

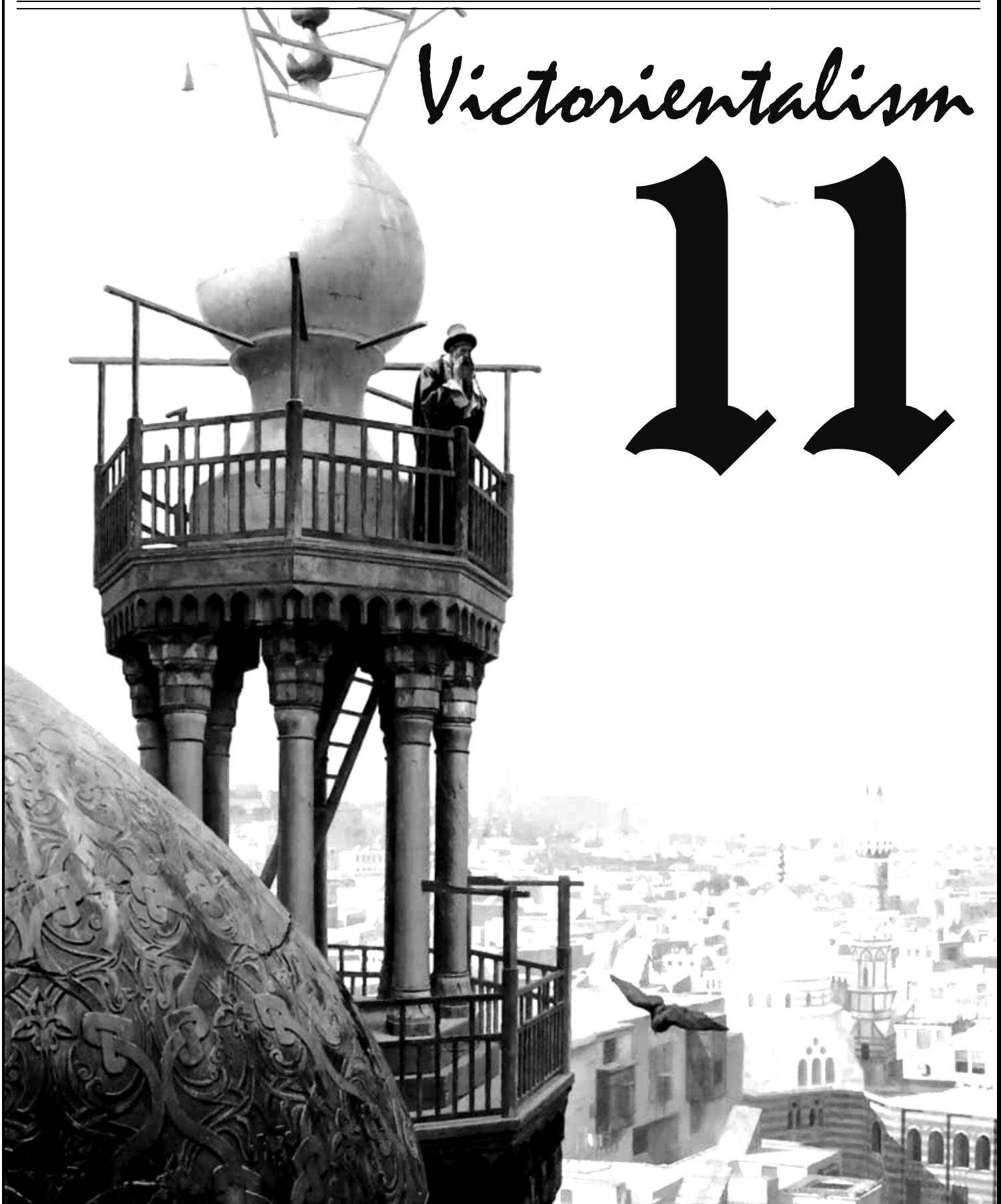
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Victorientalism

11



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EDITORIAL

For many centuries, the interaction between East and West has been a fabulous dwell for art and storytelling. From the days of medieval merchantmen to the era of the great white hunters of imperialism, to our modern day fascination with Japanese cybersculture and the much debated rise of China, the East has lingered in Westerners' minds as an irreplaceable image of otherness.

Unlike our present day of interconnectedness, globalization and what-not, up until the nineteenth century, the Orient was very much a place of mystery, inhabited by people alien to Europeans' experience, an exotic, cruel, and barbaric refuge for Western imagination. Critics of Orientalism have done much to cast shame upon our often patronizing and bizarre

representations of Eastern life and tradition, but fortunately for those incorrigible aficionados

of Oriental romance, steampunk allows us to reject the chains of reality and all the racism and guilt associated with it, to explore anew this imagined world of sultans and saber-rattling Islamic conquerors; harems and white slavery; *samurai*, dragons and dark, bustling bazaars frequented by the strangest sort of folk. Isn't this, after all, steampunk's very premise? To delve into a past that never really was. The Orientalists' world may never have

existed but its history is so powerful that up to this very, Westerners are smitten with it. With this issue, the *Gatehouse Gazette* is no exception.

As the yet undiscovered realms of Asia are so vastly different, so Victororiental steampunk must differ depending on where it takes place. The deserts of Arabia and the forbidden mountain ranges of Afghanistan may evoke visions of ancient citadels and fata morgana and deserted monasteries atop barren peaks; the jungles of India and Indochina invite adventurers to search for booby trapped remnants of lost civilizations while temples and palaces of spectacular wealth loom beyond, in the lands of Cathay.

In this issue, we, too, travel throughout all of the Eastern World, from Meiji Era Japan to Colonial India to Chinese magic in nineteenth century London.

There is non-Victororiental content on offer as well however, including an interview with Hugh Ashton, author of *Beneath Gray Skies*, an alternate history novel that is reviewed in this issue. There are your regular columns and a contribution from Sir Arthur Weirdy-Beardy, our correspondent in London.

As always, I would like to remind you that your input is much appreciated. Feel free to contact us if you wish to comment upon what's written here! ■



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Issue #9

Again, a gorgeous and marvelously written issue of the *Gatehouse Gazette*.

You know, I enjoy Boilerplate far more as a series of posters than as a story. I saw Paul [Guinan]'s display at SteamCon and was so impressed, but the book, while a lovely concept to play with alternate history, was only good. The posters though I am truly lusting after, especially the one of Pancho Villa and his Villaistas with the automaton. I do wish I had read it before we solidified our alternate history issue of *Journey Planet*.

My one ever trip to the UK (though I'm coming over again for Eastercon/Eurocon in April) featured a walk of the Science Museum's lovely exhibit, "The Making of the Modern World" with its lead curator, Doron Swade (better known as the lead on building the Babbage Engines and also for being my former boss) and seeing the trains there really made me appreciate the level of interest in keeping and maintain trains. My buddy (and co-editor) James Bacon did an issue of *The Drink Tank* about Trains which included a lovely look at a train museum and the old Boston Comet. It was fun stuff.

I've been in some serious arguments about the

Martini and related drinks. I did an entire issue of *The Drink Tank* about cocktails which is well-known around fandom as "The Cocktail Issue." There was a lot of talk about how a Martini must be made, but I am so very taken with the half-and-half martini, equal parts Vermouth and Gin. And for me, I like a twist of lemon peel instead of an olive. I know, I'm a heretic.

I wish I could have made it out to The Asylum. I've heard that the second edition is in the works and I might try and make it out, though it's something of a long-shot.

Again, a great issue and I'm happy I got a chance to sit-down with it and send some comments your way.

—Chris Garcia, editor, *Exhibition Hall*

Issue #10

Many thanks for the newest issue of the *Gatehouse Gazette*, issue #10. I very much like the layout of the magazine, a combination of easy-to-read type and wonderful illustrations and photos. Even the font work consists of the most easy-to-read fonts, most important for the clearest read. Some publishers and editors want to show off how many fonts they have, while most favored publications employ only one or two fonts.

Much has been written in the past about Howard Hughes' last days, fodder for the tabloid press, and other publications that should know better. Of course, given how it starts, in the lap of luxury and complete absence of want, Hughes' beginnings are of less interest, but yet explain his wealth, and his desire to explore what was feasible. We know more about how he died, and not enough about how he lived. I saw the Spruce Goose when it was on display in Long Beach when I was there in the mid-'80s.

In today's Cessnas, costumes such as the one that Hilde Heyvaert is wearing simply wouldn't be allowed.

Everything must be tucked in, nothing wearable can be loose, and the only thing on your head would be a pair of David Clark headphones. (Don't you hate it when reality intervenes, and ruins everything?)

A message to Mr Craig Daniel: I would be looking for something with some kick that I might be able to slip into a hot cup of tea. A little kick is all that's needed, perhaps half an ounce or so in a teacup. Even a little in your first cup would supply enough stimulant for the rest of the evening. For me, anyway.

I believe that when the annual Canadian International Air Show takes place at the Canadian National Exhibition in Toronto every Labor Day, it takes place with the idea of honoring America Earhart. I have never seen the Hilary Swank movie about Earhart, but I do intend to purchase the DVD when it is available.

Time to wrap it up and say thank you. I know how much effort and creativity it takes to create something like this, but I eagerly await issue #11. See you then!

—Lloyd Penney





Clash at Kagoshima during the Satsuma Rebellion, 1877

THE MEMES MEIJI JAPAN GAVE THE WORLD

During the early to middle Victorian era, Japan was in the late Bakumatsu (i.e., the late Tokugawa Shogunate, the Edo period) and the early days of Emperor Meiji's reign. It was still a rather unknown and almost mythical country with a feudal society and to European eyes very strange customs.

By MARCUS RAUCHFUß

As probably the only country in the world, Japan had until fairly recently managed to keep out foreign influences, most notably Christian missionaries, and thus preserved a unique and strong culture.

With the reopening of Japan, modernity set in. Japan westernized rapidly, industrialized its economy and also implemented a series of rather drastic reforms. All this turned the island nation from a feudal society into a modern power within less than a generation.

But it was not only the West which brought the industrial age to Japan. Knowingly or unknowingly, Japan started exporting ideas and images abroad. Some of these ideas have turned into cultural memes, have gained a life of their own and still influence how we perceive

Japan more than one-and-a-half centuries later. Words like *zen* and *geisha* summon distinct images in Western minds, but it is the warriors of feudal Japan, that had the most lasting impact.

