

# GATEHOUSE GAZETTE

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# Halloween in Disneyland Paris

BY HILDE HEYVAERT

I CAN YEAR YOU ALL WONDER: how is Halloween in a Disney theme park at all steampunk? Well let me explain to you all just how steampunk has crept up into Disneyland Paris' Halloween celebrations and you'll know exactly what I'm on about.

In Main Street USA, an area known for its historical origins in the American Victorian age, they have lovely Victoriana inspired Halloween decorations up. The huge portal decal of Pumpkin People motoring about leisurely in their classy old timer is no doubt the main eye catcher. It looks as though it could have escaped straight from a Victorian magazine.

Main Street USA, together with Discoveryland, will also be the performance stage of Compagnie Rémue Ménage's *Fous Volants*, a steampunk cabaret style performance group, which traditionally moves through those two areas during Disneyland Paris' Soirée Halloween on October 31.

Frontierland, an area known for its Victorian style Western buildings, has exploded into Halloween central and is redubbed "Halloweenland" for the time being. If you look closely, you will see that quite a few of the pumpkin people statues are dressed up in garb of that time.

And while we are on the topic of the pumpkin people: They also come in meet and greet characters and quite a few are of the steampunk variety. Pumpkin Dot, the youngest of the group, looks like a Victorian ragdoll (and carries one). There's a

Victorian police officer, a baseball player from those days, a mad scientist and Pumpkin Mom is dressed up like a Victorian Lady of good standing. Guests can interact with them to their heart's desire and have their photo taken with them, which always makes for a fun steampunk Halloween keepsake.

They are not the only ones in appropriate costume. The cast members' (Disneyland Paris employees) Halloween uniforms are under the influence too, as they are all looking like cheerful Halloweenified ragamuffins.

As you no doubt have realized, Disneyland Paris does a grand job of putting on a big Halloween celebration each year. They have special shows, decorations and encourage guests, even adults, to come to the park dressed up the entire Halloween season (outside the Halloween season people older than thirteen years of age are not allowed to dress up, although they are pretty lax when it comes to alternative styles as steampunk as long as your outfit isn't looking to costumy to them).



And to top it off they have all the abovementioned steampunk bits and pieces incorporated into the whole affair. For steampunks looking to go celebrate Halloween somewhere outside their own, or a friend's home, I can heartily recommend this event, and especially the Soirée Halloween. (Please do note that the Soirée Halloween is a special event and you'll need extra tickets on top of the normal entrance free to attend.)

My sole regret is that this year there are less decorations on Main Street USA as the previous years, and that the Studios Park is still not participating in the Halloween festivities (bar one special event on October 30). •



# Battle of the Sexes? How steampunk should be informed by feminism

BY AMANDA STOCK

DURING THE REIGN OF VICTORIA, the women's suffrage movement began, and, shortly after her death, culminated in women receiving the same legal right to vote as men. It was a landmark period in history for thinking about gender equity. Informed by such works as *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, written by Mary Wollstonecraft almost a half century prior to the Victorian era (1792), it spawned

lessons to heart when building our steampunk community.

Strong women abound in steampunk: lead characters as Briar Wilkes from Cherie Priest's *Boneshaker* (2009), editors and contributors to publications such as C. Allegra Hawksmoor of *SteamPunk Magazine*, podcasters including Emmett and Claude Davenport of The Clockwork Cabaret, and community leaders such as Lee Ann Farruga of Steampunk Canada and Steampunk Ottawa. Unlike some areas of geek culture which have historically been male dominated, the steampunk scene has fostered a whole host of talented, creative women. Yet one cannot rule out the ever present danger of geek misogyny, a common phenomenon within the science fiction community at large, in which female participants are made to feel less knowledgeable and their contributions are belittled or opinions silenced.

All too often, the women of sci-fi are portrayed as nothing more than sex objects in order to appeal to an audience assumed to be mostly male. Although this has been changing for the better over the past decade or so, the impact of this mentality still presents itself in the behavior of some fans that believe women are there for show: the intelligence and passion of the woman behind the corset don't matter, so long as she looks good standing at the front of an airship. The effects of this attitude are evidenced at almost any convention you care to name: even the most

creative costume being worn by a man is likely to receive reduced attention and photograph opportunities compared to a less interesting but more revealing costume being worn by a woman. Now, this is not to say that a case cannot be made for steampunk as a great equalizer (men are encouraged to embellish their costumes and dress as dandies), but that is beside the point. The point is that women in the steampunk community still run the risk of being marginalized and treated differently from men, much as the women of the Victorian era were.

