

GATEHOUSE
GAZETTE

16

It's a
Weird West



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The *Gatehouse Gazette* is an online magazine in publication since July 2008, dedicated to the speculative fiction genres of steampunk and dieselpunk.

OPINION «

ANARCHOCAPITALISM IN
THE OLD WEST 5

The real West wasn't so wild.

REPORTS «

STEAMPUNK AT DICKENS
ON THE STRAND 6

FEATURES «

THE GREAT AIRSHIP SCARE 7
UFOs in late nineteenth century America.

A HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN
BISON 12

How private ownership saved an American icon
from extinction.

LOUIS BRENNAN'S MONORAIL CAR 15

WILDE'S WEST 18

Oscar Wilde and the American West made for a
surprisingly powerful combination.

REVIEWS «

BIOSHOCK INFINITE 9

NICKEL CHILDREN 10

The Weird West was never such a scary place.

SHERLOCK 11

DR WHO CHRISTMAS SPECIAL 11

MAGICO VENTO 17

WILD WILD WEST 17

Love it or hate it, it's a steampunk classic.

COLUMNS «

THE STEAMPUNK WARDROBE 14

Hilde Heyvaert describes possible Western
Steampunk outfits and how to assemble them.

FICTION «

THE FALCON 20

A chapter from Andrew Bennett's novel *Fearless*.

EDITORIAL «

A NEW YEAR, A NEW GAZETTE

BY NICK OTTENS

Nostalgic though we are, it is inevitable that even the *Gatehouse Gazette* enter modern times, cautiously and with more than a healthy doses of skepticism, we assure you. But the urge to undertake this one change has been taunting us for quite some time and giving into it, we hope you agree, has not been detrimental. So, as we enter our third year of publication, the magazine has been updated once again but this time, the new layout is certainly special. Your favorite steampunk and dieselpunk magazine is released in full color; a novelty after fifteen issues of black, white and grey.

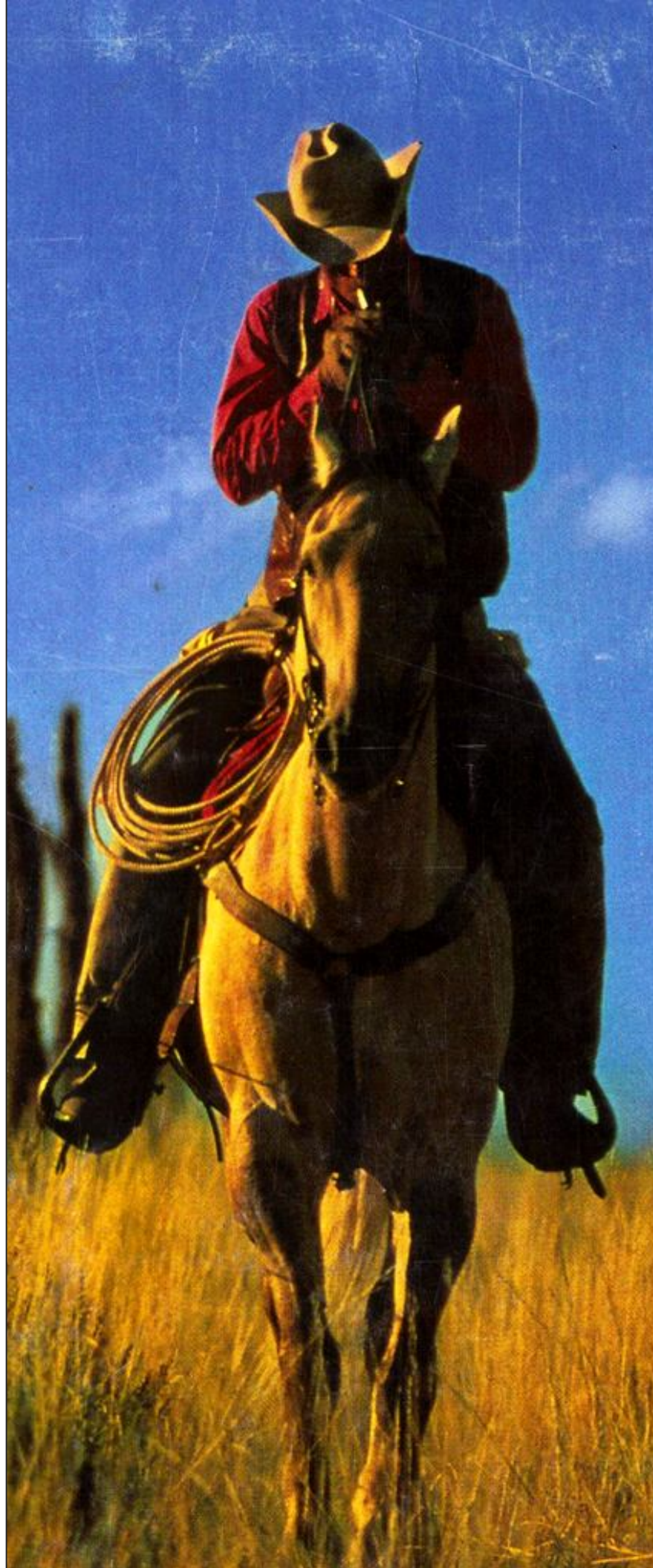
Our team has been hard at work over the holidays to make this first full color edition an outstanding one. We are themed "Weird West" this month, a realm of steampunk that begs further exploration and we have not been alone in that quest. Our friends over at *Exhibition Hall* were of one mind and dedicated their most recent issue to the same topic. Weird Westerners—not all riffraff, trust me—have plenty to satisfy their curiosity this season but, as usual, we have a good number of articles unrelated to the main theme also, for the less trigger happy, shall we say?

New this time is Ramon Fagan who filed both a report on steampunk at the Dickens on the Strand festival in Galveston, Texas and reviewed the short film *Nickel Children*.

Among our familiar contributors is Hilde Heyvaert of course with reviews and her fashion column. We're also glad and proud to have Carol McCleary, author of *The Alchemy of Murder* and *The Illusion of Murder*, two historical novels about American journalist Nellie Bly, back to write about Oscar Wilde. Her article about the great aesthete's travels Far West is as much an ode to the Irish poet as it is to the place he visited.

Andrew Bennett also returns with another chapter from his novel *Fearless*. And we have some articles about the oft forgotten histories of the American West, including a contribution by Patrick J. Worden about The Great Airship Scare.

We are always interested in hearing from our readers so please, feel free to forward your opinions about the magazine and its new layout to n.ottens@gmail.com. If you want to contribute to our next edition, contact us at the same address. •



ANARCHOCAPITALISM IN THE OLD WEST

BY NICK OTTENS

AS WE TEND TO REMEMBER THE OLD WEST, IT was a period of lawlessness and bare survival, when robbers and thieves made life nigh impossible for the honest working man and only scoundrels were able to thrive. It was a period of near anarchy hence the familiar denominator *Wild West*. But was it really that bad?

From the perspective of a libertarian, the Old West was nirvana. There was almost no government except a few sheriffs and army outposts to protect settlers against the worst of crimes and Indian aggression. Homesteading was the law of the land, at least during the second part of the century. Every man and his family could move to the West and start a new life in utter freedom.

It was, in short, an experiment in anarchocapitalism in that largely “private agencies provided the necessary basis for an orderly society in which property was protected and conflict were resolved.” According to Terry L. Anderson and P.J. Hill, authors of “An American Experiment in Anarcho-capitalism,” published in the *Journal of Libertarian Studies* 3, 1 (1979), “the western frontier was not as wild as legend would have us believe.” In the absence of government, citizens regulated themselves. They associated to establish order in a given market and teamed up to defend their property against the inevitable bandits.

Land clubs were particularly effective in warding off squatters. “They established procedures for registration of land claims, as well as for protection of those claims against outsiders, and for adjudication of internal disputes that arose,” noted Bruce L. Benson in “Private Justice in America,” published in *To Serve and Protect: Privatization and Community in Criminal Justice* (New York 1998). “The reciprocal arrangements for protection would be maintained only if a member complied with the association’s rules and its court’s rulings. Anyone who refused would be ostracized. Boycott by a land club meant that an individual had no protection against aggression other than what he could provide himself.” No one was forced to join any club but the benefits were obvious.