In many cases the *samurai* has supplanted the knight as the staple noble warrior character and the *ninja* fills a niche that was previously not even occupied by anything found in the West. Yet, the *ninja* is one of the most visible icons of Japanese culture with many incarnations in different related shapes from classic novels to manga and anime to cyberpunk.

A number of events during the early Meiji Restoration fostered images and to a certain degree prejudices regarding Japan, which helped shape the image of this nation as a whole. The most famous of these events was probably the

Satsuma Rebellion which pitted traditional *samurai*, opposed to reform and intend on defending their traditional way of life, against industrial age conscripted troops. The revolt ended in a final charge of the *samurai*, *katanas* held high, against modern infantry.

Here we have a real life blueprint for a scene often depicted in manga and anime: heroic warriors challenging better equipped foes with traditional weaponry. In the manga cases, the *samurai* (or the character cast after their image) often emerge victorious.

The *samurai* had been masters of Japan for more than three-and-a-half centuries. They had evolved their own unique culture, fighting style and weaponry. Everything the modern world had to offer must have been anathema to them. Their only option was to fight or perish—or both.

Such devotion to ideal had not been heard of in the Europe since the days of the, romanticized, knights of medieval times.

For reasons unknown to me one aspect of *samurai* culture is not commonly understood in the West: the fact that most *samurai* were highly appreciative of art. Quite a few were accomplished artists themselves like the poet Yokoi Yayū and the painter Watanabe Kazan. I dare speculate that the artistic interest of the proper *samurai* did not sit well with Western stereotypes of the manly warrior and was therefore ignored in favor of the *katana*-wielding killing machine; an image that is one-sided and inaccurate.

Another popular image which has permeated global modern culture to an astonishing degree is the *zen* bowman, or more precisely: the *kyūdō* archer: a man who hits his mark ten times out of ten in total darkness. Variations of this character can be found today in literature, from classic to manga, to dystopian science fiction like *Equilibrium* (2002). The protagonist here is able to shoot all opponents without ever looking where they are and at the same time dodge their bullets simply by going through previously trained motions.

I guess many a person would not even be aware of the origin of this sort of character and would be surprised to discover their Oriental origin. The image has become so common in various media, it has gone native.

Apart from warrior characters, their weapons have become equally iconic. The *katana* is a staple in many action-oriented TV series and movies from *Highlander* (1986) to *The Animatrix* (2003) to *Underworld* (2003). It is the non-firearm of choice of heroes and villains alike. Less commonly in use but equally iconic is the *shuriken*, the weapon of the *ninja*.

The *ninja* have outgrown their



Sixteenth century *samurai* by Utagawa Kuniyoshi

Japanese roots even more than the *samurai*. They have always had an air of mystery about them and Japanese folklore attributed supernatural powers like shape shifting and invisibility to them. The modern *ninja* is found in all sorts of settings, again ranging from classical literature and movies set in the right time to role playing games to science fiction. The figure has become so pervasive that everyone will be able to identify a *ninja*. There are sites like askaninja.com and other manifestations far removed from the original.

A more contemporary incarnation of the *ninja*, and a particular dieselpunk example at that, is the main character in the movie *K-20: Legend of the Mask* (2008), a masked thief with almost supernatural fighting prowess battling crime and corruption in an alternative 1940s Tokyo.

Which brings me to my next point: the steampunk and dieselpunk subculture would lose a

great deal of material and popularity if it was not for two very popular contemporary Japanese art forms: anime and manga.

Especially anime has produced a number of iconic steampunk features, most notably *Steamboy* (2004) and *Last Exile* (2003) but also *Castle in the Sky* (1986) and others.

As a very heavily web-based subculture, steampunk and its dieselpunk offshoot benefit heavily from the global connection that makes influx from the East so simple and cherished. Over the web, ideas flow from Japan. What was started in the times of Meiji Tenno continues up to this very day with Otaku culture in all its forms.

The most prominent elements of Japanese culture have entrenched themselves in global culture and have been with us longer than you might think. It did not begin with Sony and Nintendo; it began when Japan opened itself to the world in the late nineteenth century. ■

SERIES 'PUNKNESS ONLINE

An overview of what's new at the premier steampunk and dieselpunk websites and communities.



Josh Pfeiffer of Vernian Process and Gilded Age Records

"As a longtime member of *Dieselpunks* and a fellow member of the New Promethean mindset, Josh takes us into the mind of Vernian Process."

<http://www.dieselpunks.org/profiles/blogs/josh-pfeiffer-of-vernian>



Time Warp Living

"A retro movement where both men and women have taken radical action to escape what they see as the hectic grind of modern life. Past eras had their share of difficulties. Could it be that these timewarpers have overly romanticized the past, or were those times really better than our own? You decide."

<http://timewarpliving.ning.com/>



Daybreakers: Diesel Bloodsuckers

"*Daybreakers* spins the vampire craze on its head and creates a world where not only do vampires populate and rule almost the whole world, but it also brings a bona fide diesel feel to its world."

<http://flyingfortress.wordpress.com/daybreakers-diesel-bloodsuckers/>



Fasten Your Seatbelt

"In his dreams, asleep or not, of an alternate dimension with this place called Diesel City, where Dan Everyman was the skilled, happy pilot of one of the numerous, regular flying bus of the metropolis, expertly maneuvering his beautiful machine along the Yellow Line N°78 all day."

<http://www.ottens.co.uk/gatehouse/fasten-your-seat-belt>

Also of interest: March 20 is Obscura Day, <http://atlasobscura.com/obscura-day> / New steampunk blog at <http://thesteamblog.wordpress.com> / Visit <http://www.teslacon.org> for information about Wisconsin's TeslaCon 2010 / Our take on steampunk politics at <http://www.ottens.co.uk/gatehouse/steampunk-politics-anno-2009>

We have seen Damascus, O my beauty!
And the splendor of the Pashas there;
What's their pomp and riches? why, I would not
Take them for a handful of thy hair!—Bayard Taylor, "To His Horse"



Gustav Bauernfeind, *Gate of the Great Umayyad Mosque, Damascus (1890)*

COLUMN THE STEAMPUNK WARDROBE

Hilde Heyvaert takes the reader on a tour of steampunk and dieselpunk fashion every issue.

For centuries now Westerners have been fascinated with Oriental fashions. Within the steampunk movement this is no different, and a beautiful merge between the well loved Victorian style and the fashions of the East has come into existence, known as Victororientalism.

Victororiental fashion, just like many other historical based fashions, is one that requires some research. Fear not, you will not have to become an expert in costume history. But you should make some effort if you wish to pull off the look.

Not only does one need knowledge of the Victorian fashions but also of the Oriental styles if you wish to



mix the both together.

Any country from the East will do really, so you can augment a gentleman's military uniform with elements from *samurai* armor; devise a steampunk outfit that incorporates a *kimono* or even come up with a street urchin look that includes a *cheongsam* or *hanbok*.

It all depends on which country you wish to base your look on, and then researching what their traditional dress is. Once you have done that, it is a matter of incorporating both the Asian and the Western into a wonderful Victororiental outfit that perfectly suits you personally. And while the Japanese influence in Victororiental fashion is no doubt the greatest, the Japanese is by no means the only Asian culture that you can use to put your ensemble together. Any country from that Oriental parts of the world will do wonderfully really.

Should you wish to go for a more modern or less historically accurate outfit (or if you just don't have the time or energy to do research into traditional Asian garments) you can always watch Asian costume movies (like *Hero*, *The Curse of the Golden Flower*, heck, even *AmeriAsian* movies as *Forbidden Kingdom* will do) and combine the costume influences from those with a Western movie.

Those that would rather keep their inspiration more demure can always stick to traditional Victorian fashion but make some of the garments out of a typical Asian print such as the well known dragon print brocade. There are a great many fabric sellers out there offering all kinds of fabrics with traditional Eastern prints, ranging from brocades to cottons, so with a little searching I am certain that anyone can find something they love.

As with everything, accessories are important. Do not forget to see what kind of jewelry was popular in the country of your choice so that if you wish, you can incorporate some of that in your outfit as well. Of course if you prefer to stick with more traditional steampunk accessories and jewelry that works fine too. As long as it matches your outfit, all is well.

So whether you wish to go for an all-out mix of two worlds, or prefer to incorporate elements via more subtle touches such as statement jewelry or fabric prints, with some research a fabulous Victororiental outfit is within your grasp. ■

PHOTOGRAPH @ 2010 DRAYKE LARSON



・皮のタツ
・赤いカス

▶毛皮のカラーと小さいボーが可愛らしいムード ◀枯葉色

カチーフの萌えるような色が新鮮な印象

ツツ アカセントをどこか良

ツト・ネツカチーフなど、若
アクセントで ◀小さなテーラード
気ないスースを着こなすオ
ヤレの本格
が登場！

にダブルボタン…水々しいセルリアンブルーで若さをひきたてる親しみやすい服…

EAST MEETS WEST IN CINEMA

By SIGURJÓN NJÁLSSON

The realization, which becomes more potent as multi-national co-operations increasingly fund films abroad, has created in the film studies community a critique that there cannot be a truly "national cinema." These transnationally produced films are also often marketed globally, or at the very least within the region. And with the pan-global appeal of Hollywood, it is certainly tempting to proclaim the death of national cinema. Nations don't make films for themselves but rather for *both* a domestic and international audience. This is a

If there is any art form that is truly transnational, it is cinema. There are few other arts that are so embedded in the relationships *between* nations.

primarily economic concern—with the high cost of film production, a global appeal will increase ticket sales to help cover costs and hopefully create profit.

Japanese cinema is hardly an exception to this. It is widely screened abroad, and often its perceived "Japaneseness" is not a *detraction* for international audiences but rather the *appeal*. However, this contradiction, that

apparent national specificity creates global appeal, raises a point that the issue of "nation" still exists. Even if nations may not really

exist anymore, the concept of "nation" does live in the minds of spectators. Many people like Japanese films precisely because they are perceived to be "Japanese" and "different." I therefore agree with Björn Nordfjord's assertion in his chapter in *The Cinema of Small Nations* (2007) that national cinema is not dead, but is rather undergoing a change. These are no longer national films made for a domestic



Scene from *Rashomon* (1950)

audience, but rather national films made for a *transnational* audience. They not only reflect how a nation sees itself but also how it wants to be seen by others.