One of the uniquely problematic areas of steampunk that is different from other sci-fi is the fact that with adopting a historical time period you become inextricably tied up in the culture and social mores of the past. They will inform how people in the community role play around each other, for better or for worse. This has been used to great effect in reimagining the course of history, speeding up the acquisition of women's rights and smashing oppressive Victorian social expectations. However, it also presents a more acceptable way for casual sexism to be perpetuated: using misogynist attitudes and tropes, even jokingly, to establish the period paves the way for actual misogyny to proliferate. For instance, having women specifically come down with "the vapors" or faint at the first sign of danger (or anything else for that matter) doesn't break down Victorian sensibilities; it maintains them. Unless such motifs are carefully set up in a satirical context, and even sometimes when they are, they can lead to the appearance of spaces



Illustration by Steve Argyle

such well known feminist thinkers as John Stuart Mill, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps Ward and Florence Fenwick Miller. In spite of the oppressive atmosphere created by a focus on eradicating "vice" via the Comstock laws and other means as well as the caricature of women as weak and feeble-minded by many scientists of the day, women were making strides towards being recognized as equal to men and having autonomy. This is the historical background which inspires much of steampunk fiction, and we should take its

The intelligence and passion of the woman behind the corset don't matter, so long as she looks good standing at the front of an airship.

that permit hatred towards women.

All of this fits into a larger framework of the "retrosexual" agenda. This conservative movement appears to have picked up steam (excuse the turn of phrase) within the past few years, and its major tenets are to reclaim strong dichotomous gender roles from times before the current "post-feminism" era, back when "men were real men" and "women were ladies". Such sentiments are present within the steampunk community at large, often flying under the radar, but really coming across in the widely espoused view that steampunk is helping to bring back proper manners. This is a ubiquitous attitude among steampunk enthusiasts, and it can range from the harmless and laudable use of more common courtesy than one normally

encounters in this day and age to the troubling use of different standards in conduct towards people of different genders. Male steampunk enthusiasts seem to have a propensity for holding doors exclusively for women (preferably with a certain amount of pomp and "After you, Madam") unrivalled by any other group of science fiction fans and this sort of action is defended to the very end by those who consider it to be proper. "In Defense of Holding Doors for Ladies in the Name of Chivalry" could have been the unofficial subtitle of half the arguments made in the "Steampunk and Gender" thread in the Great Steampunk Debate. For some reason, chivalry has been romanticized and celebrated by contemporary culture to the point that many do not recognize its sexist underpinnings. The entire concept of chivalry is founded upon internalized misogyny, removing women's agency and traditional, chauvinist views of what causes women to be perceived as "honorable". This argument has been made exhaustively elsewhere, so I will not belabor the point and instead direct you to the suggestions for further reading at the end.

#### *Suggestions for further reading :*

Courtney, "Science fiction, geek culture and feminism," *From Austin to A&M* (March 12, 2010)

[austintotamu.blogspot.com/science-fiction-geek-culture-and-sexism.html](http://austintotamu.blogspot.com/science-fiction-geek-culture-and-sexism.html)

Amanda Hess, "On chivalry and internalized misogyny," *Washington City Paper* (May 18, 2010)

[www.washingtoncitypaper.com/blogs/sexfist/2010/05/18/on-chivalry-and-internalized-misogyny/](http://www.washingtoncitypaper.com/blogs/sexfist/2010/05/18/on-chivalry-and-internalized-misogyny/)

Sady, "Sexist Beatdown: The retrosexual trend-piece writing code edition," *Tiger Beatdown* (June 4, 2010)

[tigerbeatdown.com/sexfist-beatdown-the-retrosexual-trend-piece-writing-code-edition/](http://tigerbeatdown.com/sexfist-beatdown-the-retrosexual-trend-piece-writing-code-edition/)

So, what can be done to avoid the steampunk community becoming dominated by misogynistic attitudes? For starters, supporting women working in the community and not dismissing their efforts. Listening to the concerns of women within your local or online steampunk groups. Deconstructing the Victorian oppression of women and using it to inform the genre and inspire reimaginings of the past in which women have equitable rights to those of men much earlier. Forming inclusive spaces for women, LGBTQIA-identified people and people of color; standing up to oppression of one group fosters fighting against oppression in general. Zero tolerance policies regarding mistreatment and casual abuse of these groups are also of the utmost importance.