As Anderson and Hill put it, “people on the frontier invented institutions that fit the resource constraints they faced.” If there was no official protection for their lives and their property, they simply had to fend for themselves and invent private—as well as voluntary—arrangements. No man had to act against his choice or conscious. There was no one around to force him.

Only when people act freely on the market, wrote

Murray Rothbard in *Man, Economy, and State* (Princeton 1962), “everyone one of their actions benefits everyone and so growth is truly ‘social’, i.e., participated in by everyone in the society. But when government acts to force growth, it is only *some* who grow at the expense of the *retrogression* of others.”

Ludwig von Mises warned against such retrogression in “Deception of Government Intervention,” published in *Christian Economics* on February 4, 1964, noting that it is never the purpose but always the consequence of “a middle of the road policy” of lawmakers who “want to remove what they consider unsatisfactory in the market economy.” They aim at a system which, “as they see it, is as far from socialism as it is from capitalism and which is better than either of those two.”

Proponents of the mixed economy want to uphold private ownership and free market exchange but assert that these institutions could, indeed are too easily misused. “To prevent such an outcome they want to restrain the discretion of the individuals by government orders and prohibitions. The government should interfere with all those actions of the businessmen which it considers as detrimental to the public interest; in other respects, however, it should leave the market alone.”

Who determines what is in the public’s interest? The government does which is why according to Von Mises the interventionist principle leaves business free to act only “as long as what it does complies exactly with the plans and intentions of the government. Thus nothing is left to the market other than the right to execute meekly what the governments wants it to do.”

What those in favor of state interventionism fail to comprehend is that free market enterprise and governments controls are incompatible. They do not recognize, as Friedrich Hayek did in *The Road to Serfdom* (Routledge 1944), the difference “between providing signposts and commanding people which road to take.”

In the Old West there were hardly signposts to begin with yet the people prospered as did their communities. The opening of the West was one of the greatest boom periods in American history and it was exactly because people enjoyed a degree of liberty hitherto unknown that it could happen.

Freedom inevitably comes with a certain measure of chaos however. Anarchy is more often championed as a weapon against capitalism than its rightful cohort. Both only strengthen and sustain government controls instead of challenging them.

REPORT «

STEAMPUNK AT DICKENS ON THE STRAND

BY RAMON FAGAN



DICKENS ON THE STRAND IS "A HOLIDAY festival, where Bobbies, Beefeaters and the Queen (Victoria) recreate the Victorian London of Charles Dickens. Characters from Dickens' novels walk the street." This festival is so strict (normally) about proper historical recreation that all entertainers are required to fill out a detailed form about what they will be presenting, and to present the entertainment committee with photos of costumes and recordings of performances to ensure that all clothing, melodies and lyrics are from "pre-1900s sources." In spite of this, representatives of Airship Isabella convinced them to make an exception so large this year that the square around the "Crystal Palace Stage" had a huge banner across the entrance reading "Steampunk Square" with the sponsors listed jointly as the Galveston Historical Society and Airship Isabella.

The only obvious change at first was the plethora of colorful characters that blended underlying historical ensembles with very anachronistic and often futuristic accoutrement. Then it really got strange! More and more very unusual looking airship pirates, sea pirates, privateers, adventurers, naturalists, time travelers, even the "Mad Hatter" from another universe all together made their appearance on the streets and in the photographs of people from across the country.

Airship Isabella was out in full regalia along with friends from as far away as Mississippi that came specifically for this event. They and several other vendors ran a brisk trade in steampunk jewelry, clothing and other items. They also set up a "Steamunk Museum" where their friends and visiting steampunk enthusiasts were encouraged to display their most interesting and elaborate weapons, inventions and armor pieces for all the visitors to see.

When time came for the evening parade, the historical society was uncertain where to put their strange assortment of guests so we were placed at the very end behind the Queen, her befeater bodyguards, Highland guardsmen, Bagpipe bands, many other groups, even the "Texas Army" which is a Confederate Army reenactment group. The leader of that rather impressive group of Confederates asked one of the event staff members, loud enough to ensure we could hear, if our

motley looking group were ruffians that had been lined up for them to throw off the island. In his usual shy and retiring way, Admiral Ramon Leon del Mar (Kali's Hourglass) answered equally loudly that "No. We're the pirates that are here to take over the island!" The Texas Army Captain looked a bit nervous at first, but the laughter and friendly, jovial attitude seemed to put him at ease. Just the same, the admiral's words proved to be prophetic, for take over the island they most certainly did!

Much of the credit for this goes to Captain Cedric Whittaker (Airship Isabella) who made a sincere plea to friends and steampunk associates across the country to attend and support this project to bring the steampunk movement to the mainstream people of Texas at this festival. He convinced many to attend that had never before considered the festival.

The audience watching the parade responded wonderfully. It seemed that the sedate parade ahead of us had always been dignified and sedate, but never terribly exciting, and here were a bunch of oddly dressed (and heavily armed, or so it appeared) that were so welcoming, friendly, and happy to be there, that our joy was contagious! The crowd watching began cheering, yelling and waving back. We actually got a standing ovation at many intersections just for dressing so wild and sharing so much joy and enthusiasm with the crowd. The papers the next day and on Monday gave extremely favorable reviews and specifically stated that this year's fair had the highest turnout in many years.

By the end of Sunday, we found people from all walks of life, including the Texas Army, the Bobbies and the Beefeaters, had become very friendly, wanted to take pictures with us, and thanked us all for coming. There can be no doubt that this invasion was a huge success for both our steampunk community and for one of the most popular historical festivals in America. This sort of mutual exchange and support should continue to help many different parts of society come together and make the world just a lot more healthy and fun for all of us in the future!

Read the full review at artofsteampunk.blogspot.com.

THE GREAT AIRSHIP SCARE

BY PATRICK J. WORDEN

HALF A DECADE BEFORE THE first experiments of the Wright brothers, a wave of unlikely airship sightings spread across the American Midwest in an incident that has become known as the Great Airship Scare. It was America's first big UFO craze.

The quintessential encounter (and there were dozens of these) has a cigar shaped and silvery airship landing in a farmer's back field, and one or numerous passengers being disgorged and interacting with the awed farmer and his kin. The airman appearing to be in charge introduces himself, describing the airship at his back as being of his own invention, and asks for some water for his engines. There is nothing otherworldly or supernatural; it might have seemed perfectly plausible if it weren't for the fact that no airships were supposed to be flying yet in 1896. The question absolutely begs: Did it really happen?

A thousand reasons suggest that it didn't, but first let's list some reasons why it might have. To begin with, there's no earthly reason why airships couldn't have been flying way back then. Lighter than air flight is nothing more than harnessing one of the simplest fundamentals of nature. Leonardo da Vinci had envisioned it centuries before and there's reason to suspect that Mesoamericans built manned (or at least manable) balloons centuries earlier. By the time of the Scare, several patents were already on file with the US Patent Office for all sorts of flying machines. This said, why does the Great Airship Scare feel so much like the silliest of urban legends?

Because it happened in 1890s America, that's why. There is no sensible reason why any American would build a flight worthy airship, running steam engines and remain

anonymous throughout the acme of his fame. Airship sightings were front page news in every paper from the *Chicago Tribune* to the *Picayune Times-Courier* and the American entrepreneur has not been born who wouldn't milk a cash cow like that for every drop. He could have been rich beyond the dreams of Avarice, but we are expected to believe that he landed his great ponderous airship in a few farmers' fields with nary a misstep and then vanished into the mists of legend. It just can't be.