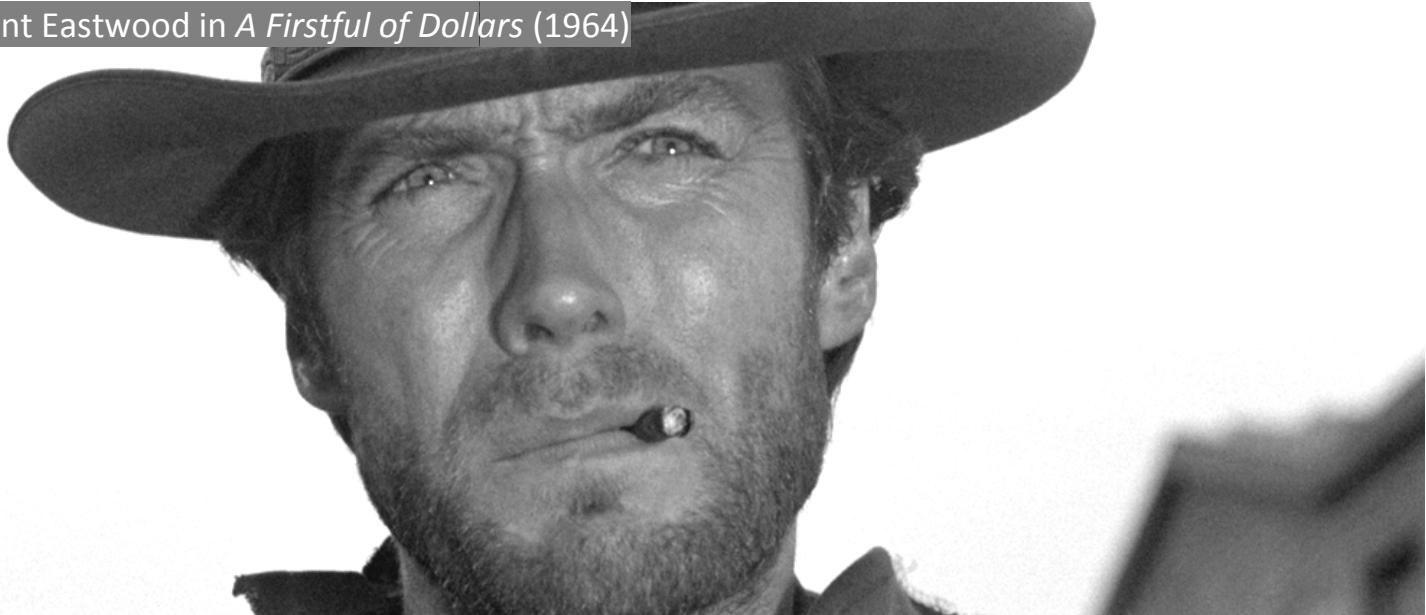
Of course, this debate is a rather new development in film studies, while *chanbara* (*samurai* films, literally "sword fighting") are not. *Jidai-geki* ("period drama"), the larger genre of which *chanbara* is a part, certainly enjoyed a heyday in the 1950s and '60s. Many of these films garnered great success both in Japan and the West, such as Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon* (1950), *Seven*

Samurai (1954), and *Yojimbo* (1961), as well as Masaki Kobayashi's *Harakiri* (1962) and Hiroshi Inagaki's *Samurai Trilogy* (1954-56). It is clear that, while the concept of "nation" had yet to come under heavy scrutiny by film scholars, and while many Japanese films were primarily funded domestically, there was still an element of global appeal. Some may argue this appeal was solely in the novelty of the exotic, but I think that oversimplifies the situation. It also fails to explain why, over fifty years later, the films listed above can still

draw captive audiences in the West. The issue here is that there is something fundamentally "global" about *chanbara*, and in order to understand what that element is, we must look at one area of apparent cross-cultural communication and influence. What I mean, of course, is that the American Western influenced the Japanese *chanbara* or "Eastern," which in turn influenced the Italo-Western or "spaghetti Western."

Kurosawa often admitted the influence of John Ford and the Western on his films, in particular

Clint Eastwood in *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964)



Yojimbo and its sequel *Sanjuro* (1962). It is also worth noting that *Yojimbo* was remade into Sergio Leone's Italo-Western *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964), and *Seven Samurai* also saw an American Western remake, *The Magnificent Seven* (1960) by John Sturges. It is evident that there was some sort of dialogue occurring between the East and the West in regards to genre cinema. However, I feel some authors, such as Fenin and Everson in their book *The Western: From Silents to the Seventies* (1973), are all too quick to simplify *chanbara* as "the Western

"made in Japan." They call *Seven Samurai* "the most striking achievement... for the Western," and while they may admit that "the resulting film [is] not merely an adaptation of the Western, but a meaningful and realistic inquiry on its own," this comment feel more like the exception than the norm. Furthermore, their overall thesis, that *chanbara* and the Western share "the language of Frontier Epic, with its counterpointing of Black and White, Good and Evil," belies a lack of understanding of the difference in dynamics between the

two genres. For while most Westerns may end with a duel between the "good guy" and the "bad guy," many *chanbara* feature a duel between two equals who must fight over matters of honor and bravery. Our protagonist's success is often bittersweet, for his adversary may have been a friend or old compatriot. For example, *Harakiri*'s dramatic final duel occurs between two friends—Tsugumo, who is our disgraced and ostracised protagonist, and his old duelling partner and friend who is still bound to the feudal lord. This

antagonist is not evil, nor does he bare any hatred towards his old friend. The duel is a ritual of honor, for as he is still bound to his lord, he is honor bound to confront Tsugumo, who has shamed the lord by refusing to commit *hara-kiri* (ritual suicide). This scene is endemic of *chanbara* as a whole, which is far more concerned with the feudal idea of honor than with the struggle of good and evil. As Silver states of feudal Japan in his book *The Samurai Film* (1977), "early fighting was marked more by ritual than ferocity."

Of course, Silver stands in opposition to Fenin and Everson, with a general feeling that *chanbara* is based more on older representations of *samurai* in Japanese art than on the American Western. Where Fenin and Everson were quick to draw parallels between the two genres, Silver is likewise quick to point out their differences. He states, "In its most recent manifestations, the association of extreme violence and polarized characteristics with *chanbara* may suggest analogies to archetypes of expression found elsewhere, in the American Western or in the gangster film; but for earlier forms, the figure of the *samurai* is more often rendered in an 'epic' style." Of course, he does go on to discuss the relationship between the Western and *chanbara*, but always with phrases such as "the main elements are simple and *might* be explained by an analogy to an Occidental genre, the Western" (emphasis added). His thesis is, essentially, that *chanbara* are something entirely of their own creation, and are only attributed influence from the Western due to the ethnocentric viewpoint of scholars in the West. While I find Silver's argument more compelling

and well-formulated than Fenin and Everson's, and certainly having a degree of validity, I also feel it oversimplifies the situation to a dualistic "either *chanbara* are just Westerns 'made in Japan,' or they are not influenced by the Western at all." There is very little wiggle room in his argument, which does not take into account the fact that art is always influenced by numerous sources. While his claim certainly bears some truth—that being that the change in the portrayal of the *samurai* in film from the old "epic" style to the more violence-oriented style akin to the Western is due to the socio-political climate of post-war Japan, where they were forced to reconsider the *bushido* code—it fails to recognize that this can also be seen as an explanation for why Japanese filmmakers would show some interest in the Western. The question becomes "What came first, the chicken or the egg—the coincidental similarities or the direct influence?" Of course, like the chicken and the egg, it does not really matter which came first, as it is undeniable that *both* exist and each one begets the other. It's easy to see that similarities in style and situation create the possibilities for influence, and that influence likewise creates more similarity. After all, influence is not a direct relationship, but a cyclical one. His argument perhaps stands best as the assertion that influence ultimately starts with a point of *similarity*. The Japanese saw in the Western something they themselves were exploring, and so they borrowed from it. In the same way, later makers of Westerns and Ital-Westerns saw something similar in *chanbara* that they were already

doing, and they too began to borrow.

All this brings us back to the crux of the matter: How are the genres of the Western and *chanbara* alike? It's not an easy question to answer, but I am perhaps most inclined to agree with Bjørn Sørensen assertion, in his essay "Hrafn Gunnlaugsson—The Viking Who Came in from the Cold?" published in *Nordic National Cinema*, that all action-oriented genres (including for him the Icelandic saga tradition) share "the emphasis on action, the predominance of certain motifs, and the stability and apparent predictability of the characters... This is a reminder that the apparently close ties... to a large extent is founded on narrative

"The Japanese saw in the Western something they themselves were exploring, and so they borrowed from it."

structure rather than on historical markers. ... Referring to the life-worlds of geographically and historically different societies, they nevertheless share a fictional world built on the principle of heroic action.". These genres appeal to us globally because they are not told through national languages but rather through strong, primal actions. Perhaps it is the screen's ability to show us the intensity of human existence without fear for our lives that gives these genres their greatest impact and greatest strength. We can experience the primal extremeness of life from the safety of the theatre. Plus, it gives us a commonality across cultural lines—we all love of a good action flick. ■



W.E.B. Du Bois, 1904

A major development of the nineteenth century was the emergence of world's fairs, all of which served to entertain visitors and impress them with the technological and cultural advances of Western nations and their colonies which increased exponentially—and dazzlingly—after the 1851 Great Exhibition hosted by England under the auspices of the Prince Consort. By the 1900 World's Fair, which was held in Paris, there had been eleven other expositions, held in such places as Vienna, Philadelphia, Sydney, New Orleans, Barcelona, and Chicago, which introduced a variety of inventions and cultures to awed visitors.

Though there were three more expositions of significance by the dawn of World War I (St Louis in 1904, Seattle in 1909, and San Francisco in 1915), the one held in 1900 was unique in that it was the first and last fair to bridge the gap between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This was also the pinnacle of imperialism, and the "nadir of race relations in America." After witnessing the successful campaign for the inclusion of African-Americans in the Chicago World's Fair of 1893, African-Americans viewed the Paris Exhibition as another avenue to promote the progress of their people in the thirty-five years since the

THE NEGRO EXHIBIT

By SANDRINE THOMAS

end of slavery. The year before the fair, W.E.B. Du Bois, a noted sociologist and activist for African-Americans, began to collect material for the display, and focused on "creating charts, maps, and graphs recording the growth of population, economic power, and literacy among African Americans in Georgia." In conjunction with Daniel A.P. Murray, assistant to the Librarian of Congress, Du Bois was able to assemble a large collection of written works, which included a bibliography of 1400 titles, 200 books, and many of the 150 periodicals published by black Americans.

