



Science Fiction Society of Northern New Jersey

OCTOBER 2010 NEWSLETTER

A HOWLING GOOD TIME: WEREWOLVES AND LYCANTHROPES: CONTINUING A FUN SFSNNJ TRADITION, WE DO WHAT A GOOD SF GROUP SHOULD DO IN OCTOBER - CELEBRATE AND EMBRACE HORROR! THIS MONTH WE HUNT WEREWOLVES AND LYCANTHROPES.

That's Science Fiction

Tuesday October 5, 2010 – 7p

Hillsdale Public Library

***Blood and Chocolate*(2007)**

*Dining follows the movie.

Face the Fiction

Saturday October 9, 2010 – 8p

Borders Books & Music

Howling Good Werewolf panel: Ekaterina Sedia

& Anton Stroud

*full details on p. 2

Suspense Central

Monday October 11, 2010 – 8p

Borders /Interstate Shopping Center

Rt. 17 South, Ramsey, NJ

***Bad Blood* by L.A. Banks**

Drawing A Crowd

Wednesday October 13, 2010 – 8p

New Moon Comics

Werewolves, lycans in comis/graphics

For additional information click

www.fantasygamesandhobbies.com

Films to Come: 4-Star Movie Discussion Group

Wednesday October 20, 2010 – 7p

Ramsey Borders/Interstate Shopping Center

This group discusses the world of cinema and entertainment. Classic, current and upcoming genre and genre-related films, TV, books and

media happenings are discussed. If it deals with entertainment, our Master of Entertainment Moderator will cover it. *Dining follows this event.

Modern Masters

Friday October 22, 2010 – 8p

Borders Ramsey/Interstate Shopping Center

***The Wolfman* by Nicholas Pekearo**

***pre-meeting dinner: Moe's**

Rogue Trader: Wolves in the Fold

Saturday October 23, 2010 – 2p – 10p

Fantasy Games & Hobbies

9 Miller Road, Mahwah, NJ

Rogue Trader is a game of space adventure, set in the grim darkness of Games Workshop's Warhammer 40000 universe. Are we the wolves in the fold, or merely the sheep?

Themes of the Fantastic

Tuesday October 26, 2010 – 8p

Wayne Public Library

Werewolves, lycans, full moons

www.waynepubliclibrary.org

please visit www.sfsnnj.com for full details



SFSNNJ FACE THE FICTION PRESENTS:
HOWLING GOOD WEREWOLF PANEL

JOIN US FOR A SPECIAL NIGHT OF FULL MOONS AND WEREWOLVES. PANEL GUESTS: EKATERINA SEDIA ([HTTP://WWW.EKATERINASEDIA.COM](http://www.ekaterinasedia.com)), AUTHOR OF RUNNING WITH THE PACK, AN ANTHOLOGY OF WEREWOLF STORIES, AND AUTHOR ANTON STROUT. OUR GUESTS WILL BRAVE THE DARK NIGHT AND ALL THINGS LYCAN TO JOIN US FOR A NIGHT OF HOWLING GOOD FUN.

WE HOPE YOU DO THE SAME — JOIN US, NOT HOWL. BE SURE TO BRING SILVER FOR PROTECTION.

WHEN: SATURDAY, OCTOBER 9, 2010

WHERE: BORDERS BOOKS & MUSIC
235 INTERSTATE SHOPPING CENTER
RAMSEY, NJ 07446
201.760.1967

TIME: 8P

***FACE THE FICTION: WHERE IMAGINATION LIVES!
ONLY AT THE SFSNNJ***



September Meeting Recaps

That's Science Fiction! – *Biggles Adventures In Time* - Tuesday September 7, 2010

Leonard Maltin on "Biggles: Adventures in Time" (1986)D: John Hough.

Neil Dickson, Alex Hyde-White, Fiona Hutchinson, Peter Cushing, Marcus Gilbert. ...entertaining sci-fi adventure with Hyde-White inexplicably traveling through time from 1986 N.Y.C. to WWI Europe...where he assists British flyboy Dickson.

Todd stopped by with his ferrier Bo to drop off the DVD and described some of the references before having to leave.

Jo, Maggie, Mike and myself all enjoyed the film. Maltin had it at 108 minutes, but it only ran 88. Though short, a lot of action throughout. **(Chris H)**

Addendum:

During the time that I was able to stand around with my dog, I did manage to discuss a bit about the film. Biggles Adventures in Time is an odd film in that it takes a staple character of British literature and embroils him in a story that really has no place in the extant stories of the intrepid hero. Biggles, who has been flying and adventuring since 1938, has appeared in literally hundreds of stories from WWI to global treks in the 1920's and 1930's to a few appearances fighting the Japanese and Nazis. The death of the creator of the iconic British character, W.E. Johns, in the late 1960's allowed a number of other writers to stir the pot of intrigue.

A common complaint about Biggles is the patronizing tone and often racist stances of the character. This is a common issue with a lot of these old-fashioned types of characters, like Harry Flashman. The problem is that it was fairly common to flaunt the superiority of the Briton in comparison to the primitive wogs through much of the height of the Empire, a practice that is demonstrated quite blatantly in the Richard Attenboro film *Guns at Batasi!* While I personally do not condone such attitudes, I understand that these are as much a part of the period as the costuming and bi-planes.

On the more positive side of things, Biggles, as evinced by the film and the books, is a rather affable everyman with a knack for getting into and out of tight spots with a combination of luck, skill, and good companions. This is exemplified in the film as Biggles just cannot do it all himself, and needs the assistance of several characters to ensure his survival.

All in all, I find the movie to be an amusing, entertaining, and overlooked part of the cinematic landscape. Odd-ball titles like this are great because, undoubtedly, they are things that you have never gotten the opportunity to see, nor will you get to see them normally... **(Todd)**

Drawing A Crowd – Wednesday, September 8, 2010

Well, in spite of our sadness at leaving New Moon Comics, Wednesday night's event was a lot of fun. Haywood did a great job making me seem a lot smarter than I actually am, and many thanks to Deena for making sure that John Edwards was not in the parking lot.

The evening started with us actually discussing the topic (this was brief and nowhere near as fun as all the other stuff we got into). Haywood brought up the X-Men and DC comics characters traveling through time (recently Batman was in Camelot), and a discussion of 1602 - a series where many Marvel characters are sent back to the start of the 30 Years War (which actually started officially in 1618, but the start of the conflict has its roots in the events of 1602-1605). I brought up the famous Frank Miller project 300, and we discussed the graphic novel/art book as well as the movie for quite a while. Some of the topics were comparisons of 300 to the movie 300 Spartans, discussions of the cinematographical imagery and how it compares to the art, and why there are no guard rails around the enormous bottomless pit. We also briefly discussed Sergeant Rock and the Howling Commandos and Atomic Robo as having a lot of ties to historical figures and events.