So what really happened? Consider this: it was imagined. It was a mirage. It was mass hysteria. One of the very first bits of human literature ever written down was the Epic of Gilgamesh, from the third millennium BC. It follows Gilgamesh the king through a mythic journey to far off lands and through the very underworld itself. There are, of course, gods and devils and torments at every turn, but there is logic and a pattern beneath it all. It strives to be as accurate a description possible of a very brutish world, using the only frames of reference the people telling it had available. So when demons belching fire erupt from the very ground, nearly burning Gilgamesh alive, we know that Sumerian traders have entered Anatolia and have seen volcanoes for the first time. It is understandable human embellishment and we recognize it as such. Few scholar will argue that there were indeed giants in the earth in those days. We realize all too well that a frightened human is an inventive one.

Likewise, skipping ahead a few thousand years, Farmer Brown had reason to be frightened. When the Industrial Revolution in America got into high gear, after post-Civil War Reconstruction, the first grim chapter in the saga of the American farmer



was written. America was switching from being an agrarian to an urban nation then and farming was becoming a business instead of a livelihood. Expensive machinery was becoming the unwanted standard, farmers were experiencing their first bank debt and it seemed like bank scares were happening every other week.

Who can blame Farmer Brown for getting a little excited and telling a tale about something that never happened? Nobody got hurt, he might get his picture in the papers and it just might take his and his neighbors' minds off their troubles for a spell. And so the telling spread.

If there were a continuum to be charted for this sphere of human experience, we might see classic mythology on one end, raw mass hysteria on the other. Throughout it we'd see the inventiveness of the human mind with peaks during times that were harshest. Explore that line of thinking just a bit further and one finds rational explanations for everything from Foo Fighters to Sasquatch.

Not all of our favorite historical mysteries will be solved in our lifetimes; and many of us prefer it that way. That doesn't preclude the rational thinker though from following the self evident analyses of these cases and decide that the simplest explanation is usually the correct one. •

**“Ballantine’s.
Damn good
scotch.”**





PREVIEW «

BIOSHOCK INFINITE

BY NICK OTTENS

Columbia. When the two attempt an escape, they are chased not just by the two battling factions on board the air city but by a large robotic bird like creature as well—an aerial version of the “Big Daddy” perhaps?

Whereas in Rapture, the player moved about between different sections of the city by bathysphere, Columbia’s structures are connected by a series of railways called the Skyline. The game’s designer has described the Skyline as “a roller coaster, over another roller coaster, over another roller coaster,” but so far, no footage of the system has emerged yet.

Just as the first two *BioShock* games derived inspiration from the libertarian philosophy of Ayn Rand, *Infinite* exploits the rise of American nationalism, political jingoism and xenophobia as it existed during the early twentieth century. Columbia is another utopia wrecked by social upheaval and division, yet it remains a monument to American industry and accomplishment. The early 1900s were a time progress as well as anxiety and it seems both will be evident in this game. •

IF ONE VIDEO GAME MANAGED to excite dieselpunk enthusiasts in recent years it was certainly *BioShock*. Set in an underwater city and loaded with art deco, bizarre technologies and ideological dystopia, it encapsulated all the elements of the darker side of the genre. The sequel, simply entitled *BioShock 2*, was similarly set in Rapture, the oceanic free market paradise turned nightmare and just as successful as the original. Now, Irrational Games is working on a third game, *BioShock Infinite*, and it is taking to the skies.

Infinite will take the player to Columbia, a city in the skies built to symbolize American hubris and exceptionalism at the turn of the last century. Built by the United States Government, Columbia is disavowed by authorities after it is involved in an unknown international incident. As a result of its isolation, civil war breaks out among the floating city’s inhabitants which ultimately sees an ultranationalist, eerily pro-genetics faction taking power.

The new ruling class seeks to keep Columbia pure of foreign influence. A resistance movement named Vox Populi opposes the racist leadership but its methods are far from admirable.

The player is introduced to Columbia in 1912 as a former Pinkerton detective. He is hired to rescue a young woman named Elizabeth who has been held captive aboard the city for the last twelve years. The agent, Booker DeWitt, is quickly able to find Elizabeth but discovers that she is somehow pivotal to the civil war raging on

“It’s 1880 and you’ve got cows in your field and the next day you’ve got indoor plumbing and electricity and radios and movie stars. That’s twenty years apart. [...] It was almost like **waking up and seeing a city in the sky**. It would be as shocking as that to those people. There’s a sense of optimism in the technology and the American vision.”

— *BioShock* designer Kevin Levine talking with *Shacknews*, August 2010

NICKEL CHILDREN

BY RAMON FAGAN

IMAGINE A PLACE WHERE AN Indiana Jones like vigilante goes after the greatest evil imaginable who is yet a classic bad guy from the Old West, hiding a secret weapon right out of a vintage science fiction horror movie. Now picture it set in the one place and time where everyone, even the family pet probably, would need to have a pair of adventurer's goggles on them at all times—the dust bowl period in Kansas. As this is a steampunk film the goggles are naturally very decorative and science fiction looking including one pair (which the vigilante's partner uses) that appear to be the most elaborate pair of magnifying, telescopic goggles I have ever seen, and I assure you, I have seen a lot of them!

The acting ranged from good to very good (depending on your interpretation of the director's intentions) on the part of several of the minor actors to some of the finest acting I have seen on the part of the main stars. The script was also tight, well written and well executed, as it must be when you have only sixteen minutes to tell a gripping tale. All short films try for that perfect blend but few come up to this one's high standards of delivering a combination that can make even a very short film one to remember!

Easton Lee McCuiston plays Jack, a quiet, polite young boy whose parents are murdered, apparently just to steal him for a child fighting arena. When I asked the director about the very emotionally restrained performance of this character he gave a sound and artistic explanation for how the character was directed to perform. "Easton did a fantastic job at keeping that somber, blank expression, of a kid who's been almost completely

traumatized by the events he's witnessed. Almost catatonic shock, he's going through the motions, but not really understanding what is happening."

Michael Venter plays his father who manages to convey, without even

speaking, courage, despair, love and tragedy when trying to calculate what will give his family the best chances when a gunslinger comes along to destroy them. While his part was brief, it was good and very memorable. Jeremy Snowden plays the evil gunslinger (referred to as "Sheriff" in review info) that rules over a network of child sex slave and gladiator slave rings throughout the territory. He gives a chilling and very believable performance with excellent attention to even very small details of facial expression, body language and a range of emotions conveyed by the eyes.

Amanda Bailey apparently (per another reviewer's comment, as she changed so expertly in her two double roles I actually missed that it was the same actress) plays both Jack's mother in the opening scene, and Anastasia, the vigilante looking for her stolen son. Both were absolutely incredibly well performed in every single way! To give you an idea of how talented this actress really is, she managed to convey deep love and protectiveness for her son, love and admiration for her man, then fear, grief, shock and finally abject terror in every possible way without so much as a single spoken line. She did all of this extremely well and in a mere total of sixty seconds!

While the subject of child



slavery, especially for sexual purposes, is, or at least should be, repulsive to us all, it was handled about as tastefully as it can be while getting across the level of evil the vigilante is up against. Besides, what Weird West story could possibly be more enjoyable than seeing the worst scum imaginable get beaten up by the very children they were abusing?

The costuming is wonderful. It ranged from Old West, Kansas area, dust bowl farmer/rancher through upper class wealthy family riding/traveling clothes from the period with the addition of goggles and corsets (the two steampunk fashion essentials) along with a few intentionally anachronistic accents. This may strike some steampunk enthusiasts as rather odd since the film is set in the early twentieth not the nineteenth century but the look and feel of great old Westerns pervades nearly every fiber of the short film, perhaps aside from the goggles, but even they make good sense in light of the time and place. Clint Eastwood himself would have found such apparel a necessity had he intended to hit anything in the terrible dust storms!

Visit nickelchildren.eslungerfilm.com for more information. Behind the scenes photo of Kevin Eslinger courtesy Jeremy Snowden.

REVIEWS «

SHERLOCK

BY HILDE HEYVAERT

WE ALL KNOW SHERLOCK Holmes, the brilliant detective from Sir Conan Doyle's novels. Always solving crime or mystery aided by his trusted right hand man Dr John Watson and a myriad of other characters including Inspector Lestrade.