Ultimately, the better informed steampunk enthusiasts are on matters of gender equity and feminist issues, the more welcoming the community will be for everybody. •



# Amazing Artificial Anthropoids

BY MARCUS RAUCHFUß

THE IDEA OF OBJECTS, HUMAN shaped or not, coming to life is a common theme in myth and fairy tale. It very likely goes back through the entire history of human culture. Similarly, there are plenty of examples in myth and literature of people being crafted and by chance, accident, divine intervention or design coming to life.

The earliest commonly known example is the story of Pygmalion. Pygmalion was a sculptor who was not particularly fond of women but fell in love with a perfect statue he cut out of white marble. On Venus' festival day, he wished for his statue to come to life. His wish was granted, the statue became the woman Galatee, they married and had a son or a daughter, depending on the version of the story.

But the majority of stories involving human shaped objects coming to life are not remotely as happy as the one of Pygmalion and his Galatee.

Continuing toward the present, there are two concepts entering the stage of history around the same time. Those two are the homunculus and the golem.

The golem can be considered blasphemous, if one is religiously inclined, since the rationale behind it is thus (in a nutshell): Adam was created by God (the Abrahamic one, anyway) out of clay, thus, a sufficiently godly person will also be able to create life out of clay. Yes, Adam was basically the first golem. The most popularly known golem, the Golem of Rabbi Loew patrolled the Jewish Ghetto in Prague, defending it against pogroms.

In recent years, golems have seen a surge in popularity. Through role playing games and fantasy literature, they have become more



A *Maschinenmensch* has breakfast with his caretaker in Berlin, Germany, March 1930

prominent than ever before and have to a certain degree entered popular culture.

The same can be said about the homunculus (Latin for "little human"). Originally an alchemical concept of a miniature human being, hence the name, and later used within an early theory to explain conception, it has found a broader audience through the same channels as the golem. The homunculus was even mentioned in the popular TV series *The Big Bang Theory* when Penny tells Leonard "You are my little homunculus!"

Alchemy is a mere historical footnote today, but the time when it was slowly replaced by modern chemistry also saw the appearance of the first, unfortunately fake, mechanical automatons. The most famous and successful of these is The Turk, a chess machine. It was claimed to function autonomously but was indeed controlled by a human hiding within the machinery.

The Turk, destroyed in 1854.

was still around when the archetypical and to this day most iconic nonmechanical artificial man entered the scene: Frankenstein's Monster.

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* was first published in 1818 but it remains one of the most influential works of fiction and the created monster, one of the most beloved icons of the horror genre, has seen a number of movie adaptations and the term "Frankenstein" has entered global culture for basically any kind of scientific abomination.

Interestingly, more than a generation after Frankenstein's Monster came to life with the help of science, another novel was published in which again an object was animated by magic: *Pinocchio*.

Including *Pinocchio* in this essay is a bit of a stretch, but the character has become another icon, so it would have been wrong to exclude him. Also, *Pinocchio* has grown beyond the original tale and has grown up, even as a puppet. Ever since *Shrek* appeared in movie



Nineteenth century engraving of Homunculus from Goethe's Faust, Part II

theatres, we know that Pinocchio has picked up some strange dressing habits along the way.

Moving further toward now, the widespread availability of steam power beginning in the nineteenth century led to several attempts to design a mechanical man (often a soldier) powered by steam. One of these is George Moore's Steam Man. Moore introduced his concept in 1893 and it received some notice but obviously never really went anywhere with it.

The design would have been connected to a rather massive external steam engine, making it impractical for any sort of actual use. To my knowledge it never went beyond the drawings.

In 1921, the dystopian, even apocalyptic, Czech play *R.U.R. (Rossum's Universal Robots)* by Karel Čapek introduced a word into the global lexicon which has become the label for another iconic artificial anthropoid: Robot.

The robot has become a staple

of modern pop culture and has spawned so many subclasses of itself, covering them all would easily fill several essays. The original robot (which would be called Android today) gave us such beloved figures as Fritz Lang's *Maschinemensch*, C-3PO, the Terminators, Wall-E, Data and of course, Marvin the Paranoid Android.

When you take a look at the characters above, you notice that they cover quite a range of

dramatic personalities. The *Maschinemensch* and the majority of the Terminators are villains whereas Wall-E, C-3PO, Data and some Terminators are considered heroes. Marvin is a splendid amalgam of hero, anti-hero and comic relief.