Conversation then turned inexplicably to TV shows, and Haywood and I discussed White Collar as well as Covert Affairs, The Closer, Leverage, Burn Notice, Warehouse 13, Eureka, and a number of other fun shows. We both agreed that White Collar and Leverage are probably two of the best shows on Cable.

Discussions then moved to art style and comics. Haywood and I discussed the nature of artists like Alex Ross and a few others, and how disappointing it can be to have the first issue or two of a series done by a great artist and then subsequent issues done by some rushed, over-worked artist in a completely different style. Ann Marie showed off a copy of Alice in Wonderland with wonderfully wicked art, and brought the subject to different level. Ana mentioned some of Simon Green and Jim Butcher's recent work and we got into a quick discussion of modern series writers. Chris got us back onto art and animation by bringing up Hayao Miyazaki, which in turn brought us to Death Note, Bleach, and Evangelion. We wandered around from Anime to Manga, to the inherent influences on modern comics of Asian art types. One thing that we discussed was the waxing potential of influence from India on American comics.

It was a fun, exciting, and insanely varied discussion, and a fitting close to our long association with New Moon



Comics. Join us next month as we meet at Fantasy Games & Hobbies in Mahwah to discuss Shape-changers in Comics!

Face the Fiction: Elizabeth Roamnaux – Saturday, September 11, 2010

The watchword was Science on Saturday as the Science Fiction Society of Northern New Jersey gathered together for a little something out of the ordinary: a presentation by Vice-President of Marketing and Public Relations for the Liberty Science Center, Elizabeth Romanoux. The evening started early with discussions of Star Wars and Warhammer 40,000/Rogue Trader in Todd's Carpool. That's right, Todd Ehrenfels, Kate Landis, and Todd Debiak teamed up for laughs and conversation on the road, as I wanted to make sure that everyone had a chance to have some fun.

We arrived at 6:30pm and Kate, Todd and I started setting up the room in preparation for the meeting. During the set-up we chatted about Cthulu, the problems with some modern SF movies, and the decline and fall of the SyFy channel. We were soon joined by the Spinmen: Steve and Jim Spinosa, who pitched in with contributions on Technology and e-Publishing. Next in the room was Master Gene McGrath, who I would have liked to chat with a bit more, but a rapid influx of people prevented my socialization efforts. Next thing we knew, it was 8:00 and Elizabeth was arriving and ready to start.

Like a Super Derecho blowing in across the Great Plains, Elizabeth started the evening out with a masterful description of the Liberty Science Center's latest premier attraction: The Baby Mammoth, Lyuba, who is headlining the the Mammoths and Mastadons exhibit (<http://www.lsc.org/lsc/ourexperiences/exhibits/mammoths>). Elizabeth explained that she was very excited about this because the opportunity to actually see something like this is beyond rare, and hearkens back to her first steps in the realms of science.

Brought up in a home filled with science, Elizabeth Romanoux wanted first to be an Anthropologist and Archeologist after becoming enamored of the sciences due to early exposure to National Geographic magazine. Before the age of six, her focus had changed to Geology and Paleontology, subjects that she continued to favor until she arrived at college and learned that she would need a great deal more math in her background, and years of lab-work before she could fully participate in the sciences that she so loved. After school, she moved out to the West Coast and began a successful career in Marketing, and eventually landed a gig back in New York City doing PR and Marketing for a firm that dealt almost exclusively with museums. The Liberty Science Center was not having much success with their current advertising and PR guru, and through a quirk of fate, the Chief Administrator was someone who Elizabeth had babysat for in the past (small world), and said Chief Administrator placed Elizabeth's resume and curriculum vitae on the desk of the then VP of Marketing and said, "You owe me one."

Thus began a career of awesome events at the Liberty Science Center. Elizabeth recounted tales of frantically gathering the CEO of the Liberty Science Center from Mexico City and having the exhibit makers drop everything to build a proper erupting Mount Saint Helens during the more recent eruption about five years ago for an appearance on the Today Show. Explaining the facts of environmental sciences to John McCain to help him make informed decisions on New Jersey Horseshoe Crab issues was another cool topic of conversation. While politicians and such are cool, some of the celebrities that have graced the LSC were just as much fun and fodder for discussion.

Conversation turned from the LSC itself to the concepts of Science in the media, conservation, and a few other important issues. When asked if she thought that there might be too many Science Museums in the NY Metro area, she quipped that there was no shortage of ignorance and so there should be no shortage of education. We discussed the environmental impact of our homes and habitation, the importance of newts, greening the house, saving the spiders, and the importance of anatomically correct anatomy models. Also in the mix were anecdotes about the science courses for educators, the cool programs for Abbott District Schools, and changes in the way that reporting is being done.

I am totally not doing this event justice. We started promptly at 8pm, and likely would have kept going until midnight if the store was not closing at 10pm. As it was we had to force an end to the evening when the manager of the store very subtly reminded us that they were closing in 10 minutes. We repaired the room in record time, and then proceeded to chat in the parking lot until 11pm. In addition, Kate, Todd, and I enjoyed even more discussion on the way home, citing many interesting topics from the event before moving the topic to how cool the rock band Genesis is.

Join us in October as Anton Strout and Ekaterina Sedia for a discussion of Werewolves, Lycanthropes, and Shapechangers at Borders Books & Music at the Ramsey Interstate Shopping Center on October 9th.

Suspense Central – Years of Rice and Salt by Kim Stanley Robinson - Monday September 13, 2010

Moderator Aurelia Long did a fine job of leading the discussion on Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Years of Rice and Salt*. Given the overall agreement of those that had read the book, Mr. Robinson should go into hiding.

The Years of Rice and Salt is an alternate history novel that incorporates the concept of reincarnation. The point of Robinson's divergence is the Black Death in 14th Century Europe. In Kim Stanley Robinson's alternate timeline 99% of the population dies from the plague. The world is left a blank canvas for what are now mostly Buddhist or Confucian China, and an Islamic Middle East/Africa struggling for control. In this timeline, Europe and Christianity do not factor in. Would the evolution of man be different? What does this mean for social and political structure?

The book is set up as a series of ten long novellas that follow the significant events/lives of a few characters. Each story is set further in the future. The main characters in each story are treated as reincarnations of characters in a previous story. The reincarnations occur in different sexes, parts of the world (i.e. Persia, India, China, North America, France) and times (some return sooner and some later). The reincarnations happen in the "bardo" - a place where souls are sent after death - kind of like Starbucks in limbo. The souls hang out here; discuss their lives and possible futures while awaiting designation.