Now take all those characters, add some new ones and throw them in contemporary London. That's right, the London of today, in the twenty-first century.

Steven Moffat (of *Dr Who* fame) and Mark Gatiss decided to do it, and lo and behold, they did it brilliantly. I was incredibly sceptical at first when I heard that Holmes would be placed in our time, but the fact that Moffat was involved made me turn on the good old beeb (it was aired on BBC1 earlier this summer) for the first episode anyway.

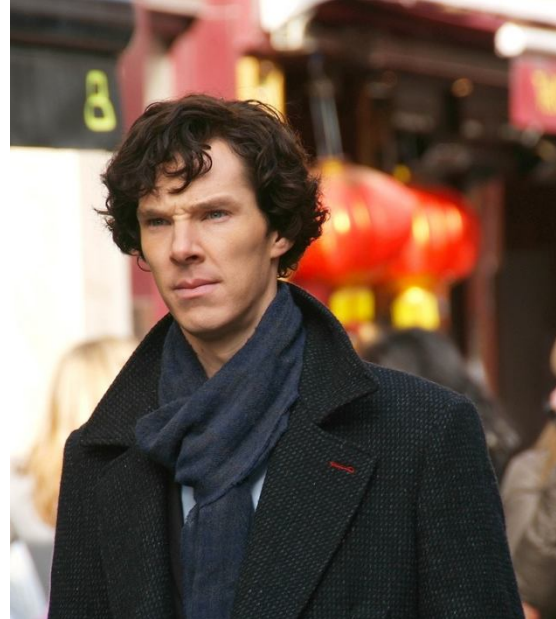
I can report that I was glad I did. The miniseries consists of three

ninety minute episodes (there's four on the DVD though) that take place immediately after one another, so you should really follow the series or you'll miss important bits.

The series unsurprisingly focus on the brilliant detective (and high functioning sociopath) Sherlock Holmes, who acts as the world's only consulting detective and the scourge (most cops despise him with a fiery vengeance) but vital help of Scotland Yard. He is played by Benedict Cumberbatch, who is doing an absolutely smashing job portraying the sleuth. Never before have I seen a Holmes on screen that reminded me so much of the Holmes of the books.

At the start of the series we meet Dr John Watson (played by Martin Freeman), a traumatized former military doctor freshly returned from Afghanistan, looking for a better life in London, starting with a better place to live. Through a mutual friend he meets Holmes and from there we all know how it goes. They move into 221B Baker Street under the not so watchful eye of Mrs Hudson and start solving crimes together.

Along the way we meet new characters, including Sherlock's



brother Mycroft who "occupies a minor position within the British Government" (or that's what he claims at least) and of course there is Moriarty, criminal mastermind and Holmes' nemesis.

I really can't say more without giving away spoilers, which would be a shame to do, so if you have the chance to catch the show, be sure to. Even if you are a fan of Sherlock Holmes you won't be disappointed.

Fans of the show will be glad to learn that the series is scheduled to return during the autumn of this year with fresh episodes!

DR WHO CHRISTMAS SPECIAL

BY HILDE HEYVAERT

Mr Stephen Moffat once again proves to be a genius with his take upon the traditional *A Christmas Carol*.

Fast forward to the future and a spaceship in distress. The ship on which Rory and Amy (for those who have not been following the series, she is the Doctor's companion and Rory is her husband) are

honeymooning is in a whole lot of trouble and about to crash. Of course the cavalry arrives in time in the shape of the Doctor and his Tardis. Or so it seems, because the nearest world has sky control and therefore the ship can't land.

Yet.

Said world is some kind of futuristic Neo-Victorian one with people in period garb and goggles. Kazran Sardick is a mean old scrooge like man, refusing to let the spaceship with 4003 humans on board land on the planet of which he controls the skies. He doesn't care about their impending demise, nor of the feelings of the poor family begging him to release their sister from the icy prison which she has been bound to. I shan't tell you why, because that would spoil it.

Now what must the Doctor do to change Mr Sardick's mind and save his friends and the crew of the seemingly doomed vessel? I won't venture into details as it would thoroughly spoil the plot for you. Suffice to say it involves sky fish, a shark, a whole lot of time travel, the Doctor as a babysitter, singing, romance and much more action. And maybe, or maybe not, the Doctor might actually get married to Marilyn Monroe in the process.

If you get the chance, make sure to catch this special, even if you're not a fan of the show yet. Sure it's bittersweet, but it's a fabulous take on the original, making it into something new and original entirely. As far as Christmas specials of television series go, this is by far the best I've ever seen.



A HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN BISON

BY NICK OTTENS

The mighty American bison once roamed the great plains of the Midwest by the tens of millions. They sustained the native Indian population of the continent which hunted the bison for a variety of purposes. Besides meat the beast provided leather, sinew for bows, grease, dried dung for fires while the hooves could be boiled to produce glue.

The Indian hunted bison for several hundreds of year but during the nineteenth century, when white settlers moved westward and the native Americans for the first time obtained horses, did the hunt escalate. The bison population was reduced to mere hundreds by the mid 1880s. By that time, the animals were primarily hunted for their skins. The rest of their corpse was often left behind to decay on the ground.

One man who helped save the buffalo was South Dakotan rancher James “Scotty” Philip (1858-1911) who, starting with just five animals, bred a herd of more than a thousand bison by the end of his life. Other ranchers followed suit and during the twentieth century, they saved the animal from extinction. Ted Turner (1938), founder of CNN, deserves special praise, owning some 50,000 bison across a number of ranches.

What saved the American bison? The fact that people started to own them. The animals used to roam freely, owned by no one, thus protected by no one. The Federal Government refused to act even as the bison faced extinction, because they were the Indians’ foremost and sometimes only source of food. Without the bison, the Indians would have no choice but to live in

reservations which was explicitly the aim of many lawmakers.

Up to this very day, bison are herded for meat. It ensures their survival. By slaughtering the bison at a sustainable rate, farmers are able to afford keeping them—and turn a profit. This is a lesson to all who care about preservation as scores of animals teeter on the brink of extinction today. Private ownership may well be the best guarantee of a species’ survival.

The bison population has been growing rapidly in recent years and is now estimated at 350,000. An American icon has been saved thanks entirely to the initiative of private ranchers and philanthropists during the last century but their numbers probably won’t ever reach the millions that used to live in North America.



Stairway to the stars

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THE STEAMPUNK WARDROBE

BY HILDE HEYVAERT

This column is dedicated to Western steampunk fashion. And by western I don't mean modern day Western society, no, I'm talking about the Wild West of days gone by. The American Wild West, long regarded as the final frontier and the subject of many a movie and book.

Now those who might think that they can just throw together a cowboy or Indian outfit movie style and add some goggles will find that they have really taken the easy way out. By all means, if that rocks your boat do so, there's no rules stopping you. But there's really a lot more to this fashion.

It may have been called the Wild West but fashion wise it really was a turn on the fashions of Victorian England. Gorgeous dresses and exquisite ball gowns for the ladies of good standing, and prairie dresses for the common female and Victoriana style suits, yet with a twist for the gentlemen. That there is a cowboy hat involved instead of the typical British bowler or top hat is in most cases correct but you should by no means feel obliged to forgo more traditional headwear in favor of the cowboy hat.

Wild West fashions are, as is the case with most steampunk fashion, largely Do It Yourself. Thankfully a lot of pattern companies (McCalls, Simplicity, Laughing Moon, Truly Victorian and Folkwear, to name but a few) all provide patterns which you can either make in a fabric of choice or use as a basis for your own attire. Looking at fashion drawings and even early photography from the time will provide for wonderful inspiration.

Bare in mind that the West does not have to stop with the territories we now know as the USA, you can venture into the clothing of Native American tribes or Mexican areas as well. After all, the West was a lot more than the conquering white man settling in.

It is also unnecessary to entirely stick to historical fashions or movie costumes. There is absolutely nothing against adding Western

elements to a modern day steampunk outfit. Quite to the contrary, it could provide for a fresh and original take on the style. A duster coat, cowboy boots and cowboy hat could be wonderful additions to a contemporary outfit and turning it into a fabulous example of Wild West steampunk at the same time.