Thus, the artificials have now left Frankenstein's stigma of the evil creation that knows nothing but violence and hate behind and gone on to become proper persons in our imagination. Interestingly enough, with the introduction of more sophisticated robots in science fiction, the definition of what makes a person increasingly blurred. Rabbi Loew's Golem was a thing, a tool. C3PO is a person, the more sophisticated Terminators maybe even more so. The latest incarnation of android, the Cylons of the 13<sup>th</sup> Tribe of the new version of *Battlestar Galactica*, completely blur the line.

One might wonder, what it is that truly separates us from sufficiently sophisticated machines? Maybe there's another rewording of Clark's Law hidden somewhere:

"Androids, sufficiently advanced, will be indistinguishable from humans."

With the rise of cyberpunk, a completely new and previously unknown form of artificial life form enters the scene: The incarnated AI, i.e., an Artificial Intelligence, previously disembodied, that comes into possession of a cyber- or robotic body. The first time I encountered this concept was in the acclaimed anime *Ghost in the Shell*, but by now there should be plenty more examples available. The online project Orion's Arm for example, lists those *incarnates* as just another group of sentients in the portion of the galaxy colonized by Earth's denizens some 10,000 years in the future.

And at this point, the artificial anthropoids have come full circle. They started out as a created, molded or constructed thing which received consciousness somewhere along the way. In the latest incarnation, the consciousness comes first and looks for or creates itself a body to inhabit. This leads to a whole set of different philosophical problems and questions and makes the definition of what is consciousness, intelligence and humanity (the quality, not the species) even more complicated.

Far more interesting, though, is the acceptance especially androids have found in our modern society. I guess there is many a little boy who would love to have a robot friend and I guess quite a few of us could imagine growing old with an android friend or caretaker. At least in this respect, the future has turned out to be rather interesting.

It seems, everybody loves robots these days, despite the fact they are not as ubiquitous as they were promised to be fifty years ago. But who knows, we may yet live to see the coming of the android butler and the inevitable robot uprising! •

# The Mission

AN EXCERPT FROM ANDREW BENNETT'S *FEARLESS*

A RIPPLE OF FEAR TRAVELED ALONG EVA'S SPINE AS she sat there in the presence of these people, the thin man sat across the table from her, smiling, his face hadn't shifted an inch since she had entered. He was sat with his elbows on the table top, arching his fingers, calmly contemplating the revolver she still held inches from his contented face, as though he did not fear his possibly imminent death. The large man she had seen standing beside the door. And his strange, stooping companion who had been fumbling with the lock, one of whom was now stood behind her, pressing the barrel of a gun against the back of her head. It was a man who had spoken with an icy chill in his voice as he calmly threatened her, as if he could kill her and immediately fall asleep without worry.

"I think it would be in all of our interests if you listened to him, Miss Wood" the man across the table said without breaking his calm, steely gaze away from the end of the revolver's barrel. Eva complied and slowly lowered the weapon to the table, trying to ensure her shaking hands were visible to the man behind her.

"There's a good girl" the disembodied voice reassured her across her right shoulder as she moved hands away from the gun and then raised them to either side of her head. The man across the table suddenly burst into laughter, as did the man over her shoulder and she felt the pressure of the barrel against her head lessen as the gun was removed.

"Looks like we've got a new one Sir, this should be fun" the thin man across the table said between chortles as he rose from his seat, unfolding himself to his full height, making his short blonde hair brush against the ceiling before he stooped to pick up Eva's pistol from the table and began carefully examining it, turning it over in his hands. This was the first chance she had to clearly look at the man who had falsely introduced himself as "The captain", he was wearing a clean white shirt with a bow tie and a dark jacket with pressed black trousers and black shoes, and he looked to be almost identical to every other young man living in a major city, save for his immense height, standing nearly seven feet tall. The man stood behind her grunted his assent as he spoke and she saw him move off to one side as he began to circle the room, turning up the gas lights, his form becoming more apparent as her eyes gradually adjusted to the brighter lighting, revealing the dark oak paneling of the room. The hunched figure she had seen fumbling with the lock was hunched no more. She found he was

of average height with a mop untidy brown hair adorning his head. She could tell little else as much of his figure was hidden by a long, tan colored leather coat which hung loosely from his broad shoulders and reached nearly to his ankles, despite the pleasant heat in the room. He turned around after adjusting the last of the lights and purposefully strode towards the seat which had just been vacated by the blonde man who deferentially stepped to one side as the other man



approached; whilst still examining the revolver in hands. The newcomer dropped himself into the chair across the table before leaning back, calmly and silently appraising the young woman sat before him. Eva took the opportunity of the oppressing silence to lower her hands and further examine the strange man who seemed to be the most powerful of the three men in the room. He was still fairly young but older than either Eva or the Blonde man, but not by a great deal, the first signs of age were only just beginning to show themselves, and so she estimated him to be around thirty. The main impression his face gave off was drastically different to