One such character is Myu. Myu has an ax to grind...deservedly so.

Myu is pressed into slavery. He is stolen from his home, thrown on a ship and has some 'alterations' done while sailing. Myu can now hit the high notes with ease as a eunuch in a scene that left Chris, Kathleen and Aurelia cringing. As Kathleen notes, "Cause being thirteen and a slave isn't bad enough." He is treated horribly. His anger and hatred fester for years. He plans his escape and plots for years before finally burning down a village and fleeing. He later returns in another life with no knowledge, other than an occasional déjà vu moment, as another character.

Sound a bit confusing? Todd had read *The Years of Rice and Salt*. He had to reread the book because he remembered nothing! Aurelia agreed, describing the book as "not memorable". Aurelia did a good job of trying to put the book into relative order. Her issue with the book was that it reminded her of a Dickens novel - too much minutia. Daunting detail that bogs the reader down rather than enhancing the reading experience.

Todd concurred and added that his problems with the book were narrative. He felt no connect to the characters and when he finally did start to feel a connection, that character was killed off. He was agitated by parts of the book that should have been interesting but were full out boring. Kathleen also felt no connection, and added that her favorite characters/story-lines were brought up only to be discarded and forgotten - the story was not only truncated but also completely forgotten! All who had the book agreed that loose threads were prevalent and frustrating.

Kathleen also noted that she found herself wrapped up in a "where in history" are we predicament that made it difficult to follow the story.

Aurelia believes the Robinson sacrificed narrative to beat the reader over the head with his beliefs. Todd nodded, stating that as he was reading the book (for the second time), it occurred to him that Robinson was trying to be Neil Gaiman - he was trying to write the next *American Gods* and failed. He felt the book was tedious. As Aurelia put it, "I might stone him myself just to get some of my life back."

Dave likened the story to a few other alternate history stories he'd read, while Barry played with his apps (Todd and I did not look at web comics - gorilla signal! - it was Jo). In all, it was the consensus that a road trip will happen soon - bring rocks.

Addendum: To me, one of the biggest problems with the novel was that the most interesting diversions from mainstream history were not really explored, but rather relegated to the dustbin. The whole Travancor Ascendancy period is kind of glossed over, and it seems like even though they should have been the most powerful of world powers, there is no real explanation as to how or why this is not the case. A few great sequences, especially the ones with the Japanese exiles in California and the Americas, are equally treated in a more dismissive and halting fashion. All in all, this was a novel with a lot of wasted potential.

Films to Come – Wednesday, September 15, 2010

Films to Come opened with a reading from *The Years Best Science Fiction: Twenty-Seventh Annual Collection* edited by Gardner Dozois. The section read noted that in 2009, 8 out of 10 top earners were genre films.

Coming in at #2 was SF offering *Transformers*. Dozois points out that while *Transformers* may have been bad SF, it was still SF. He felt the same about *Avatar* - bad SF but SF none-the-less. *Star Trek* made the list at #7 and Dozois credits the film for a revitalization of the franchise. #3- *Harry Potter* and #4 - *New Moon* made the list. Dozois lists both as fantasy. He felt *New Moon* was fantasy as opposed to horror since the film was not scary.

Following the films of 2009 were the various genre TV shows. Some have been canceled (*Dollhouse*, *Reaper*) and some still are going strong (*True Blood*, *Eureka*, *Supernatural*, *Smallville*).

Next up was the All-Time Box Office list. Yes, we were once again asked to identify the films with our only hints coming from the moderator. Todd seemed to have some difficulty.... when given the hint Robin ____ - Todd provided the answer as Williams...Robin Williams. At least it wasn't Ida Lupino this time.

The criteria for the list are films that have grossed over \$100,000,000 at the box office during their theatrical runs. The focus for Films to Come are centered on but not limited to genre films. On the list this month:

1. *Avatar* = \$759,562,778 *technically a 2009 film but the recent re-release allowed it to make the list
2. *Toy Story 3* = \$409,976,037
3. *Alice in Wonderland* = \$334,185,206
4. *Iron Man 2* = \$312,057,433
5. *Eclipse* = \$299,633,864
6. *Inception* = \$282,423,176
7. *Despicable Me* = \$243,531,970
8. *Shrek Forever After* = \$238,371,987
9. *How To Train Your Dragon* = \$217,387,997

Also among the top 18 was *Clash of the Titans* (#11) categorized as genre.

All-Time Non-USA Box Office was next. This recent addition is fun. The difference between USA picks and abroad is interesting:

1. *Avatar* = \$2,012,000,000
2. *Toy Story 3* = \$632,200,000
3. *Shrek Forever After* = \$488,800,000
4. *Inception* = \$448,800,000
5. *Eclipse* = \$380,600,000
6. *Clash of the Titans* = \$328,400,000
7. *Iron Man 2* = \$304,700,000
8. *How To Train Your Dragon* = \$275,000,000
9. *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time* = \$ 236,400,000

We then moved on to "the list" - this time it was August, September and October.

August:

We quickly went through the films attendees had seen in August. Todd and Barry both seemed to regret *The Expendables*, with Barry feeling he'd lost IQ points just watching it (I didn't point out he paid to see to it too...loss of IQ and \$\$\$ - double whammy). *Scott Pilgrim VS. The World* was discussed. Moderator Barry W. brought over three Scott Pilgrim graphics (Vol. 1, 2 & 3 specifically). Vol. 3, Scott Pilgrim and the Infinite Sadness, was the basis for the recent theatrical film. *Piranha 3-D* made the discussion for some people who saw the film as did *The Last Exorcism* (I maintain worst ending ever).

September:

Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps led to an aside about Michael Douglas being sued by his ex-wife. Bill Wagner told us this little tid bit. Bill W and Barry both saw *The American*. Barry would recommend it. Bill gave a lukewarm recommend but decided to not incur the wrath of our moderator who liked the film. *Easy A* got a nod from the moderator. *The Town* provided a brief chat about Ben Affleck and the benefit of going off the radar for a while after a clunker. Our moderator felt Betty White should take note of this tactic after the movie *You Again* was mentioned.

Somewhere along the way Todd informed us there were morlocks in Pennsylvucky and he talks to them. Bill was curious as to why Todd did not speak to the morlocks of West Virginia. You had to be there. Todd was in rare form, and Bill... well...he's Bill.