Accessories can range from (replica) guns, rifles and other weaponry from that time, whether they have been steamified or left in their original state, cowboy boots and hats, and the modern day steampunk accessories we all know so well including goggles, special belts, bags and many, many more.

As always; think your persona or outfit through. Who are you? Are you a member of high society? A cowboy or cowgirl out on the land? An outlaw or a (wo)man of the law? A tinkerer? The local newspaper official? The sky is the limit, but who you are portraying should be obvious in your outfit. And the more historical you go, the more research you will have to do to make your Wild West wardrobe perfect.

As you can see, there really is more than meets the eye to Wild West steampunk fashion, but with some work, it can be a fabulous and original style and a perfect addition to the wide range of steampunk fashions out there.



Captain Anthony LaGrange, Airship Archon

LOUIS BRENNAN'S MONORAIL CAR

BY CLEVELAND MOFFETT

ON THE 8TH OF MAY 1907, MR Louis Brennan exhibited, at a meeting of the Royal Society in London, a piece of mechanism which stirred the imagination of every beholder and, reported next morning by the newspapers, aroused the amazed interest of the world. This invention consisted of a car that ran on a single rail, standing erect like a bicycle when in motion, but, unlike the bicycle, remaining equally stable when at rest. If a weight was placed on one edge of the car, that side rose higher instead of being lowered. If you pushed against the side with your hand, the mysterious creature—you could feel that it must be endowed with life—was actually felt to push back as if resenting the affront. If the track on which it ran consisting of an ordinary gas pipe or a cable of wire was curved, even very sharply, the car followed the curve without difficulty, and, in apparent defiance of ordinary laws of motion, actually leant inward, as a bicycle rider leans, under the same circumstances, instead of careening outward, as one might have expected.

It was a curious mechanism, this new car with its four wheels set

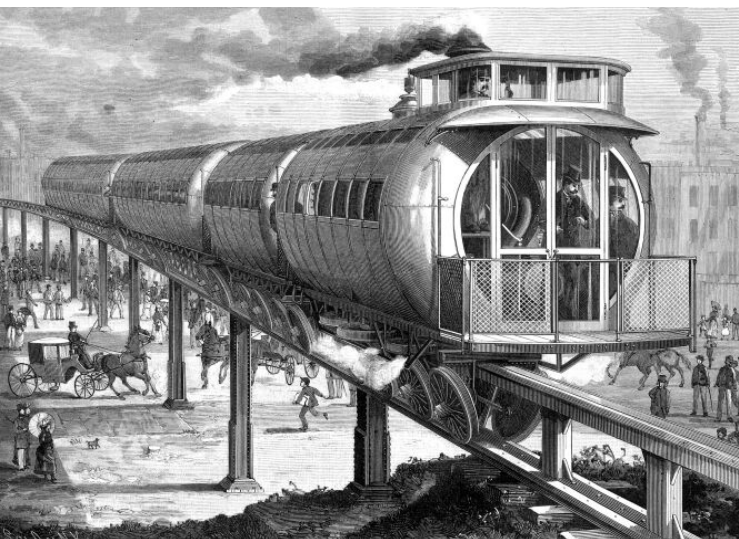
in line, bicycle fashion, running steadily along; but strangest of all it seemed when it stood poised and perfectly still on its tight rope. As stably poised it stood as if it had two rails beneath it instead of a single wire; and there was nothing about it to suggest an explanation of the miracle, except that there came from within the car the murmur of whirling wheels.

The mysterious wheels in question would be found, if we could look within the structure of the car, to be two in number, arranged quite close together on either side of the center of the car. They were two small flywheels, in closed cases, revolving in opposite directions, each propelled by an electric motor. These were the wonder workers. They constituted the two lobed brain—or, if you prefer, the double chambered heart—of the strange organism. All the world had learned to call them gyroscopes. The vehicle that they balanced may have been termed a gyro car, a name that had the sanction of the inventor himself Louis Brennan, already a man of international reputation as an inventor

"In speed we shall surpass all that the world has known;

for with friction reduced to a minimum and side thrusts practically eliminated, there is no reason why our monorail trains should not make one hundred and twenty, one hundred and fifty, or even two hundred miles an hour with absolute steadiness and far more safety than is possible on existing trains," he proclaimed. "I may add that ideal smooth running will be secured by having a continuous line of wheels under each car, a single line, of course, so that the whole train will rest on a solid chain of wheels."

"These cars will be different from any cars thus far known," the inventor added. "They will not be cars at all, but great, beautiful parlors, where we shall travel almost without knowing that we are traveling; where we shall find the comforts and luxuries of a first class hotel, brilliant dining rooms like saloons on the best ocean liners; entertainment rooms for music or dancing, and large, well ventilated sleeping rooms instead of wretched bunks behind dusty curtains." •



Old Gold

"So mild and
easy on the throat"

Carole Lombard

CAROLE LOMBARD
IN

"NOW AND FOREVER"
her latest PARAMOUNT Picture



REVIEWS «

MAGICO VENTO

BY LORENZO DAVIA

ITALY HAS A GREAT TRADITION of Western comics; the most famous being *Tex* which has been continuously published for over fifty years. Other Far West adventures include *Zagor* and *Ken Parker*. In the last decade a new comic was introduced though which met with approval from both critics and readers; *Magico Vento*.

Magico Vento was issued by Sergio Bonelli Editore from 1997 to 2010. The serial was invented by Gianfranco Manfredi and takes its name from the protagonist, the Sioux shaman Magico Vento (Magic Wind).

It is a Western comic with strong elements of horror and thriller; the protagonist often deals

with Indian legends and mythology, but there is more to the comic than the supernatural. *Magico Vento* is often involved in historical events, as the Chicago fire of 1871 and Custer's defeat at Little Big Horn.

Now the shaman of the Sioux tribe of Bull Tail, *Magico Vento* was originally an American soldier named Ned Ellis. He lost his memory as a result of train accident in which his comrades died. He was saved by the shaman Lame Horse and taught the ancient ways of the Indian tribe.

The hero's sidekick is journalist and alcoholic Willy Richards, called Poe for his resemblance to the poet. His nemesis is Howard Hogan, a speculator without scruples who was responsible for the crash that killed Ellis' friends and who may be his father.

The enemies encountered in the comic are often derived from Indian legend. Among the creatures met is the Windigo, which is a man whose greediness transforms him into a monster, as well as the Vultur, a demon that can be evoked by wizards and is used by Hogan against

Magico Vento.

The heroes live in the ghost town of Blizzard, abandoned by white men and taboo to Indians. This town, always lashed by wind, is haunted by the ghosts of its previous inhabitants. *Magico Vento* and Poe lodge at the Last Chance Hotel and Poe starts publishing the *Blizzard Gazette*, the town's newspaper, which has no readers. Some articles from the *Gazette* are presented at the beginning of each issue, making an introduction or deepening of elements present in the issue.

The plot was developed, issue after issue, only by author Gianfranco Manfredi. This offered a strong sense of continuity and was one of the reasons the comic encountered much success. At the same time it was a weakness as Manfredi decided to end the series when he felt he had told the story he wanted to tell.

For various reasons *Magico Vento* has been a welcome addition to Italian Western comics, not only for its supernatural elements but also because of the presence of strong historical characters.

WILD WILD WEST

BY HILDE HEYVAERT

A FINE EXAMPLE OF A MOVIE you either love or hate, *Wild Wild West* (based on the series from years previously albeit in parody style) will strike your fancy or be written off as complete tripe.

The year is 1869 and the Civil War has just ended. That doesn't mean that all of the Confederates have given up though. Led by Dr Loveless, who is literally half the man he once was because of the war, and his futuristic steampunk technology, they plan to take out President Ulysses Grant and claim rulership over the reunited states of America.

