke, I know what you've got for Christmas.

Luke Skywalker: That's not true! That's impossible! How do you know?

Darth Vader: I felt your presents.

Q: *What do you call an time travelling android that comes back from the future to plant seeds?*

A: *The Germinator*

Q: *How do you stop a werewolf howling in the back of a car?*

A: *Put him in the front.*

I'm sorry. I'm so, so sorry.

Goodbye!