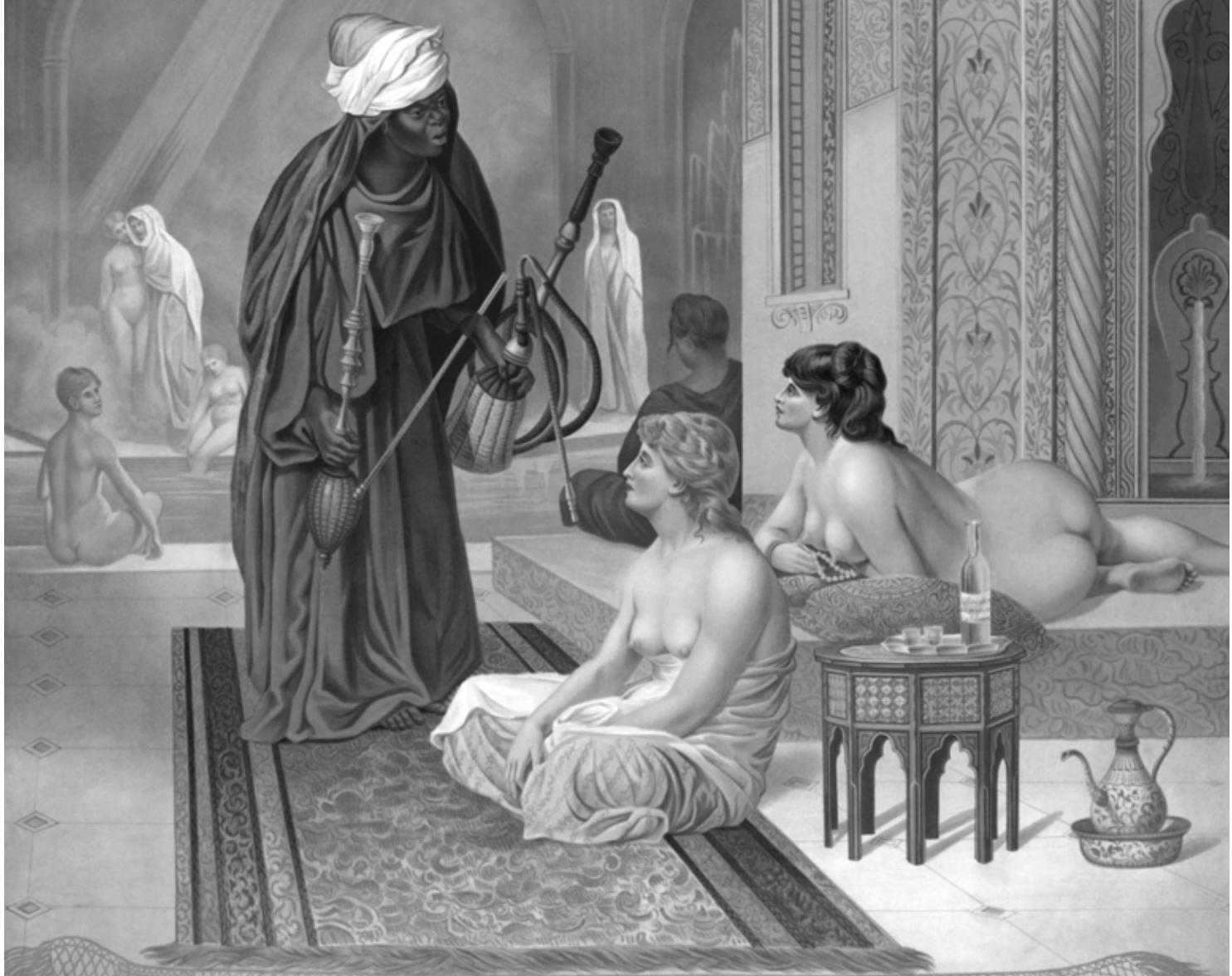
Du Bois stated that the objective of the exhibit was quadruple, and by displaying it he hoped to illustrate "the History of the American Negro, the Present condition of the Negro, the Education of the Negro, and Literature of the Negro." The project was backed with a \$15,000 budget appropriated from the American government and amounted to numerous artifacts, including "musical compositions, books by African American authors, and the poetry of Paul Laurence Dunbar, their award-winning display of photographs, books, models, maps, patents, and plans from several black universities, including Atlanta, Fisk, Howard, Hampton, and Tuskegee, showed the world African Americans "studying, examining, and thinking of their own progress, and prospect."

One highlight of the exhibit "utilized nine model displays to depict the progress of Negroes from slavery to the present day. The models began with the homeless freedman and end[ed] with the modern brick schoolhouse and its teachers. Finally, to illustrate the increase in population of the race and to demonstrate other contributions, there were charts showing population growth, the decline in illiteracy and a record of the more than 350 patents granted to black men since 1834." Du Bois stated, concerning the exhibit "we have thus, it may be seen, an honest, straightforward exhibit of a small nation of people, picturing their life and development without apology or gloss, and above all made by themselves." ■

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TRADE MARK.

BELLE OF NELSON
OLD FASHION
HAND MADE SOUR MASH
WHISKEY.



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REVIEW **BENEATH GRAY SKIES**

Adventure in a world spared the American Civil War but imperiled by an unholy alliance. By Damon Molinarius.

Beneath Gray Skies is a self-published alternative history novel, set in a world where the American Civil War was not fought, but the United and the Confederate States of America (CSA) exist in uneasy balance.

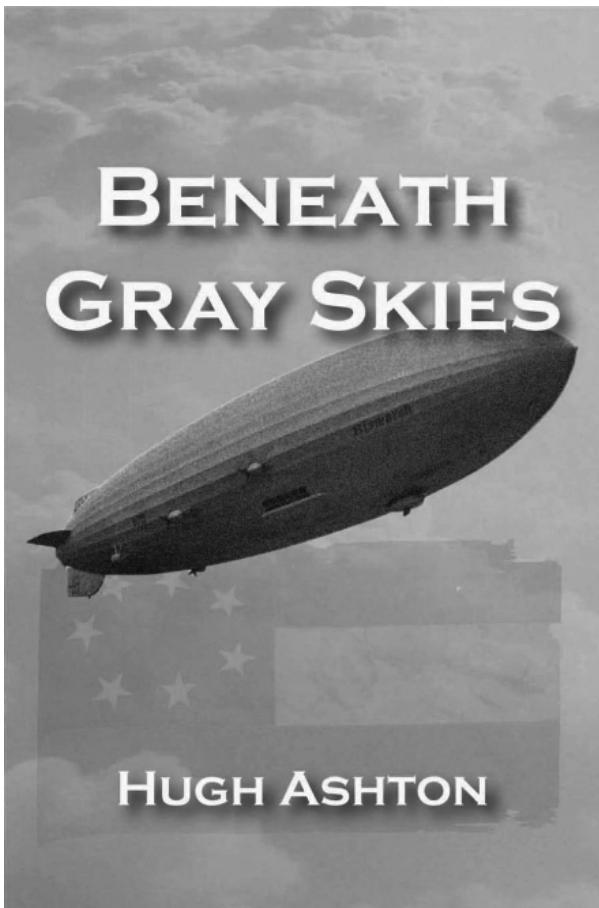
The author, Hugh Ashton, is a journalist based in Japan, but hails from the United Kingdom. As he himself has stated, he became interested in the “what if” after starting the book as a “why” in an attempt to make sense of the changes to the United States during the George W. Bush presidency, whereby the country was becoming something dislikeable while his American friends were not. By attempting to discover where the aggressive and intolerant tendencies which the Bush Administration brought to the fore came from, Ashton came to understand that the less desirable characteristics of the American national character had their roots in the South, and these values were embedded in the heart of G.W. Bush, and therefore his administration.

None of this is apparent in the book, other than in the brief introduction by the author. Indeed, grand narratives are not the focus. Rather, Ashton concentrates on the minutiae, upon the motives and actions of small people within the bigger social and political machinery. Rather than undertaking the exploration of this alternative world and its development from its diversion point of the siege of Fort Sumter—whereby a decision is made by President Lincoln’s US

Secretaries of State and for the Treasury not to engage the forces of the Secessionists and to withdraw Union troops—the author moves

Nazi Putsch unfolds in the background, as the narrative concentrates upon the actions of three individuals within a small group of Nazi Party officials and Confederate soldiers which are blocking German civil servants’ entrance to their workplace, and separating some—who later are discovered by the protagonists to be Jews—from others who are merely turned away. There is no conception of the wider implications of this event until the later analyzing of an official report in Whitehall. Indeed, while the reader may be aware of the enormity of the events as they unfold, the author’s focus keeps the story tight and enclosed through personal, rather than grand, narratives.

This is partly due to the author’s style, whereby events tend to unfold through dialogue and conversation, rather than descriptive passages. The effect is two-fold. Firstly, it creates an empathic connection with the characters, giving the sense of being party to the events as they unfold, and an understanding of the motives for characters’ actions, bringing the reader more closely into the story. Secondly, when the action is presented through descriptive narrative, it has a greater impact. This is most impressively seen in the description of the maiden flight of the inorganic character central to the plot, that of the airship *Bismarck*. Ashton was not an expert on the mechanisms of airship flight, but his description is illuminating and exhilarating,



forward to the 1920s, and the putsch of the National Socialist Party in Germany. Indeed, events between the secession of the southern states from the Union and this point are rarely alluded to, and the focus of the entire novel, while dealing with world shifting events, is on the small scale, individual, lives and actions of a few characters. The

bringing to life the sensations which those party to flights of these incredible *zeppelins* must have felt.

The story itself is relatively simple. After years of isolation, the Confederate States of America is an authoritarian state, with President Davis III operating a corrupt and inefficient government, and an almost bankrupt state premised upon continued slavery. While large, the army is ill equipped, with no machinery to speak of, and there is no air force. Slavery is holding the Confederacy back, being inefficient and preventing innovation, but the costs of abolishing slavery are prohibitive. The CSA is isolated from the world, with no access to technology, and no trade possible for the natural resources which the CSA holds. The border with the USA is tightly controlled, although war is unlikely between the two states. With no way out of this dire situation, President Davis entertains a small, mustachioed leader of a German political party. An agreement is made—in return for providing covert Confederate troops to assist in Hitler's Putsch, the new Germany will provide technical

expertise to enable the CSA to modernize and to extract the natural resources which in turn would be sold to Nazi Germany to allow their militarization. This agreement is made easier given their mutual perception of race.