Queue the arrival of our heroes: US Army Captain James West (Will Smith), a free black man with more than one bone to pick with Loveless. West is forced to cooperate with US Marshall Artemus Gordon (Kevin Kline) who is more than a little gadget obsessed. And here you get a comedy combo of Captain West on one side, who is rather boldly throwing himself into harm's way, relying on his social and fighting skills to get the job done with Mr Gordon on the other side, who is the archetypical geek with a mad scientist streak.

It results in both good guys and bad guys having a tinkerer on their side and a whole lot of brilliant



steampunk machinery. From pimped trains to a steam powered wheelchair and penny farthing, to an enormous mechanical spider and much, much more.

This movie isn't meant to be taken seriously. It is a lighthearted action comedy set in the Wild West and filled with steampunk gadgetry. It's fun to watch and might even get you some inspiration for your own steampunk kit or persona!



WILDE'S WEST

BY CAROL McCLEARY

THE "WILDE" WEST WAS THE perfect stage for Oscar Wilde. Filled with rugged individualism, spacious freedom, toughness, America's West was not only bigger than life and unique to the rest of the world, it was legendary, just like Oscar Wilde.

When Oscar Wilde went to visit the West in late 1881, it had not yet fallen prey to the industrial age.

As Oscar so eloquently put it, "I am lost in wonder and amazement. It is not a country but a world... the West I liked best. The people are stronger, fresher, saner than the rest. They are ready to be taught. The surroundings of nature have instilled in them a love of the beautiful, which but needs development and direction. The East I found a feeble reflex of Europe; in fact, I may say that I was in America for a month before I saw an American."

It was a bizarre place to define, especially with its outlandish landscaping—the sky high Rockies; deserts with tumbleweeds as large as horse carts, or as small as a ball, being picked up by the wind and thrown about like toys; tall mountains with flat tops villages could live on; miles and miles of nothingness, only hot sun and dirt and strange plants that grow up to eight feet tall and from a distance look like stick people, but once up close you wouldn't want to touch for it's covered with prickles; and yet there are also endless miles of mountains with trees larger than a house, and crystal blue rivers that run forever.

Mixed in with this diverse landscaping you had diverse people: farmers and ranchers, cowboys, Indians, outlaws, prostitutes, miners, even entrepreneurs—all with the lack of Eastern etiquette.

As diverse as the Old West was, it didn't know what to expect of this man who upon his arrival to "the colony," as the British were inclined to call America, declared to the customs agent, "I have nothing to declare but my genius."

Author James Simmons said it best: "a less likely love match could scarcely be imagined." But being prone to Anglomania, the Americans flocked to see him, making him one of the top money makers on the flourishing lecture circuit.

Oscar was considered the biggest yarn the West had witnessed and they called him the Gay Flower; but this huge man with long, flowing dark hair, dressed in satin and velvet suits with a rose or lily in his lapel, his head adorned with a large, wide brimmed hat that could be purple one day and bright red the next and

"I think you mean Wilde West, I sure do!"

— Oscar Wilde on the Old West

more times than not sported a peacock feather, and smoked long cigars, not only surprised them all, he won over their hearts. A Denver reporter for the *Times* described Wilde's long duster he had recently adopted as "not unlike a Texas ranger who had struck it rich."

The *Denver Republican* declared approvingly "that if placed in a mining camp dance hall, [the Aesthete] would pass for a real bold, bad man."

A Denver storekeeper, Luther Thomas, who became Oscar's friend, said, "I have known more heroic souls and some deeper souls, but I have known no more charming no more quickening no more delightful spirit as Oscar Wilde." As he traveled through the West, his reputation

quickly followed him and each city was decorated with flowers.

From Kansas City to San Francisco this fun loving Irishman attempted everything that was thrown his way and succeeded.

In San Francisco, when a Bohemian Club tried to prove him a "Nancy boy" by plying him with liquor, he not only out drank them, he out talked them too. They honored him by placing him in a group photograph of the club.

Another group tried to question his manhood by darning him to a game of poker. Once again Oscar beat all challengers at the game.

Wilde was different, but the West discovered that this "out of the way" person had more in common with them than they ever imagined. Both were extreme, eccentric, expansive—they were myths in process.

In a place that enjoyed freedoms unique in Victorian America; intimacy with women outside of marriage; a place where they could find their own space of tradition and individualism; they discovered Oscar's masculinity that was complicated by a "feminine" aesthetic and appearance acceptable.

As Wilde explained to them, "When a man is going to walk or row, or perform feats which require a display of strength and muscle, the trousers are done away with and knee breeches are worn."

Even though the West was savage and filled with many hazards—cholera, typhoid, diphtheria, and other scourges inflicted upon the people who dared to venture out into this land of the unknown—it was also a place of beauty and kind hearts and souls, people with adventure and willingness to make a new life. They dared to go to places where they had no idea of what they would find even though they had been warned about the bandits, gunfighters, and Indians

on the war path.

Despite all that the West was up against—drinking water that was commonly drawn from sloughs and streams that did double duty as town dumps; sewages that ran in the streets and mingled with the droppings of horses and other animals—they kept a sense of humor. For example, when an unlucky cowpoke stepped into a puddle and sank up to his belt buckle, patrons at a saloon in Dodge City, Kansas, laughed and applauded him for the show he unwillingly gave them.

So Oscar's wit and ability to drink excessively and play cards won their hearts, even if he had a reputation as the "Apostle of Aestheticism" (a person who has an extreme devotion to beauty). Years later a Leadville miner remembered Oscar with great affection. "Oscar Wilde is some art guy, but he can drink any of us under the table and afterwards carry us home two at a time."

Oscar never stopped to amaze them. Once he had a bout of altitude sickness, but still went on stage. A reporter noted: "he stumbled onto the stage with a stride more becoming a giant backwoodsman than an aesthete."

But when Wilde descended into the Leadville, Colorado Matchless mine to talk about the ethics of art and share a spirited dinner with the miners, well, that became the stuff of legends. Oscar recounted in a letter, "the miner's surprise that art and appetite could go hand in hand ... when I lit a long cigar they cheered till the silver fell in dust from the roof ... and when I quaffed a cocktail without flinching, they unanimously pronounced me in their grand simple way a bully boy with no glass eye, artless and spontaneous praise which touched me more than the pompous panegyrics of literary critics ever did or could."

He also declared after returning to England, "English

people are far more interested in American barbarism than they are in American civilization ... Rocky Mountains charm [Americans] more than riotous millionaires; they have been known to prefer buffaloes to Boston. Why should they not? The Far West with its grizzly bears and its untamed cowboys, its free open air life and its free open air manners, its boundless prairie and its boundless mendacity is beautiful!"

As he told a reporter for the San Francisco Examiner, "the further West one comes, the more there is to like..." Which makes sense from the comment he made to a journalist in Denver: "The West has kept itself free and independent while the East has been caught and spoiled with many of the flirting follies of Europe."

Oscar loved how the proprietor of a general store was the

town's most popular figure—and why not? He sold not only guns and chaps, bootjacks and baby carriages, but also Bibles for the devout and whiskey for the sinners. Saloon keepers were also partners with the newspaper editor and prospective settlers. Everyone mingled and accepted each other. And if they didn't, they had a shoot out.

Even with his elegant hands, languid gestures, wild and often ridiculed stage dress, Oscar found in the Wild West people who accepted him. He was a man who could stand his own ground, eat and drink with gusto and speak with genial frankness, and that's what mattered the most to them and Oscar.