There were many diversions throughout the night, all germane to films/entertainment and very interesting. Various books, news, directors and actors were discussed. Todd brought up the Casey Affleck/Joaquin Phoenix harassment case and I clarified for those unfamiliar with the charges. Mike brought up critics and how he doesn't let opinions sway his preference for or against a film. He cited *Terms of Endearment* as an example of a film he felt overrated by critics.

A late start of Films (apparently the great Medium or Large Debacle of ought 10 caused this to occur) meant we were running out of time and Barry decided to wait to discuss October rather than short-change the month and its releases. Instead, he opened the floor to anyone with something to add. Bill took the opportunity to discuss *Inception*. Barry felt the movie was "ambitious". Mark enjoyed the film and felt that even though it was complex and had layer upon layer of story, it was easy to follow. Chris enjoyed the movie but was more confused.

Much fodder for discussion. Much discussion. Films moderator Barry did a notable job of leading the group through the myriad of topics.

Modern Masters – Friday September 24, 2010

**Modern Masters Presents: *Flashman on the March* by George MacDonald Fraser
9/24/2010 Event Recap by Todd V. Ehrenfels**



For Queen, Country, and Survival! This past Friday night we discussed the tales of Harry Flashman, soldier, statesman, cowardly poltroon, and adventurer, in the very last of the books written by Scotsman George MacDonald Fraser. Yet to truly understand the tale of *Flashman on the March*, we must start at the beginning, just as Fraser does.

At 6:30pm, some of us gathered at Moe's for a delicious dinner and some fun conversation before heading out to Borders. Amongst the topics of conversation: Books, Music, Dancing, Singing, and why Todd needs a Companion (like The Doctor). Once our meals were done we headed over to Borders and rendezvoused with the rest of the raucous Modern Masters crowd.

Discussion ranged rather far afield, with a very nice young lady chatting with us about her family's amazing military service, an awesome discussion with Aaron about the upcoming appearance of Ryan Reynolds as the Green Lantern, as well as the new Spiderman, the Green Hornet and a brace of other comic book film projects, a fun chat with Jeremy about the pitfalls of modern filmmaking, and a discussion with Kathleen, Ann Marie, and Chris about *Supernatural* and the Fall TV schedule (I am throwing myself on a hand grenade watching some of this awful dreck for you folks, so I had better get one heck of a Christmas present).

Eventually we wended our way from off-topic to the subject of Harry Flashman and George Macdonald Fraser. After hitting the highlights on the life and times of Fraser, we analyzed the storied history of Harry Flashman. From his start as a minor character in *Tom Brown's School Days*, Flashman was a notable braggart, liar, and coward. His career of service, as chronicled by Fraser, is amazing in the heights of adventure and the depths of depravity that Harry and those around him often fall to. From the Afghan Wars to China, from the Americas to Africa, there is nary a job that Harry won't shirk nor a skirt Harry won't chase.

One thing that struck us all was the great way in which Fraser educates us, the readers on the world of the 1860's. We learn all sorts of amazing facts and tidbits, almost all of which are historically factual. This makes Flashy a good teaching tool for the great period of Britain's supremacy during Victoria's glorious reign. He also inveigles a bit of truth from the idea that most of the problems faced by the Empire are diplomatic and bureaucratic ones, where a simple clerk starts a war by not forwarding the mail properly.

Flashman on the March itself concerns one such issue of the Foreign Office not doing its job properly on multiple front. Basically, Britain is going to war against Emperor Theodore of Etheopia and Abyssinia. Theodore, who we meet on the last third of the book, is a particularly vicious and vile despot, who rules with an iron fist and more than a few nasty terror tactics. Flashy is hired to bring operating funds from Trieste to the British Army in Abyssinia, where General Napier plans to use it to pay his soldiers and bribe the locals into fighting Theodore on his behalf. Realizing that he will need a potent ambassador to said locals, he dispatches Flashman, who really just wants to go home but cannot weasel his way out of the job, to secure an alliance with the Golla tribes under Queen Masteat that they can cut off Theodore's escape to the South.

The story unfolds with lots of vicious and nasty characters, including the strong and beautiful Uliba Wark, half-sister to Masteat and conniving little minx, the drunkard glutton Queen Masteat herself, and of course crazy Emperor Theodore. The story is fast-paced, action-packed, and a lot of fun, with lots of memorable characters and a great sense of history.

One thing that Kathleen noted was that it was amazing that all these women were basically throwing themselves at a 50+ year old British coward. At the time, I pointed out that Flashy obviously had charisma in buckets-full, and as evidence I pointed to the book itself. The book is written as the memoirs of Harry Paget Flashman, and is basically told in his voice. If he could get us, the readers, to like him just through his written recollections, can you imagine what it must have been like to stand in a room with the fellow. Degenerate coward and poltroon though he admittedly is, he is instantly likeable, and you get the feeling that if you knew him, you would likely forgive him his excesses.

All in all, those of us who read the book had a fine time dissecting the various scenes, describing the death of one of Uliba-Wark's lovers in lurid and graphic detail to the delight of Ann Marie and Colleen, and just enjoying a night of exceptional company with Harry Flashman.

Next month we will be discussing *Wolfman* by Nicholas Pekearo as part of our shape-shifters, lycanthropes, and were-wolves month. Join us for a meal at our old stomping grounds, Moe's Hand Rolled Burritos at 6:30p!

Medium Screen Classics – Schlockfest - Saturday, September 25, 2010

As Gene points out - we laughed ALL day long! The Schlockfest line-up was soooo bad it was good. *Troll*, *Troll 2* and *Megashark VS. Giant Octopus* provided a plethora of fodder that lasted not only from the start of the first movie, but into the dinner that followed.

I would be remiss if I did not point out that our day would not have happened if Barry hadn't shown up to save the day by getting us operational. Direct comments accordingly - lol :-)

First up was *Troll* (1986). This movie had what should have been an all-star cast. Note the emphasis on should have. Noah Hathaway (genre credit in *Neverending Story*), Michael Moriarity (*Outer limits*, *Taken*, *4400*, too many to list), Shelley Hack, Sonny Bono, June Lockhart (why *Lost in Space* mom, why?!), Ann Lockhart, Julia Louise-Dreyfus (I believe Gene has put a hit out on her for her participation). The premise wasn't horrible. Trolls inhabit an apartment building wreaking havoc on the human world. Gremlins had a similar premise and was a huge hit. What could possibly have gone wrong.....

In the case of both *Troll* and its sequel *Troll 2* (that had absolutely NOTHING to do with the original) the question is more what did they do right and the hilarious and obvious answer is, well...we are still laughing too hard and scratching our heads trying to figure that out. The even bigger question is why there was a sequel. No really...why?