As well as the prospect of a remilitarized Germany, and of a stronger CSA under Davis, it is this latter issue of race and the risk of spreading slavery to Europe which underpins the motives of the majority of the characters, from the British secret service and their counterparts in Washington to the Confederate officers conspiring against Davis. The characters themselves are well drawn overall, although national stereotypes do tend to underpin them and some of their individual stories are a little unbelievable, and the interplay between fictional and historical characters is well done. Their voices come across clearly through the use of dialogue in driving the plot forward. Whilst most reviews of the book centre upon one character, David Slater, a young Confederate soldier, as the main protagonist, this is a misconception. The plot is

driven by a few fictional characters, some of whom are not introduced until midway through the book, despite their importance in the story. The roles of the main characters tend to shift as the story progresses, and one—Brian Finch-Malloy, British spy—disappears from the plot for a while before reappearing to play a key part, and Christopher Pole changes his role at least four times—from slave, to British spy, to American spy, to icon of changing attitudes towards African Americans. Importantly, the geographical character of Cordele—a small town in Georgia—changes throughout, from being a small, dead-end minor settlement where Slater and Pole originate, to the locus of the new relationship between Germany and the CSA.

Unusually, there is no core enemy character. Yes, Davis, Hitler, and Goebbels are present, but they are not central to the story, although Goebbels is more so than the others. Most of the characters tend to be on the "right" side—even the Germans who, other than a very small minority, are not Nazis, and disagree with their ideology. This latter aspect is vital to the climax of the story, which is focused upon the flight of the Nazi hierarchy on the *Bismarck* to the CSA to meet with Davis and his cabinet in order to concretely recognize relations between the two states. The different threads of the tale—from the directions of the British Cabinet in London, the actions of the joint intelligence services in Washington, the plotting of the various elements in the CSA, and the political position of the captain of the *Bismarck*—come together inexorably in Cordele, Georgia, where the airship is to land. As the threads come together, the pace and inter-cutting

USS Akron over Manhattan, 1930s



of the action increases, and the novel becomes a real page turner.

From a steampunk perspective, there is not much here to engage the enthusiast of machinery or of alternative technologies, or of the presence of future technologies in an alternative past. Everything present in this alternative world was present in the real one. Its application and exploitation is very different however. Whereas the resources of the southern states were put to good use historically, most effectively during the First World War, this is not the case with the split nation not involved in the European conflict. As a result, the CSA is poor, with no opportunity to

exploit its resources, and the USA is weak, meaning the British Empire remains the dominant force on the world stage. There are no great new innovations developed, no pan-continental railways, and powered flight is not widespread from the limited perspective of the novel—the CSA has no aircraft, for instance. Socially, the CSA is rooted in the mid-nineteenth century, and the USA's population lacks African Americans as most remain in the South.

This is a different novel in terms of approach and style to most alternative history fiction, and to steampunk fiction in general. However, it is engaging and

entertaining, and highlights the role of individuals in the outplaying of history, which does lie at the heart of both steampunk and alternative history fiction. Ashton will shortly be publishing a new novel set in Tokyo in 2008, and has just begun research on his third, which will be centered upon an alternative world where Lenin had been killed in the assassination attempt of 1918, with an altered USSR and alternative Communist leadership. This latter novel will feature a steampunk or dieselpunk technology which will drive the plot, and so will be more firmly placed within the steampunk genre, and I, for one, am anticipating it with relish. ■

INTERVIEW HUGH ASHTON

Author of Beneath Gray Skies, about his novel, alternate history, and steampunk. By Damon Molinarius, Nick Ottens.

Were you aware of steampunk before or during the writing of this novel?
I'm a little isolated from popular culture, living in Japan, but I had heard of steampunk! Sure—it's a genre I actually enjoy quite a lot as movies (*Wild Wild West* and *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*) and as a general concept (I enjoyed playing *Crimson Skies* on my computer, for example—I guess that counts as steampunk or dieselpunk). However, when I read some steampunk books, I find that they are too concerned with being steampunk to be totally enjoyable as stories. That's true of a lot of genre books—I'm not into vampire stories, etc. Typically the writing is poor, and the characters are little more than cardboard cutouts moving against a superbly crafted background. *Avatar* springs to mind—a beautiful film, with decent acting, but on the whole, poor script and

plot. Most genre fiction is like that, so it's not a put down of steampunk per se.

How do you suppose your novel fits in with the general concept of steampunk?

As you say, it uses real-world technology for the most part. But the plot hinges on technology that isn't found in today's world, and it's set in a fictional past, so in that

sense it's "heliumpunk" at the very least. There are some obvious messages in *Beneath Gray Skies*, but I do hope that they don't hit you over the head too hard, and in that sense, I hope it's more than a genre novel, be it steampunk, alternative history or whatever.

Why did you take Fort Sumter as the break from real history, rather than another event or point in time?

I wanted to keep fairly close to the real timeline, as I wanted a recognizable pseudo-history. The Southern states had threatened secession in the event of Lincoln's election, and Fort Sumter was the tipping point. This was really the make or break test of Lincoln as a leader—would he give in to the noisy abolitionists, or would he give in to the demands of the South? He was damned if he did, damned if he didn't, whatever his decision. My timeline shifted him



out of the decision-making role, and pushed the responsibility onto a more cynical, if equally pragmatic and practical, politician, Henry Seward. I could have taken Dred Scott, or the Nebraska Compromise or something like that as the breakpoint, but Buchanan and his cabinet are not nearly so well-known as Lincoln, and most people seem to regard Sumter as the effective start of the Civil War. Anyway, that's my amateur historian's view.

You make reference to events between this break, but shift the action straight to the 1920s—were you not tempted to explore some of these events more fully?

It was tempting, yes, but I'm leaving them for prequels (smile). More seriously, I thought that too many diversions into the byways of my alternative timeline would distract the reader from the main plot. They're there as foundations to the big story, but not as decorative flying buttresses. The whole business of the South attempting to take the Danish Virgin Islands would make an intriguing vignette in itself, but wouldn't add a lot to the book I wrote. There's a whole book that could be written on the Great European War (my timeline's WWI)

of course. And I am certainly looking at the first few years of the Bolshevik revolution (which gets several mentions) as a setting for my next alternative history novel, which will involve a twist in the history that we know.

The alternative world has the same technologies as the real world—was this deliberate, and, if you were to write the novel again, would you be tempted to introduce some new technology, as you intend to in his new novel?

I didn't want to change the airship technology too much, as the real thing is marvelous and miraculous enough. My LZ127, the *Bismarck*, does differ from the real LZ127 (*Graf Zeppelin*) in a number of ways, though: first, the *Bismarck* was designed for helium, the LZ127 was, of course, hydrogen-filled. Next, the Blaugas neutral buoyancy fuel engines were actually available for that time, but I didn't want to use them (Germany's engineering might easily not have been up to the development). The radio equipment on the zeppelins was actually inside the control gondolas, rather than separated, but I wanted the *Bismarck*'s radio outside the hull for dramatic effect (the engines were mounted in this way, of course).

And, of course, *zeppelins* didn't carry parachutes. The *Bismarck* is more the size of the *Hindenburg*, or R100/R101 than the *Graf Zeppelin*, and I think it's doubtful if something that size could have been constructed at that time.

There are a few other places where I diverge from our technology timeline: for example, the use of shoulder-fired rockets in the Confederacy, as the result of the lack of metallurgical techniques to produce artillery.

But there's no point in my having the South developing, say, nuclear power. They wouldn't have had the engineering skills to back up the science. Face it, though the Merrimack class was a potential war-winner for the South (it could have destroyed the Union's blockade capability, deployed intelligently), they only had the resources to produce one of the class, and I didn't see their economic condition improving too much over the next few years. Nor did I want to invent some sort of fantasy technology with no relation at all to our real world. It's possible that the relative lack of oil in the Union would have slowed the development of the automotive industry a little—at least as far as internal combustion engines are

The bombardment of Fort Sumter, April 7, 1863. From *Civil War Harper's Weekly*, May 2, 1863



concerned. Maybe they could have run on alcohol, or even used Stirling engines fired by something else. But things like steam-powered airships are absurd—you only have to do the mathematics to realize that. In any case, as I say, real-life airships are (were?) almost as amazing as anything we can dream up.

Do you think dialogue is more important than description in driving the plot?

Yes, definitely. The way people speak is as important as what they say. We do, after all, communicate with words, and I think dialog does help bring a sense of immediacy that reported speech can't do as well as the manner of speech providing a clue to the character, and hence to the ploy. To write simply, "it was decided at a meeting that..." doesn't give the same life as the dialogue that led up to that decision. Of course, you can overuse dialogue, but I do regard it as a plot driver as well as a character development tool. I've said it before, and I'll continue to say it—Elmore Leonard and John le Carré are my favorite dialogue writers—they say so much about a character by making him or her say only a few words, and thereby drive the plot forward.

What was the inspiration for the contents of the box?

Without giving away the identity of the contents, I needed something with a touch of mystery, and with some real value. These contents actually do exist—they were in Berlin up to 1945—and turned up in Moscow in the 1990s, after the collapse of the USSR. It suddenly hit me that these existed in real life, and would make a good lightweight valuable cargo for the *Bismarck*. The back-story in the museum is fiction, of course.

Do you think focusing on small, relatively unimportant people and their actions enables more possibilities as an author than telling the story through a grand narrative of events, or by using real characters as his protagonists?

Well, *Beneath Gray Skies* was a bit of a novelty for me. Typically I write from a single point of view, either the omniscient eye in the sky, or first person. To dodge around in the way I did was a new thing in my writing. It's not a unique device, of course, by any manner of means—John le Carré does it very effectively sometimes in the *Smiley* novels, and Len Deighton does it with his historical novels—but in *Beneath Gray Skies* there would have been no single character who could have seen all the ramifications of the plot, and there would have been too much offstage reported action with the God's Eye view.