A sign Oscar saw in a saloon in Leadville, Colorado, adequately describes not only the West but Oscar's life: "Please do not shoot the piano player. He is doing his best." •

THE FALCON

A CHAPTER FROM **ANDREW BENNETT'S FEARLESS**

AS THE CAPTAIN LEFT THE TAVERN HE DREW HIS COAT COLLAR UP around his exposed neck attempting to fight off the chill wind that blew through the Town's streets, despite the warmth of the day which still longingly lingered in the streets. He stopped and slowly looked up and down the narrow cobbled street he had just entered before he then began to slowly make his way through the gathering fog, trailing smoke behind him from his smouldering pipe. As he turned a corner he stopped, and lifting up one of his hob nailed boots tapped the bowl of his pipe against his heel, emptying it of ash and sending several sparks drifting through the still air. He paused watching them dance, small lights of warmth in this otherwise cold world, as they slowly spun, dropping to the cobblestones, before he moved on. He struck the few observers who saw him as a strange, lonely figure, purposefully striding toward its' goal. Although many people would have shied away from walking the streets alone at this hour, for fear of the murderers and thieves that they perceived inhabiting the dark recesses of the streets, he walked without fear of the city's criminals. His contacts in the underworld made sure that he could walk the streets of any city, and enter any alleyway without fear of molestation. He knew the penalties for attacking him were harsh; he made sure they were, ensuring that the criminal classes feared his very presence in their city and even the mere mention of his name, in some circles was enough to send entire organisations running in blind panic. Even the most fearsome gangs of London's East End feared his displeasure, and made sure that none of their members either accosted him or obstructed his progress. That fear, and the presence of the two loaded colt revolvers hiding within easy reach inside his coat, was more than enough to give him a sense of well deserved security.

A tall figure leaned out of a doorway, illuminated by the light coming

» WHO WAS OSCAR WILDE



1854

Oscar Wilde is born in Dublin, Ireland, son of poetess and a surgeon.

1881

Wilde publishes his first collection of poems and decides to visit America.

1880s

Wilde marries, has two children and engages in his first known homosexual affair.

1890

The Portrait of Dorian Grey, Wilde's only novel, is published.

1895

In a very public trial, Wilde is convicted on charges of "gross indecency". He served two years imprisonment and died in 1900.

from within the building it was about to enter, clearly curious of this newcomer. It stood and examined the man passing, before slowing retreating into the doorway and the well lit warmth of the house beyond. As it disappeared The Captain reasoned that the occupant of the doorway had clearly just descended from the steam-hansom which stood idling in the street, spewing smoke and sparks from its' chimney, casting a radiant glow around itself from the fire of its boiler, as the fireman stoked the licking flames. As he passed the doorway, The Captain relaxed, chiding himself for his nervousness. He began to recall what had happened to the last man who had tried to relieve him of his wallet. That man had certainly lived to regret his choice of targets, although not for long. With a smile he recalled the reports detailing the discovery of his body after it had finally been pulled from the river. There was almost nothing left on the body to identify him, and little else to identify it as a man, or even as human for that matter. But all his friends and companions knew who the mysterious corpse was, many of them had witnessed his slow, terrible and above all, painful demise. One of his accomplices was also found days later, hanging from a bridge by his heels, with his eyes, nose and tongue removed, as warning to others of the danger of attacking The Captain. He suddenly cursed as he was brought swiftly back to the present. Forced to leap out of the way of a speeding steam-hansom, which almost ran him down, the driver was clearly paying little regard for any possible passers by. As he passed the lonely pedestrian the driver entered into a tirade of swearing, cursing the very life of the man who he had nearly killed as he drove on, ferrying his passengers from whatever entertainment they had just witnessed. This outburst from the driver was met with a response of an equally colourful language from The Captain, as he turned and cursed both the driver and the Hansom's occupants, as did the fireman hanging desperately onto the rear of the vehicle as it bounced along the cobbles. The Captain soon gathered his wits and once more set out toward his destination, reaching it before long.

His aim was a ship moored in the Queens dock near the port offices, as he reached it The Captain smiled and let out a sigh of satisfaction, gazing upon the vessel from the base of the gangplank. It was not a large vessel; it measured scarcely 45 feet long and 25 feet wide, its iron hull rose 15 feet above the water before its wooden deck began, and it was in clear need of repair. So much so that many passing sailors and seamen cursed the owners for allowing their men to go to sea in such a dilapidated ship, and were surprised that it was still somehow afloat. It was an incredibly strange looking vessel, although it had the expected dimensions and proportions of an iron hulled ship, with a wooden deck, rising fore and aft, culminating in two platforms, on each of which were mounted dual maxim machine guns. The Ship carried two

small iron cannon amidships, it clearly had been a sailing vessel but a large chimney rising from the rear betrayed its conversion to steam power alone. The ship, much like the man who stood before it, mesmerized, was an enigma to the inhabitants of the city. It had arrived nearly a week earlier, but no one had been seen boarding or disembarking the ship, neither had it been loaded nor unloaded, its purpose in the port was a mystery as no harbour pilots had been allowed aboard. Occasionally a lone crewman had been seen swabbing the deck or an officer, strolling along it as though on a promenade. From its jack staff was hung the Dutch Tricolour, swaying limply in the breeze. On its prow, hanging beneath the bowsprit was the figure head which gave the ship its name. A small cast bronze Falcon. Depicted with its wings extended back and its talons outstretched, but the ship's outward appearance was at odds with its' fearsome reputation. As The Captain stood before the ship taking in its ragtag glory he was filled with a sense of pride. Here was his domain, a land he ruled, floating in a vast ocean of nothingness, one of the last, tentative links to his former life. Behind the visible signs of rust and decay, what could not be seen by anyone but the initiated was the gleaming and precise model of efficiency that the façade hid. Below, across two of its four decks were hidden 12 large calibre, automatic breech loading guns, each one of which was capable of firing a 5 pound shell well over a mile, should the need arise, as well as the special explosive shells with which they were more commonly loaded. And despite their appearance the two dual maxims mounted fore and aft were in perfect working order and had been modified so that they were able to fire a variety of specialised ammunition, at unheard of speeds, through various enemies. The two cannon mounted amidships were almost entirely for show, although, should the need arise they could be utilised, firing a variety of balls through the common and relatively mundane, round, grape and cluster shot to the exotic, explosive shrapnel cannon balls they commonly launched into unsuspecting boarding parties who were almost always decimated by this hellish ammunition. The Captain finished his inspection of the ship and strode aboard, pausing only to scowl in habitual disapproval at the flag flying at the rear of the vessel. Upon reaching the deck he turned and strode directly into his cabin at the rear of the Ship. As he walked through the left door of the three which fronted the aft platform, separating the stairs to the quarterdeck, he gazed inwards upon the room.

Approximately 10 feet square, and lit by a collection of oil lamps, this was his Cabin. The cabin's space was filled with a bunk up against the hull, hidden for the moment by a curtain hanging from the ceiling, along with a washstand and chamber pot. On the opposite side was a chest of drawers sat next to a doorway leading to the companionway which separated the Captain's Cabin from the Officers' Wardroom. Resting

upon the top of the drawers were two crystal decanters, their contents clearly visible, and two crystal glasses matching the decanters which were being watched over by the Cabin boy, Josiah. Some of the remaining space was occupied by a modest oak campaign desk and chair, facing the door. Between the door and the desk were sat four men in chairs obtained from throughout the ship, all of whom rose when they saw The Captain enter. He strode around the desk and hanging his coat over the back of the chair he sat down. Looking up at the men, standing to attention before him he said simply;

'At ease.' At which the four men, in unison, returned to the seats. The Captain looked over them, these were his officers, men who he grown to instinctively trust with his life. They were his closest advisors and the nearest thing he had to a family. The Captain removed his pipe from his coat, and he methodically began to fill it as Josiah carried one of the decanters and a glass, placing them upon the desk, his head held high as if this act of servitude was his greatest achievement, before he drifted off to a respectable distance.