Back to *Troll* (1986). Michael Moriarity plays Harry Potter, yes, Harry Potter. Shelley Hack is Mrs. Anne Potter. They and their two children, Harry Potter Jr. (Noah Hathaway) and Wendy Anne (Jenny Beck) have moved into a new apartment. Within minutes Wendy Anne has gone into the laundry and gets 'possessed' by an evil troll named Torok. His magic ring allows him to transform into the form of Wendy Anne but this Wendy Anne growls, snarls and pulls the fire alarm. Every resident in the building comes downstairs and in turn meet the family. They are a bunch of kooks. Toroc/Wendy Anne proceeds to take out the residents one-by-one by turning them into pod plants that spit you back out in troll form. Big brother Harry Potter Jr. figures out something is wrong with little sis (maybe the clue was when she tosses him across the room) and forms an alliance with Eunice St. Clair (June Lockhart) who conveniently happens to be a witch guarding the building and its occupants all these years. Will they be able to save them this time?

While this stellar film had many, many comical moments these should give you a glimpse at the root of the raucous laughter - notable moments from the film:

- Michael Moriarity rocking out to Summer Time Blues complete with sock-clad Risky Business rip-off dance. Even more hysterical was Chris telling us he knew the band and owned the 45!!
- Realizing J.K. Rowling has a dirty little secret, very dirty indeed!
- *Poltergeist* rip-off - Wendy-Anne, stay out of the light (and the film)!
- Sonny Bono the 'swinger'.
- Julia Louis-Dreyfus the wood nymph. Run Julia, here comes Gene!
- Liz asking why there was a sequel...why indeed.
- Chris whimpering.

We should have cut our losses. We should have pretended power failure, but noooo, we forged forward with *Troll 2*. This one made *Troll* look Oscar-worthy. It has Chris on the edge of his seat (trying to flee).

Troll 2 (1990). "Newer" we said. "Will have better effects" we said. We were beyond wrong and wound up with stomachaches from laughing so hard. We are talking tear-flowing laughter. This movie is so bad a documentary has been made about it, *Best Worst Movie*.

This "sequel" had nothing (other than being bad) to do with Troll. This time out a young boy (who talks to the specter of his deceased grandfather) and his family are taking a vacation to Nilbog. A quaint little place in the middle of nowhere with 26 residents (*this number will be important later). There are no trolls - only goblins. The acting was indescribably horrific. Painful. Not one minute of this one went by without us cracking up. We truly could not believe what we were seeing! This is a must see simply because you will be amazed at the badness.

Notable moments:

- The entire 86 minutes we will never get back.
- Big sister's techno dance scene and speech to wayward 'boyfriend' Elliot.
- The druid witch from Stonehenge who oddly sounded Transylvanian....when did they move Stonehenge to Dracula's backyard and I thought Druids were Celtic in origin.
- The googly-eyed goblin.
- Coffee-mug-in-hand-potted-plant-victim...oil can....oil can.
- Green. gloppy food.
- Chris whimpering.
- Look at Nilbog backwards!
- The climactic scene where the townspeople converge upon family scene that prompted Barry's outraged, "Hey! There's more than 26 people there!"
- But, the one with the most laughs had to be the POPCORN MOMENT!

With stomach muscles in pain we completed our Schlockfest with the syfy original Megashark VS. Giant Octopus. Sadly this dud seemed almost boring after the two Troll fiascos. We laughed our way through Deborah Gibson's dreadful....wait, let me stop laughing...."acting". Yes, Ms. Gibson is the "actress" formerly known as Debbie Gibson. Can I use that word to describe her? Joining the cast was Lorenzo Lamas as the pony-tailed "government guy". If I had to pretend this film had notable moments:

- Megashark takes plane out of its 30,000-foot travel route with one big jump.
- Megashark eats the Golden Gate Bridge.
- Lorenzo Lamas & Deborah Gibson really thought they were cool!!
- Jo realizing she wants to become a submarine captain.

We laughed, we cried (hoping for an escape from the gulag that was Hillsdale Library's media room), but we had one heck of a good time and that is what it is all about. Who wants dry, dull and boring? Who wants done-to-death? We had so much fun we continued the evening over dinner. I concur Gene - nothing better than watching bad movies with friends with senses of humor.

***Additional comments:** Go away, monster! That's the quote of the day for this schlockfest - movies that were so bad, they were almost good - good in that they made us laugh and joke and enjoy constantly commenting on the horrible acting and production values! There's nothing like sitting with friends and enjoying really bad movies together. Let me close by just saying two things: Julia Louis-Dreyfus should be ashamed of herself, and Deborah Gibson needs to go easy on the racoon eye-liner. **(Gene McGrath)**



Heroes & Rogues - Rogue Traders: Wolves in the Fold, 9/25/10

Chapter 6: Secrets in the Darkness (828.866,M38)

The lack of any socially redeeming or useful features in an underground complex is readily apparent to anyone, but frankly, I have never seen a more disrespectful or vile place as the Experimentarium beneath the former Imperial complex known as Silo Fourteen. Granted, thus far I have seen nothing on this entire planet that could not definitively benefit from the judicious application of lance strikes from orbit, but the horrors in this underground complex push the bounds of even the worst in poor taste.

Upon entering the complex, we proceeded through one set of corridors to a pressure door, which seemed rather uncomfortably non-standard. Deciding to see what lay the other way, we encountered another pressure door, which seemed to be suffering from some sort infestation of cancerous growths on its surface. How this could occur on a battlesteel pressure door, I am at a loss to explain, but I am certain that Sarvus will have a better knowledge of these things. Young Lilith ordered Ivan Vasudev to cut the door open, rather than risk any of us touching the foul-looking thing. While this resulted in a delay of our mission, we were all grateful of the respite.


Lorren, who determined that the likelihood of enemies on the other side of the blast door was fairly high, decided that he should use his Bolter as a rather elaborate battering ram, firing an explosive bolt at the remaining piece holding the door to the frame. We were immediately assailed with foul odours, and a scene of mold, rot, and decay. Further examination revealed a talking puddle of filth that attempted to bargain with Sarvus' man, Jorn, who in turn demonstrated considerable strength of will in shooting the monstrous apparition in the face. What resulted was a bloody scrum that saw several of my colleagues injured, though none fatally. Veruca, Lorren, Jorn, and Ramhat marshaled and dispatched our forces quite resourcefully, allowing us to use our strengths against the beast while Ivan tried his best to get us a usable escape route to the next room.