As to the status of the characters, yes, I like the idea of using relatively minor characters to tell the story. They don't have the big picture that the major players do and they, together with the reader, discover what's going on around them. If you want a good example of this parallel discovery process (in a rather bad book) look at James Clavell's *Shogun* where the protagonist learns Japanese by osmosis at the same time as the reader.

Your new novel which you are researching is also set in the 1920s—are you drawn to this period for any specific reason, and would you be tempted to set a story in another period. If so, which one?

Why do I like the 1920s? It was an interesting time—the old Europe had broken up and the social and political orders were changing very fast. New ideas, such as Fascism and

Bolshevism, were coming on the scene. The beginnings of the European welfare system were coming to fruition. And it was an immensely fruitful age in the technological sense. Cars, planes, and of course airships, were being developed with some stunningly new ideas at an immense speed. Look at what we have now. The US Air Force is still flying C-130s and B-52s which are much older than the crews flying them! Fighter designs take fifteen years from drawing board to deployment. In the '20s, you could almost specify a fighter and have it delivered to the squadrons inside a year. That's just aeronautics, of course. Other areas of technology were almost as fruitful. Look at the wonderful land speed record vehicles, for example. John Cobb's Railton Special, or even the amazing White Triplex.

Other interesting times? The 1950s, for sure. The Cold War and the threat of the Bomb and the jukebox culture. A fascinating psychological era. And the mid-Imperial Roman Empire (say 100-200AD) could be interesting—I'd like to explore links with China and the East at that time—such links existed, but it would be fascinating to see what would be the world picture if the Romans had possessed technology that eliminated slavery. The whole economy of Europe and probably the world would have been different.

Will you return to this particular alternative world for a sequel?

Quite probably—but it may be a prequel rather than a sequel. I like "Bloody Brian" as a character, and he may re-appear. Likewise David Slater, but he will come in a sequel. A mid-twentieth century not dominated by the USA is always worth exploring. ■

RICHARD BURTON

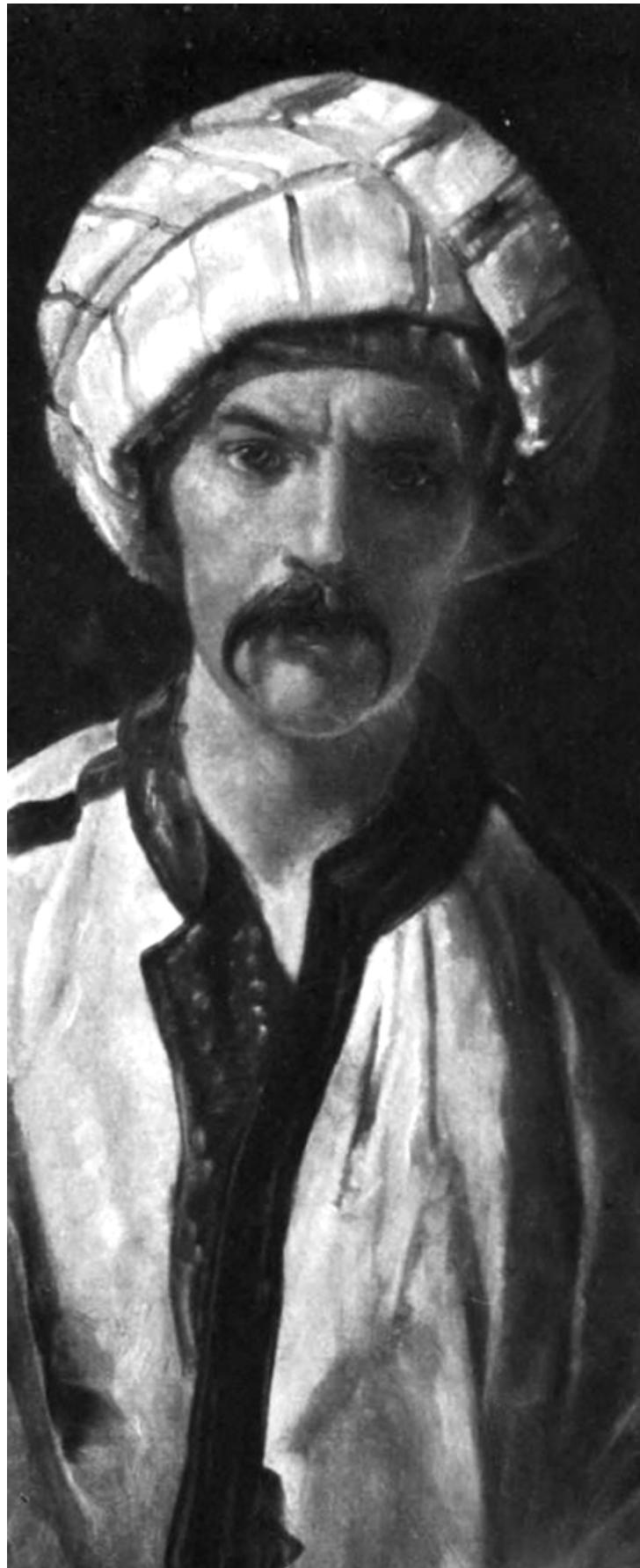
By NICK OTTENS

For centuries, the riches of India had lured foreigners to the subcontinent and the British, initially, were no exception. Merchants made fortunes there; administrators made careers. Unless succumbed to illness, the Briton who returned from India almost without exception returned a wealthy man.

Many willingly left for the East for this reason and oftentimes, they developed a deep affections for its people and their customs. Although with the advent of Modern Imperialism, the British became evermore convinced of the necessity—indeed, their destiny or “burden”—to reform and modernize India, there remained Britons who expressed great interest in India’s many and diverse cultures. “Going native” as well as acquiring the local tongue remained popular with officers and explorers alike who set out to retrieve the roots of India’s civilization. Richard Francis Burton (1821-1890) was one such man.

Burton began his career in the East as a soldier in the Company’s Army where he was nicknamed “the White Nigger” due to his peculiar enthusiasm for India’s religions and traditions. He had intended to fight in the First Afghan War but arrived too late to see action. Nonetheless, “Ruffian Dick” acquired a reputation for his demonic cruelty as a warrior. He was more informed of Asia’s histories than many Orientalists in Europe and didn’t shrink from reminding them of it. His journals and stories were based on personal experiences and structured as pilgrimages which revealed both his ability to absorb himself in a native cultures and his capacity to contemplate them dispassionately.

This was an explorer who submerged himself in a foreign way of life; who shared their lives; spoke their languages; and understood their faith by becoming one of them. He grasped Eastern life and thought, prepared as he was to abandon his Westernness to comprehend a strange, new world. ■



REVIEW *GHOSTS OF MANHATTAN*

Crime and mystery in 1920s New York. By Marcus Rauchfuß.

After having done a review on Lavie Tidhar's *The Bookman* I was eager to see how *Ghosts of Manhattan* would measure up against it.

At first I was not too impressed. The plot seemed too transparent: it seemed obvious after about fifty pages who the eponymous Ghost was and who was probably the villain. But I was wrong about the latter and realized that I measured *Ghosts of Manhattan* along the wrong standards. *Ghosts of Manhattan* is not a mystery tale; it is straight forward pulp. After I got that, the novel suddenly became very enjoyable.

Ghosts of Manhattan is a dirty, gritty, action-packed noir tale. The hero, The Ghost, is haunted by memories which are only hinted at until the finale and from which he takes part of his strength to fight crime. The New York he is trying to protect is a city with the Mob like a festering wound at its core. It is the New York of the Roaring Twenties, but darker.

Along with the Ghost comes the full range of characters you would expect in a noir setting. The driven, untouchable cop in the form of Donovan. Celeste the beautiful jazz-singer from a seedy bar, the hero's love-interest with a dark secret. Countless expendable goons and The Roman at the head of the pyramid of crime, terrorizing the city for his own nefarious ends, which ran far deeper than I expected. The characters are credible within the setting despite and maybe because of the clichés which they are. The Mafia wants to bribe the good cop. When money fails they threaten violence against him and

“Excellent entertainment for a dark, rainy evening.”

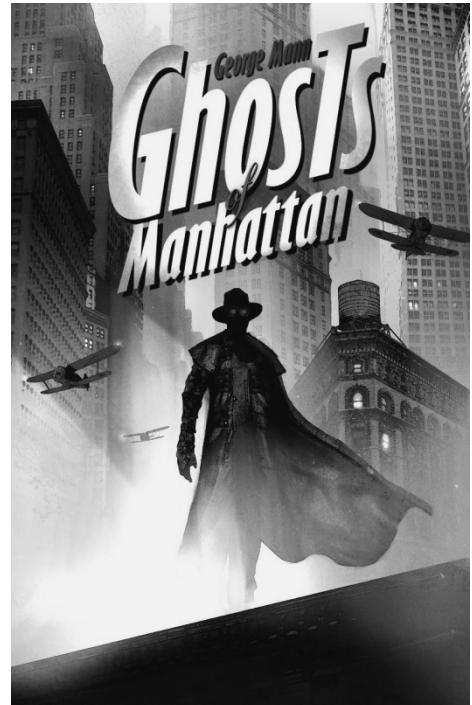
his wife. The second-in-command of the Mob is a sleazy, demonical rat, the good cop a tough but fair guy who can take a beating.

In best pulp fashion, the action starts quickly and keeps going at a very fast pace right to the last chapter. The tension also never leaves this novel, there is always something happening. Fistfights, shoot-outs, mad chases across the rooftops of New York, every page holds another thrill.

However, this *noir* tale goes further and deeper: There is the steampunk, or maybe in this case, dieselpunk background it is set against. We get steam-powered cars, rocked-accelerated biplanes, Tesla coil power generators and creatures of strange science. This all adds flavor to the story, from the technology used by all protagonists, from weapons to heavy equipment, to the history of the world and the reason the Great War came to an end and what led to a Cold War between the United States and the British Empire.

There are also elements to the triad of principal characters; The Ghost, Celeste and The Roman, that you would not get in a normal noir setting, but I may not say more, lest I spoil it for the reader.

Now for the few downs of the novel: As I noted earlier, the plot is a little too straight forward and transparent for my tastes. Also, The Ghost resembles Batman too much. This may be excusable by the fact that you do not have too many options when it comes to pulp heroes with a dark secret or



mysterious past, still, the parallels are too obvious.