'Thank you Josiah. That will be all for this evening.' The Captain calmly uttered. The boy exited the cabin through the door to the companionway. The Captain sat in silence as he lit his pipe and gazed from man to man as he filled his glass. On the extreme right of the men assembled before him tonight, to discuss the mission was Richard Crabbe, his First Mate. Sitting with his legs outstretched smoking a thin cigarette, relaxing every inch of his 6 feet and 8 eight inches. The man who had earlier impersonated The Captain was still wearing the evening dress he had worn to the theatre after leaving the Tavern; he was possibly The Captain's oldest friend and knew him and his mind better than any other man present. Next to him sat the imposing form of Joseph Swan, the Boson, he knew the men serving on board the ship to a man, and could gauge their mood with ease, many of them had personally learnt to fear both the displeasure and temper of the large man, who was a great deal swifter than his portly frame suggested, and although age was beginning to dull his reactions he still remained a formidable force. He and the engineer, sat at the left end of the line, Patrick O'Rorke, could almost pass for twins and now with them both dressed in their accustomed garb of woollen pullovers and well worn trousers, the similarity was striking. Only the oil and grease stains on O'Rorke's hands, along with his flame red hair, in direct contrast to Swan's grey, served to differentiate between them. Lastly, sandwiched between Swan and O'Rorke's separate bulks was Dr. Stevens, the Ship's surgeon. The oldest man present, he had seen the Falcon's crew, and even its' Captain through a number of possibly life-threatening incidents, all of which the patients survived, to his immense pride. He was dressed in the usual surgeon's garb of shirtsleeves and calico trousers, although he was not wearing his usually blood-soaked apron, as he sat

smoking a fat cigar, his major, and as far as any of the men onboard were aware, only vice, having previously sworn off drink, following an incident in which he saw a colleague's career wrecked by his fondness for the bottle. After considering the men before him The Captain finally spoke;

'It seems, gentlemen, once more that the Empire is in peril, and we are the ones selected to aid her.'

Crabbe spoke for them all when he asked;

'Well what is it this time?'

'We' The Captain responded 'are to escort an agent of the Military Intelligence Service into France so that they can find another missing, and quite probably captured agent of the Service, as well as returning them both to England. I presume that we shall also be required to aid her in her mission, should the need arise.'

'Is that all?' Stevens responded

'I think so, although I don't know where in France we're going to, so I can't tell you how likely we are to be recognised. However, if Mr. Crabbe's documents are up to their usual standard it is unlikely.'

The Captain responded.

'What's the payment?' Asked O'Rorke; in his deep, Irish brogue.

'Twelve hundred Sovereigns, in gold bullion, one third paid on acceptance, the rest on completion. Exactly the same as terms as last time.'

The Captain responded coolly. There was a general murmuring of approval from the men sat before the desk.

'Well, it seems that you are all willing to undertake the mission, but are the men?' Asked The Captain of Swan; resulting in the latter pausing for thought before he responded;

'The men will do what they're told to sir. You know that. They're all loyal to you; I dare say some of them would sell their mothers to the devil himself if you told them to.'

'Very well, then. It seems that the decision falls to me. I shall inform you as soon as I have made it. You are dismissed'

The Captain responded and removed the box containing their orders from within his coat pocket and fell to studying it, as the other men filed out he held up his hand and called out;

'Mr. Crabbe.'

At the sound of his name Crabbe turned towards the desk and The Captain continued;

'Stay with me a while, I wish to talk with you privately.'

Crabbe strode over to the desk and seating

"It seems once more that the Empire is in peril, and we are the ones selected to aid her."

himself before The Captain who continued to draw on his pipe, filling the space above his head with spirals of blue smoke.

'Sir?' Crabbe asked.

'We're quite alone now, Dick, I think we can afford to be informal. You know I only call you Mr. Crabbe in front of the men for discipline's sake.'

'Very well, then. James.' Crabbe returned, and relaxing, he removed his cigarette case from his jacket pocket before selecting a cigarette and pausing to light it. Eventually he said;

'There's something troubling you about this mission isn't there?'

'How can you tell?' The Captain responded, not looking up from his examination of the wooden box he held in his hands.

'I've known you longer than anyone else. And in that time I've learn to tell when something's bothering you. Are those our orders?' He asked indicating the box the Captain held. He simply nodded in reply and passing it to Crabbe said;

'Look where they come from.' Crabbe let out a low whistle as he saw the CIO emblazoned upon the box's seal.

'Straight from the top.' The Captain explained.

'Straight from him, you mean.' Crabbe responded. Avoiding the bait thrown to him by his friend, The Captain continued curtly;

'That's not all.' And he removed the unsigned Letters of Marque from his coat pocket, passing them to Crabbe who put the box down on the desk. Having read them in silence he asked;

'An incentive I presume?' The Captain nodded.

'That blank spot will be filled by someone high up in the MIS after we've completed the mission.'

'Hmm. Well, now this is tempting.'

'Any chance you'd be able to forge a signature.' The Captain asked.

'With the Queen and the Prime Minister's signatures and seals already on here it would be easy enough to put one down which would pass muster, but not one that would withstand close scrutiny.'

'I didn't think you'd be able to help much on that score.' The Captain responded simply.

'James, don't make this personal. We're all in the same situation as you are. But, with this' Crabbe said, waving the Letters of Marque in clear excitement 'we'd be able to return to the lives we had, to reclaim what's rightfully ours, all of us, not just you. We wouldn't be fugitives, constantly running and hiding away in the shadows. We'd be able to walk in the Sun again James!'

'It's not a pardon dammit!' The Captain exploded with rage, striking the desk with his fist sending the glass jumping a good inch clear of the desk and it's contents sloshing over the rim 'If we accept this, then it would mean admitting to all those crimes they've accused us of!

We'd be free men, yes, but forever tied to the Crown, and unable to escape our pasts. We both know we didn't rob that bank in Manchester last month, nor did we sink that troop ship on its way to South Africa.' The Captain bolted upright in a fit of rage and pounded on the desk as he continued to speak with passion inflaming his emotions;

'If we accept these they'll be able to say we did. I know as Captain of this Ship I've done some things I'm not proud of, and I've made mistakes in the past, as have you. But I'll face the judgement for my sins when I'm dead. And when my end comes and I finally meet my maker, I want to be able to hold my head high, and be able to say that "at least I died an honest man." I don't care what you or anyone else promises, I will not make myself a liar before God. If I die, then at least I'll die a free man, under my own colours, knowing I led my life as my own and not as a pawn in someone else's game.'

Following the other man's rant, Crabbe was stunned into silence, and immediately regretted having let his excitement get the better of him. He looked across at his friend, seeing in him the broken man he had become, leaning heavily on the desk, with his head hung low.

The Captain spoke plainly, and with plain emotion, clearly choking back the tears he felt welling in his eyes;

'Whatever else they've managed to take from me, they won't take my pride. Not while I have some dignity left.'

Crabbe rose, silently unfolding himself to his full height and placing the document down on the desk he said simply;

'I know you'll make the right choice, James, and I'll stand by you, whatever it is.'

His friend, once the proud man that was the Captain of the Falcon, but was now nothing more than a shaking child in the form of man, responded quietly, almost in a whisper;

'Thank you.'

At which point Richard Crabbe, Sailor, Airman, Officer, but above all friend, quietly exited the room, softly closing the door behind him and leaving The Captain alone with his thoughts.

Upon finding himself alone The Captain sat back down, and resting his head in his palms reached for his drink with a shaking hand and took a large gulp. Swallowing, he felt the warmth of the fiery liquid as it descended deep inside him, and slowly, he began to cry. Barely noticeable at first, there were only a few tears appearing at the corners of his eyes which slowly rolled down his face and splashed upon the desk. But within minutes his whole body shook with tremendous, mournful sobs. Outside, the city slept and was at peace. But, above the silence, there floated a terrible and inescapable tragedy, which haunted The Falcon's Captain, just as it had done for the previous five years.



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January

- 1 *New Year's Day*
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8 *Smoking Lounge Day*
- 9
- 10
- 11
- 12
- 13
- 14
- 15
- 16



- 17
- 18
- 19
- 20
- 21
- 22
- 23
- 24
- 25
- 26
- 27
- 28
- 29
- 30
- 31

The team of the Gatehouse Gazette
wishes you all the best for the new year!
<http://www.ottens.co.uk/gatehouse/gazette.php>

February

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8 *Jules Verne Day*
- 9
- 10
- 11
- 12
- 13
- 14 *Valentine's Day*
- 15
- 16
- 17
- 18
- 19
- 20
- 21
- 22
- 23
- 24
- 25
- 26
- 27
- 28
- 29



This year, Hilde Heyvaert provides two steampunk themed **birthday calendars** with each issue of the *Gatehouse Gazette*.

The calendars for March and April will be attached to our next edition.