Once the daemonic apparition, for that is surely what this horrid thing must have been, was laid low, Veruca and the others penetrated into the next room. This room appeared to be laid out similarly to the prior one, only without the rot, wreck, and ruin of corruption polluting its surfaces. It was here that we discovered what the work of this secret experimentarium was to be: they were working on constructing a device whose purpose would be to cut psykers and witches off from the powers of the Warp that made them a danger. This would have a great many applications, however it seems that the experiment went poorly, and things rapidly got out of hand, as evidenced by the long dead corpses of several Imperial Army officers and a dead Inquisitor, who appears to have been murdered by his fellow Inquisitor, Pavius Terix, when he began to succumb to the taint of the beast from the Immaterium. There was no sign of Terix or his acolytes, and it is likely that they fled the base. One thing that was in evidence, however was a great deal of expensive and powerful weaponry, that we wasted no time in kitting ourselves out with.

After completing our examinations of the majority of the base, and determining that the really dark room with the creepy voices was just too potentially horrifying to enter, Lilith ordered us to enter the Lift and proceed to the command and control room.

Though it took some effort, we arrived and did battle with three members of House Wolfe's advanced team: Constantine Wolfe, Demetrius Wolfe, and Stephanie duWolfe. The fact that there was a second Stephanie, eerily similar to the one that we had captured the night before, was more than a bit disturbing, but I am going to chalk this up to House Wolfe's lack of imagination and lots of inbreeding. Gauche cretins.

At any rate, Constantine, true to form apparently, injected some sort of battle drugs and rushed our positions while Demetrius fired wildly into both allies and enemies. Stephanie tried to fire-off a few shots with her Sunfury Plasma Gun, but succeeded only in pot-shooting the wall in the chaos. Sadly, Veruca and Ramhat were laid low, but Ivan, Lorren and Jorn were able to work together to bring down the mad dervish that was Constantine. During a moment of distraction on Constantine's part, Lorren took a pot-shot at Stephanie and managed to gut the vicious little trollop, while Lilith and I showed Demetrius why fighting House Tremnar is a bad idea.



We managed to hold the command center for several hours, and though we prepared ourselves, no counter-assault came. We discovered, much to our delight, that when contact with the *Lady Malbec* was lost Commodore Harm ordered Liana to fire a Lance barrage on Silo 14, which allowed the native savages and our own ship-board troopers to assault the Communications Silo. Now, all we need to do is set up some mines and get out of this accursed system...(Todd Ehrenfels)

New Players Always Welcome!
To Join In, email RogueTrader@sfsnj.com

Themes of the Fantastic – Tuesday, September 28, 2010

Well, it was an interesting evening, with a long chat about Harry Flashman that hearkened back to the previous Friday's Modern Masters event. In spite of the promised stormy weather (which never really hit).

In between these awesomely varied topics, we discussed the Fall TV schedule, and Chuck revealed that he was busy watching DVDs of some older shows that he really enjoyed. Chris lamented not getting to see *Blue Bloods*, Barry asked about *Lone Star*, I vomited forth a stream of annoyance about *Lone Star* and *Undercovers*, Bill praised the Event (which I then whined about and reported that everything they told us is a lie).

Getting back on topic we discussed the Gregory Peck *Horatio Hornblower* and compared him to Ioan Gruffudd, who reprised the role in several A&E mini-series events alongside the dreamy Jamie Bamber, better known as Lee Adama of *Battlestar Galactica* fame. Geoffrey Beane's *Sharpe's Rifles* absorbed a long swathe of conversation, there are more than ten films and books, and the redoubtable Harry Flashman was brought up again, before moving on to films like *Indiana Jones*, *National Treasure*, and *Sherlock Holmes*.

Amusingly, we managed to mention a bunch of books in there, including David Liss's *Coffee Trader* and *Conspiracy of Paper*, which were discussed in the early days of Suspense Central and revolve around fictional characters during two important historical and economic events (the creation of paper money and the beginning of the Dutch coffee trade). We also wandered around the subject of comic book adaptations of Harry Flashman as well as the Warhammer 40,000 character Caiphaz Caine who was based on the venerable Harry Flash.

Next month join us for a discussion of werewolves, monsters without shape and form, and shape-changing creatures of all stripes!

(Writeup by Todd V. Ehrenfels)


Todd on TV– New Fall Shows

Todd on TV: Blue Bloods

Finally, a show worth watching!!!! Dredging through the morass of crummy and uninspired programming this season has been a miserable and thankless task, but I have done it. Granted, I am watching a lot of these premieres on Hulu or on the Channel Websites, but still I am stuck with many hours that I am never going to get back. Thankfully, every now and then there is a show that is actually worthwhile.

Blue Bloods revolves around a family of cops in New York City, and features a fantastic cast led by veteran Tom Selleck and including luminaries like Jennifer Butler, Donnie Wahlberg, Bridget Moynahan, and Len Cariou. The writing is serviceable, though not stellar (at least not in the pilot), and the story is not ambitious or groundbreaking (we have certainly seen this sort of thing many times in the movies and on TV), but the long and short is that the cast and direction provide a winning dose of chemistry for a show that is, at best, a cliché.

The pilot of *Blue Bloods* gives us a good grounding for the Shakespearean soap-opera that is undoubtedly



coming hard on the heels of powerful families vying for prominence in the NYPD, and we really get a feel that this is almost NYPD Blue meets King Lear. Watch this show!

Undercovers

I wanted to like you, Undercovers, really I did. I saw a treatment of the pilot circulating and thought, "Oh, this sounds like fun..." Then I saw some commercials and my heart started to sink. By the time the pilot premiered last night I was anticipating this with a certain amount of dread. Having been burned once this year with bad spy-show funk in USA Network's Covert Affairs, I will admit to entering into this with some skepticism... OK, let's be honest: I was totally gun-shy.