Also (spoilers ahead!) *Ghosts of Manhattan* effectively has two separate endings. The first one comes with the, unfortunately inevitable, loss of Celeste. The second comes a few pages later, with the discovery of another mystery that was already hinted at in the margins of the novel. I would have much preferred a more ambiguous demise of Celeste, something that had made a rescue possible, but who knows what the future holds in a world where reality is not all it seems and there are forces at work beyond mortal comprehension.

All in all *Ghosts of Manhattan* is an enjoyable read. It is pure pulp entertainment. Once you get into the flow of the narrative, it is hard to put it down again. It drives you ever onward to a seemingly inevitable conclusion that is, at the same time, not inevitable at all. Best enjoyed with your favorite piece of Jazz or Swing playing in the background. ■

THE STORY OF CHUNG LING SOO

By CRAIG B. DANIEL

The night of March 23, 1918, was a big moment for stage magicians around the world. It was the night one of the best-kept secrets in the world of magic was revealed.

At the time, a popular turn of phrase in London was to respond to an impossible request with "Who do you think I am, Chung Ling Soo?" It was a reference to the most famous magician of the age, a frail Chinese gentleman who spoke no English and so remained silent on stage, communicating with the press only through an interpreter and with his audience only through his art. He was not the only Asian magician performing in the west at the time, and in fact had carried on a long-running professional rivalry with

Ching Ling Foo since 1905 (possibly seriously, but more likely planned by the pair of them as a mutual publicity stunt); both billed themselves as the "original Chinese conjurer" and decried one another as impostors, and they performed many of the same effects—which they both claimed that the other had stolen from them. Of particular fame was one of Ching's own invention which Chung also performed flawlessly: the production of a large bowl of water from a piece of cloth. This effect is discussed in Christopher Priest's novel *The Prestige* and shown in the film adaptation, and is used to highlight the deception required by the fictional Alfred Borden's dedication to his art—for, in reality, both Chung and Ching were in peak physical condition and able to carry the fishbowl between their knees throughout their act, but both affected great weakness to disguise the secret from the public.

On that fateful night in 1918, Chung's performance incorporated several of the acts which had earned him fame, performed in the graceful and mostly-silent style which he made famous. Chung's performances were famous for a majesty and grace that impressed the audience well beyond the impossibilities they featured—an approach common in the nineteenth century which would give way after the Great War to a faster-paced approach to

magic in which gentlemanly performances of elegant wonders gave way to the edgier effects of a style still popular today, such as P.T. Selbit's "Sawing Through A Woman" (premiered in 1921). In 1918, Chung and Ching were among the best performers of the style of magic whose popularity had not yet waned, and this is reflected in Chung's final program. His performance, which followed that of several other music-hall acts, lasted an hour and contained just eight effects—a slow pace, by modern standards.

After introducing himself with a bow and a simple vanishing knot effect, the magician performed a torn and restored handkerchief effect whose description reads like something that might be exhibited only to children today—but the manner in which he presented it was that of a gentleman performing for gentlemen, rather than a clown for children, and the audience reportedly loved it. This was followed by the magical production of two flowering trees, in pots, from which fresh flowers were picked and given to members of the audience. This was followed by an exhibition of the Chinese linking rings, which is today among the strongest survivals of the Victorian approach to magic. Metal rings link and separate by magic; while it is obvious to any spectator above the age of eight that at least one of the rings must have a cleverly-concealed gap in it, many performers will focus more on using these rings in a beautiful routine akin in its own way to juggling than

Chung Ling Soo



on trying to pretend that every ring must be solid.

Among Chung's more popular effects was the one which followed—a female assistant (specifically, Chung's wife) was brought out onstage and covered by a metal cylinder. When Chung Ling Soo clapped his hands, the cylinder was removed, the assistant had vanished—and, in her place, was a large orange tree, bearing real fruit. The assistant then entered the stage again from the wings to take her bow, and Chung moved on to his next effect. In this, he lit several strips of paper on fire, then ate both the burning papers and the candle from which they had been lit. Next he proceeded to daintily eat a large quantity of cotton, periodically pausing to blow smoke and fire out of his mouth. Finally, he pulled back out of his mouth a great length of ribbon and a slender barber pole. Gathering the ribbons together in a pile, he produced from them a large Japanese umbrella. This was followed by Chung's assistants ceremoniously introducing a cannon to the stage, which was fired over the heads of the audience. The cannonball vanished in the air, and where one might expect it to have landed, Chung's wife appeared in the audience.

None of these effects, with the possible exception of the cannon, are particularly brilliant or startling in their techniques. Rather, it was Chung's inimitable stage presence which raised his fortunes above that of his rival Ching Ling Foo and the other magicians working in London at the time. Living as he did in an age before modern recording technology, all of Chung's performances are lost to us save for the commentary of his contemporaries, which agree that his presentation of these effects was

nothing short of breathtaking. He was also a genius at self-promotion, and considering British views on then-recent events in his Asian homeland he needed to address certain issues in his act. This led him to the effect with which the performance that spring evening was concluded—a piece Chung referred to as "Execution by the Boxers."

After a brief pause in the magic act in which a Japanese man performed a stunt with swords, Chung's interpreter appeared onstage to introduce this final piece of the night's performance, explaining that his employer had been in China during the Boxer Rebellion. Since Chung Ling Soo was a great admirer of Britain and a sympathizer of the crown, he was captured by the Boxers, who put him on trial and sentenced him to death by the firing squad. So great, however, was the power of the marvelous Chinese conjurer that he was able to survive, and now he would demonstrate precisely how he had done so.

While the exact details of this routine varied from one show to another, it was always an instance of a classic piece of magic which dates back to the late sixteenth century, when it was invented by a French performer named Coullew of Lorraine. In spite of a reputation for being one of the most dangerous effects in the entire art of magic, it continues to be performed today, most famously by American magicians Penn and Teller. Always a crowd favorite, for Chung Ling Soo it was a special trick, to be performed only on certain occasions—which of course made it feel that much more amazing to those audiences lucky enough to see it.

Chung Ling Soo's performance went like this: three Chinese men

dressed in the uniforms of Boxer soldiers marched onto the stage, each carrying a muzzle-loading rifle, while Chung is carried back onto the opposite side of the stage. Three audience members came up—most likely chosen for their familiarity with firearms; Chung was fond of playing up the political angle by including at least one uniformed soldier to represent Britain in the conflict that was being played out by proxy on the stage. Chung's assistants marked three bullets, verified that the gunpowder offered was real by touching a little bit off, and then loaded the rifles before returning them to the Boxers and taking seats on the stage to observe. Chung Ling Soo stood, defiantly, before these would-be executioners, and held up a small porcelain saucer over his heart to shield himself from their bullets.

All at once, the three members of the firing squad fired their guns and Chung suddenly staggered back and dropped to the ground as he sometimes did, ready to conclude the effect by proudly getting up, holding out his saucer, and spitting out onto it the three marked bullets. These would of course be confirmed as the three which had been loaded into the guns, but this was mostly a formality—by the time they were out of the magician's mouth, the audience would know that Chung Ling Soo had defied death once more. But on the night of March 23, 1918, the conjurer did not get back up. Before leaving the theater, the volunteers from the audience and the people in the first few rows heard him exclaim, "Oh my god! Something's happened, lower the curtain!" The greatest stage magician in the world had been shot.

The act ended then and there, and the audience left the theater

stunned by everything they had seen. Each miracle had seemed greater than the last, until the final impossibility proved beyond even the greatest wonder-worker they had ever seen. Chung Ling Soo was rushed to the hospital, where he died. His wife revealed the secret of the bullet catch to the coroner, who discovered that one of the gimmicked guns used in the act had not been cleaned properly and had malfunctioned; instead of separating the charge of gunpowder from the bullet and detonating it harmlessly, the gun had fired. The magician's death was ruled to be an accident.

And as for Chung Ling Soo's last words, which those who heard them were quite certain had been spoken in flawless English? It was only this that led to the public learning what most stage magicians of the time already knew and kept to themselves—that Chung Ling Soo's real name was William Robinson, and while his features happened to look Asian enough to pull off the deception, he was born in America. Far beyond merely feigning physical weakness so he could believably perform Ching Ling Foo's goldfish bowl, he had lived a public life as his stage persona, even refusing to speak English in public so that any imperfections of accent would not betray his secret.

Many *fin-de-siècle* magicians claimed to have learned their techniques in real or imagined travels to exotic lands—Arabia, Egypt, India, China, Japan—and presented their effects in a style designed to encourage the audience

to imagine that they were seeing a piece of genuine Oriental mysticism. A particularly striking example of this trend was American magician Harry Kellar's "Levitation of Princess Karnac," which he presented as a recreation of a wonder he saw performed in India; in fact it was a creation of Western engineering. Within a few years his successor on the American stage,

Thurston leaned down and whispered a coarsely-worded admonition not to speak a word of what they had seen.)

But after a less-than-successful career as "Robinson, Man of Mystery," William Robinson took this sort of Orientalism one step further, claiming not that he was an American who had studied in China but that he was himself Chinese.

Modeling his act largely on that of Ching Ling Foo (who was actually a native of Beijing), Robinson incorporated a greater number of Western illusions into his art, building a show that was carefully tailored to English tastes while presenting the fiction that it was a purely Chinese act of the sort his audiences thought themselves hungry for. Thanks to his own dedication and the willingness of his colleagues to keep his secret within their profession, Robinson was able to maintain his deception and present a sincere but ultimately patronizing homage to the Chinese magical tradition. While from today's perspective Robinson's act is uncomfortably close to the blackface minstrelsy that was only recently starting to fall out of fashion by the time of

his death, he is also remembered for giving the world some of the most elegant performances in the history of magic, for being one of twelve magicians thus far to have died in connection with the bullet catch, and for nearly two decades managing to preserve the greatest illusion in the history of the art—the illusion of Chung Ling Soo, the original Chinese conjurer. ■



Howard Thurston, was performing the effect with a novel twist—he invited a child onto the stage to witness the marvel up close, and explained that by ancient Indian superstition anyone who touches a floating princess is granted one wish. (The child, who was in a position to see the wires which supported the levitation, was shocked into secrecy when

COLUMN STEAM FROM THE OLD SMOKE

Brigadier Sir Arthur Weirly-Beardy reports from Londontown.

The following is a transcript of an interview recorded in the far-flung future of the year 2010. Those from that era who wish to hear the recording for one's self should visit *The Imperial Empyreanaautical, Cryptogeographical & Chrononautical Society's* location upon the International Network of Linked Computational Engines, and their excellent *Chromophonographic Chamber* at thesteampunkclub.com.