So, what was so bad about Undercovers? To put it bluntly: this is the most ham-handed, poorly scripted, badly handled show I have seen on network television thus far this year. Considering how much I disliked a few of the shows this year, this is saying a lot. Why do I say that? Let's examine the show in excruciating detail:

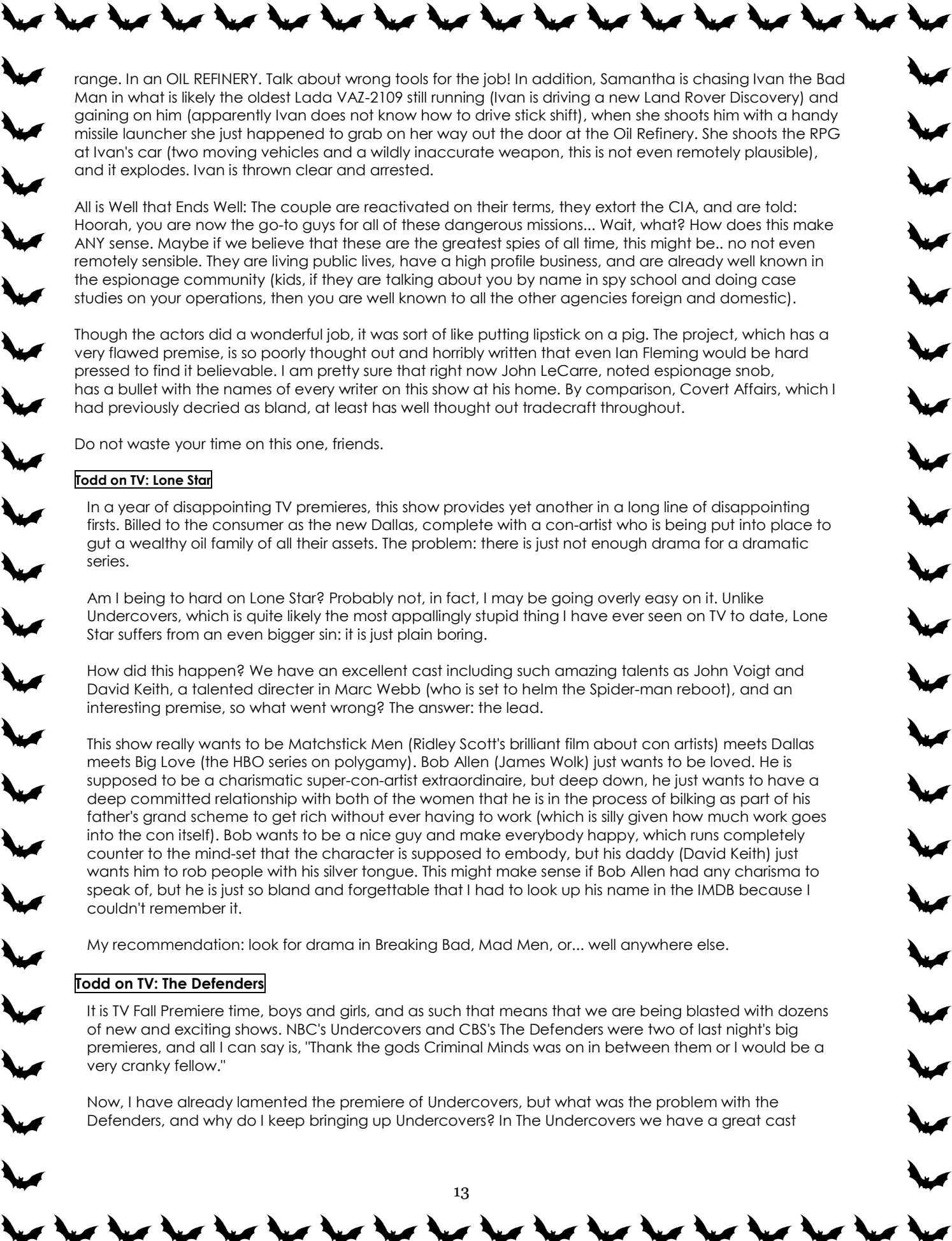
The Opening: Handsome guy, Leo Nash (Carter MacIntyre) sleeping in hotel room is disturbed by intruders who are 'after him' for files he possesses. This is handled very badly. First, the character, who is allegedly supposed to be a professional spy, has no pre-arranged escape route. Given that he is obviously half expecting this, as evinced by his subsequent actions and the entire rest of the pilot, this is silly. In addition, if his aim was to get caught, which he later implies, why did he have the 'dirty little secrets' he was supposedly going to sell with him where they could be easily taken by the villains. The opening is action packed and looks neat, but is ultimately 5 minutes of idiocy with gunplay.

The Introduction of the Darling Heroes: We meet our happy retired spy couple, the Blooms: Samantha (Gugu Mbatha-Raw) and Steven (Boris Kodjoe). Apparently they run a successful catering business (though given the enormous staff and obvious money troubles this seems somewhat doubtful), and they are approached by Carlton Shaw (Gerald McRaney), who is their obvious irascible handler. Shaw explains that they need the couple to return to active service to track down Leo, who is missing, because they know about the operation and Leo was their close friend. Given their disaffection with the agency, obviously they sign right up. In spite of the problems with this idea, these three actors show that they are going to give us their all (and they all sparkle like diamonds in spite of the stupid dialog and contrived staging).

Next Stop Madrid: Steve and Samantha go to Madrid because Samantha remembers that Leo had a safe house there over 5 years ago. OK, start the engines of stupidity. First, the whole concept of a safe house is that nobody knows where it is or what it is for. You should only ever use it once. Leaving that aside, the couple are met by their soft-op field agent, Hoyt, an obsequious little toad who appears to want to make-out with Stephen (which is understandable since Boris Kodjoe is pretty darned sexy). In spite of the fact that Hoyt loudly and publicly blows everyone's cover within 5 seconds of his own introduction (said introduction is completely without any semblance of tradecraft), he then proceeds to blow the op. They break into a bank, steal some information, break into a wedding, steal some other information, and determine that they need to get to Paris. Their fieldwork continues to be sloppy, though Samantha/Gugu has a great turn introducing the concept of 'sexpionage' to the viewers to her husband's chagrin. How they are not captured and stuck in prison in Madrid is a major question, however they figure that they need to get to Paris at this point, so we go to Paris.

To Paris With Regrets: Given the enormous plot holes present at this point, the viewer follows Sam and Steve to Paris. The Agency, which is throwing tons of resources into this, seems completely at ease with letting the happy couple waste time and resources with no real oversight. Sam and Steve find the McGuffin, fight some bad guys, and determine that Leo might be a traitor. This sequence is shabby and more than a bit rushed.

Moskva On My Mind: Now the train really hits full steam on the tracks of stupidity. Why? Steve, who is convinced that Leo is a traitor, goes in to kill Leo, figuring that his wife will be on lookout to ensure proper extraction. Nooooo, wifey follows to save Leo, who maybe isn't a traitor (though they never really prove that he isn't they just decide to go with it since that is how it was written), and a gun battle ensues. Keep in mind that they are fighting Russian Gun Runners in Moscow with no backup, no extraction plan, and nobody on hand to help. The gun battle proceeds to move from the ridiculous to the absolutely idiotic as the villains begin shooting at the heroes with RPGs. That's right, shoulder-fired missile launchers at pistol



range. In an OIL REFINERY. Talk about wrong tools for the job! In addition, Samantha is chasing Ivan the Bad Man in what is likely the oldest Lada VAZ-2109 still running (Ivan is driving a new Land Rover Discovery) and gaining on him (apparently Ivan does not know how to drive stick shift), when she shoots him with a handy missile launcher she just happened to grab on her way out the door at the Oil Refinery. She shoots the RPG at Ivan's car (two moving vehicles and a wildly inaccurate weapon, this is not even remotely plausible), and it explodes. Ivan is thrown clear and arrested.

All is Well that Ends Well: The couple are reactivated on their terms, they extort the CIA, and are told: Hoorah, you are now the go-to guys for all of these dangerous missions... Wait, what? How does this make ANY sense. Maybe if we believe that these are the greatest spies of all time, this might be.. no not even remotely sensible. They are living public lives, have a high profile business, and are already well known in the espionage community (kids, if they are talking about you by name in spy school and doing case studies on your operations, then you are well known to all the other agencies foreign and domestic).

Though the actors did a wonderful job, it was sort of like putting lipstick on a pig. The project, which has a very flawed premise, is so poorly thought out and horribly written that even Ian Fleming would be hard pressed to find it believable. I am pretty sure that right now John LeCarre, noted espionage snob, has a bullet with the names of every writer on this show at his home. By comparison, Covert Affairs, which I had previously decried as bland, at least has well thought out tradecraft throughout.

Do not waste your time on this one, friends.

Todd on TV: Lone Star

In a year of disappointing TV premieres, this show provides yet another in a long line of disappointing firsts. Billed to the consumer as the new Dallas, complete with a con-artist who is being put into place to gut a wealthy oil family of all their assets. The problem: there is just not enough drama for a dramatic series.

Am I being to hard on Lone Star? Probably not, in fact, I may be going overly easy on it. Unlike Undercovers, which is quite likely the most appallingly stupid thing I have ever seen on TV to date, Lone Star suffers from an even bigger sin: it is just plain boring.

How did this happen? We have an excellent cast including such amazing talents as John Voigt and David Keith, a talented director in Marc Webb (who is set to helm the Spider-man reboot), and an interesting premise, so what went wrong? The answer: the lead.

This show really wants to be Matchstick Men (Ridley Scott's brilliant film about con artists) meets Dallas meets Big Love (the HBO series on polygamy). Bob Allen (James Wolk) just wants to be loved. He is supposed to be a charismatic super-con-artist extraordinaire, but deep down, he just wants to have a deep committed relationship with both of the women that he is in the process of bilking as part of his father's grand scheme to get rich without ever having to work (which is silly given how much work goes into the con itself). Bob wants to be a nice guy and make everybody happy, which runs completely counter to the mind-set that the character is supposed to embody, but his daddy (David Keith) just wants him to rob people with his silver tongue. This might make sense if Bob Allen had any charisma to speak of, but he is just so bland and forgettable that I had to look up his name in the IMDB because I couldn't remember it.

My recommendation: look for drama in Breaking Bad, Mad Men, or... well anywhere else.

Todd on TV: The Defenders

It is TV Fall Premiere time, boys and girls, and as such that means that we are being blasted with dozens of new and exciting shows. NBC's Undercovers and CBS's The Defenders were two of last night's big premieres, and all I can say is, "Thank the gods Criminal Minds was on in between them or I would be a very cranky fellow."

Now, I have already lamented the premiere of Undercovers, but what was the problem with the Defenders, and why do I keep bringing up Undercovers? In The Undercovers we have a great cast

soldiering on in spite of a badly flawed concept and poor writing, whereas in *The Defenders* we have what should be a good cast floundering in excellent writing and story. If I could merge the two projects and get some sort of gestalt project with only the best of each, it would be the greatest show of all time!

Jerry O'Connell and James Belushi play a pair of seedy Las Vegas attorneys who are the verge of becoming one of the better low-end law firms in the city. Their legal acumen and desire to genuinely help their clients is very obvious, as are their personal dysfunctions, and their characters are quirky and full of fantastic and subtle little tidbits. Why, then, is this show so hard to like? We all know that these two actors, and the rest of the cast from Stephen Root to Teddy Sears, are excellent exemplars of their trade, so why was I kind of bored by this show?

The problem, in my opinion, is a directorial and production issue. The performances were serviceable enough, I suppose, but when one is selling a pilot, one needs a bit more than that to seal the deal. Because of the rush to showcase the neat stuff in this show, we find ourselves with a definite case of over-exposition which bogs down our opportunities to actually get to know and like the characters.

Do I think that this is going to be a good show? Yes, though the pilot was a bit lack-luster it has a lot of potential meat for us to chew on during the upcoming season. All-in-all, this is a provisional recommendation, however I am biased as I like legal dramas in general...

Todd on TV: Chase

One of the smarter and better shows premiering this season, Jerry Bruckheimer's *Chase*, boldly takes us where about twenty other shows have gone before, mostly unsuccessfully. For those of us who remember the *Fugitive* series reboot, *US Marshalls* the series, *Bounty*, and a bunch of others, the idea of fugitive apprehension as a vehicle for a show if nothing new, however can Jerry Bruckheimer bring the magic that made *CSI*'s glamorous to this aspect of the criminal prosecution? The answer is: Apparently not.

Lacking in any real star power or oomph to speak of, as well as trite and tired personal life issues among the cast, this show seems destined to be a half-season wonder. While the acting and writing are slightly above average, I doubt that will be able to save them from the juggernauts that are *Castle* and *Hawaii Five-0*. Don't invest the time in this one as it is destined to disappear quickly.

All I can say is, "Where are the Crime Scene people when you need them?" Probably investigating the corpse of this show in 13 weeks.

Upcoming Conventions

Big Apple Comic-Con - **<http://www.wizardworld.com/home-apple.html>**

Oct 7th-10th 2010 • Pier 94, *New York, NY 10019*

Join tens of thousands of fellow fans as they converge to celebrate the best in pop culture. Big Apple Comic-Con brings it all - Movies, Comics, Toys, Video Gaming, Games, TV, Anime, Manga, Horror, Wrestling, MMA, Original Art, Collectibles & More!

New York Comic Con

Oct 8th-10th 2010 •, *New York, NY 10001*

Art, comics, cosplay, fantasy, media, science fiction.

Philcon 2010 - <http://philcon.org>

November 19 – 21, 2010

Crowne Plaza Hotel, Cherry Hill, NJ

Featuring fantasy author Peter S. Beagle, writers, artists, scientists, fans, gamers, and 48 hours of fun of all kinds.

NY Anime Festival

<http://www.newyorkcomiccon.com/en/NYAF/>

October 8–10, 2010

Jacob K. Javits Center
New York, New York