Today, I have the pleasure of interviewing a world famous collector—ladies and gentlemen, all the way from 1885, please welcome Brigadier Sir Arthur Weirly-Beardy. Good evening. And “Hello, listeners at home”.

How do you do, Sir Arthur. Now, I understand that you have a somewhat unique collection. What exactly is it that you collect?

Holes.

I beg your pardon?

Holes. I collect holes: big holes, small holes, knot holes, worm holes, fox holes, mole holes, man holes...

Fascinating. Have you been doing this for very long?

My whole life. I discovered my first hole when I was but a naked babe: but I started my collection at the age of thirteen, with a hole I had made myself in a conservatory window with a stray cricket ball. I still have it.

The cricket ball?

The hole. Ah, I remember it fondly (one never forgets one's first hole). I looked at it there (ignoring the angry face of the bloody-nosed

gardener behind it) and rather than seeing the negative pessimistic lack of glass, saw instead the positive optimistic hole which had replaced the broken shards. (Much rather have a hole than a lot of broken glass, wouldn't you?)

Over the many, many, many years since that fateful day, I have amassed an extensive collection of well over eleven holes—some of which are worthy of historical note. These include the hole in King Harold's spectacle lens, the hole from Nelson's tunic, the infamous Black Hole of Calcutta, the lesser known Red Hole of Madras, part of the hole from the side of the *Titanic* (the other half of which is sadly still under the North Atlantic), a hole from a leaf from a grassy knoll in Dallas...

Do you have any examples I could perhaps take a look at?

What? Oh, yes... here's one of my two most favorite holes, the ones I keep in my wallet. Please, do be careful with it, it's rather delicate... Dash it all, it's not here! Must have fallen out through the other hole. I really should stop carrying two around together at the same time. And there's a hole in my pocket too, now. Oh well, there's always a bright side.

So, collecting holes can be a difficult business at times?

Oh yes. Quite.

I recall, on one occasion in



1922, I was—erm, sorry, *will be*, no, *was*—collecting an ancient, valuable and considerably large hole from an archaeological dig in Egypt's Valley of the Kings. Despite their protests that it might be subject to the “Curse Of The Pharaoh,” I eventually managed to convince the local tribesmen to carefully load the excavated hole onto the back of a truck that I might began the long journey home to England with my prize. Whether the “curse” is true or not, disaster dogged my trail all the way... Rum business, all round.

A cursed hole, you say?

So the natives would have one believe. Either way, the first noticeably rum incident, of many, occurred before we had traveled more than a few miles from the dig site. We were on the dirt road north to Alexandria, not far from Beni Suef, when the hole became dislodged and fell from the back of the truck. I noticed it fall from my own Rolls Royce ‘Silver Turin’ travelling in convoy behind (or rather, my chauffeur did, as I had finished off the rum and was having a little nap at the time) and shouted at the driver of the truck to stop. He

did so, reversed back up the road in order to collect the fallen load, promptly drove straight into the hole, and was never seen again!

Nor was the damnable truck. The wallahs had to carry the blasted thing by hand from there on.

The whole way? Couldn't you have carried it in your car?

What? And risk getting a hole in the Rolls' trimmed leather upholstery? Are you quite mad?

*Sorry. Do carry on.
I will.*

Good.

Quite. And do stop interrupting me when I'm in my flow.

I won't.

Good. Erm... Oh... Where was I?

Tell me, do you still have the hole?

Whole what? What are you implying?

No, no. The hole... H-O-L-E.

Which one? I've got more than eleven, donchaknow.

The Egyptian one? With the supposed curse?

Oh that one! Yes, well, sadly not. The ship I'd chartered in Port Said to fetch it back to Blighty mysteriously sank *for no apparent reason...* as did the other twelve I charted... Until I ran out of sailors to persuade, at which point I abandoned the whole project.

Hole Project?

No, no. Whole project... W-H-O-L-E. Of course, collecting holes is not a challenge these days. Market forces, mass production, and all that.

How do you mean?

Well, during the Second World War, every Tom, Dick and Harry jumped on the hole bandwagon. The market became saturated, you see; more holes about than people needed, so they simply lost their value. Then the post-war industrial giants of Germany and Japan started all that mechanized factory business, mass production, and the situation only got worse. In my day, they were a sought after and valuable commodity, nowadays they are ten-a-penny; when I began my collection, one had to go out and find individual holes for one's self. Nowadays, one simply contacts a holesaler.

And it gets worse: not content with the holes the Good Lord gave us, some damned fool boffin's in Switzerland—where they put holes into everything, even cheese—have devised a mechanical contraption that will generate man-made holes on an unprecedented scale! (Even if they are the greatest ever seen on earth.)

Ah, you're referring to the The Large Hadron Collider which lies in a tunnel beneath the Franco-Swiss border near Geneva which many fear will result in the creation of an artificial Black Hole...

Am I? Well, if you say so... It's playing God, I tell you. Wouldn't happen in Britain. (Damned-fool Swiss. Whole bally country's cuckoo. That's what happens when you allow Germans and Frenchies to crossbreed...)

Relax. It's perfectly safe. On 10th September 2008, the proton beams were successfully circulated in the main ring for the first time—

Yes, sending shockwaves throughout the, erm, the whatjamacallit? Timespace...

Continue...

Um... You know, the so-called "Very Fabric of Reality".

(Why 'very' fabric? Fabric isn't quantifiable. It either is, or it isn't. One never says, "I say, those trousers are 'very fabric', aren't they...")

Anyway, the Swiss made holes in the very fabric, like little Alpine moths. Creates merry hell with those of us who like to travel through Time, let me tell you. Practically impossible to visit this part of history without getting out at 2006 and walking the last couple of years. All because of that damnable Hadrian's Colander. Bloody thing's faulty.

Well, operations were indeed halted due to a serious fault between two superconducting bending magnets. There, you see.

Due to the time required to repair the resulting damage, and to add additional safety features, the LHC isn't scheduled to be operational again before September 2009.

No, that's an early estimate. 2012 is when it all goes wrong.

I'm sorry?

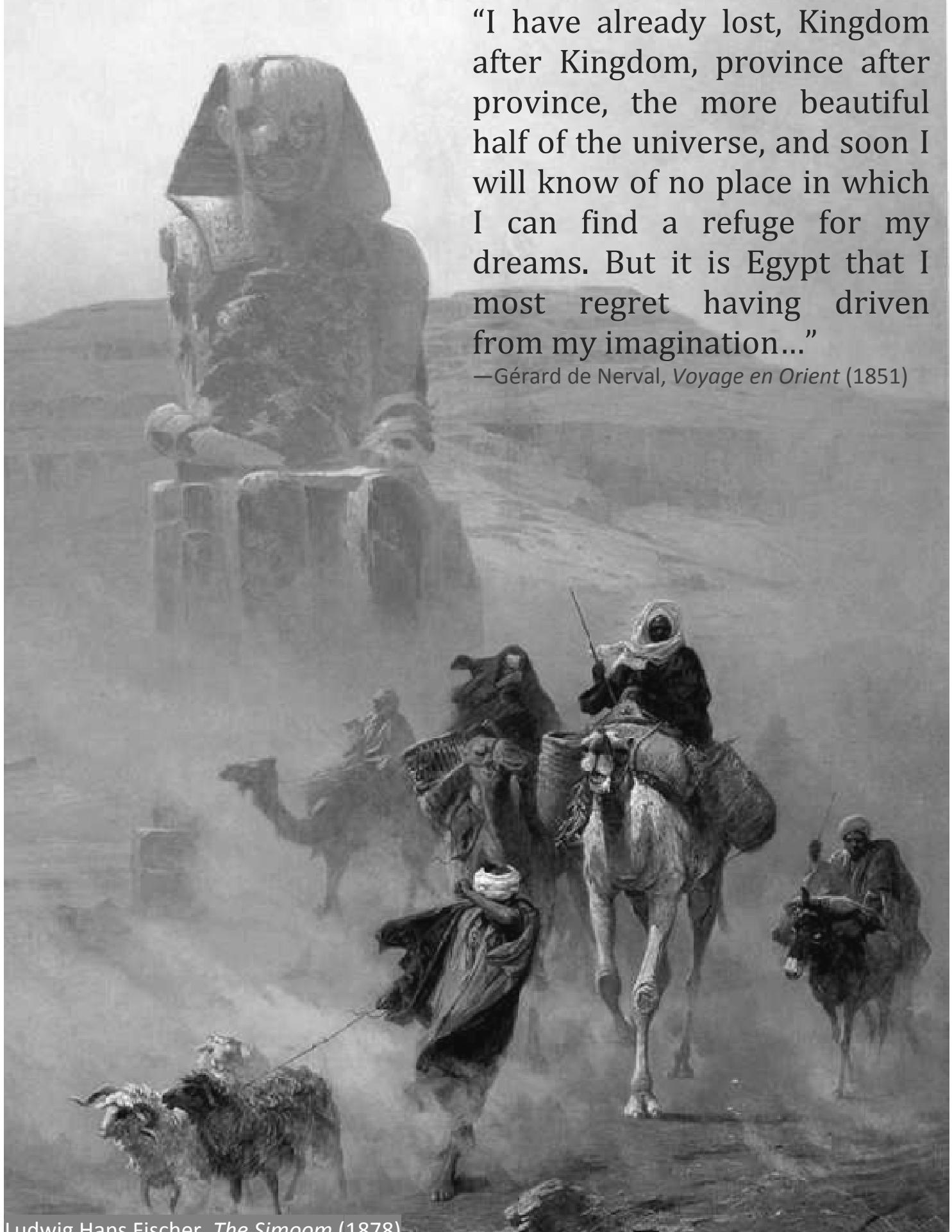
Nothing. Forget I said it. Yes. But mine is still the finest collection in the hole world. Even finer, when it's complete.

*And what do you plan to do with your collection, once it is complete?
Display them?*

Well, when I have enough of them, I shall sew them all together and make a net.

*Sir Arthur, good evening.
Is that it? The whole interview?*

Get out. ■



“I have already lost, Kingdom after Kingdom, province after province, the more beautiful half of the universe, and soon I will know of no place in which I can find a refuge for my dreams. But it is Egypt that I most regret having driven from my imagination...”

—Gérard de Nerval, *Voyage en Orient* (1851)