Illustration by Nith46

that of the Blonde man, where as he looked like a society gentleman, this man looked like a drunkard, or at least to be aged well beyond his years, he was unshaven, sporting at least two days worth of beard and his untidy, dark brown hair had been messily cut short, but not close to the skull, his worn features and dark skin spoke of a great deal of time spent at sea. However, there seemed to be more to this man than met the eye. Beneath his coat he was wearing a thick, dark blue, almost black, military style tunic and a grey shirt, open to the throat. His large, hooked nose was held high, with the result that he exuded an air of authority, reinforced by the deep, penetrating stare of his pale blue eyes and the firm set of his jaw, his overall appearance give Eva the impression of a hawk, his stare chilled her to the bones as she imagined herself as the prey. Eva also noticed a pair of pistol handles either side of his chest emerging from the folds of his coat, the collar of which was turned back revealing a sheepskin lining. As the silent man leaned back in his chair she could see he also wore a pair of trousers the same color and fashion of his tunic with a thick, brown leather belt wrapped around his waist. As she examined him she realized he was the man she had been sent to meet, although the color of his hair and eyes could not be determined in the likeness she had been given of him, the set of his jaw and the angle of his nose were both unmistakable, even with the poor quality of the daguerreotype she had memorized before destroying the previous day.

"Looks to be a standard issue Webley, sir." The voice suddenly broke the oppressive silence which hung over the room. It was the blonde man stood at the side of the table as he gently placed Eva's revolver back on the table "bored out of course, to accept a heavier caliber round, but other than that, completely unremarkable, all intelligence service agents use these." As the up until now silent man sat across the table nodded in approval and turned his head, Eva was struck with an uncanny sense of *déjà vu*, the image she had been given showed him from the front and from a distance, as if the photographer had been forced to take it unexpectedly from across the street, but his profile stirred strange memories and feelings in Eva, even as he calmly spoke;

"Thank you Mr Crabbe. That will be all, please leave me with Miss Wood so that we can discuss the mission. Send up Josiah with the drinks and I shall see you all back on board the Ship."

"Yes sir." The blonde man replied and he turned before walking away from the table and exiting the room along with the red haired sentinel stood beside the door. The dark haired man sat across the table leaned forward and sat upright, before leaning forward and crossing his arms.

"So Miss Wood, as my companion said, it seems that Her Majesty's Government wishes to employ us once more."

"Yes that is correct. Although I must ask, who was that man and why the deception? I'd already proved my authenticity as an intelligence agent" Eva asked him as she replaced her gun in her handbag and removed the small, wooden box she had been given by Saville.

"If you mean the man who was previously sat here, he is my First Mate. As you have most likely guessed by now, I *am* the man you were sent to meet and as I assume you've been told I am extremely selective of whom I meet, even under circumstances such as these."

"Yes I was." Eva replied, "And I was also given these for you. They are your orders." She continued holding out the box which the Captain then took before looking at the seal, twisting his face into a mask of disgust.

"So, he still thinks he can summon me like a dog. Orders! *pfft!*" He threw the box onto the table between them before continuing;

"In case you were not informed Miss Wood my men and I are Mercenaries, and as such, expect payment for our services and, of course we do not take orders. We shall undertake this mission only if we choose to. Not because we are ordered to."

"Actually, Captain I was informed of your status. Those are your orders, should you choose to accept the mission, which I assume you will, since I was assured of your cooperation by my Superior." Attempting to hide her surprise that she might fall at the first hurdle, damning the missing Agent to a horrible existence, and possibly jeopardizing the future of the Empire, Eva continued;

"I was also informed of your payment. You are apparently to be paid in the usual amount and in the same manner as you were last time. I have been told that even as we speak a chest containing the first third of your payment is steaming its way toward us, onboard a specially charted train from London. It should be here tomorrow. When it arrives it shall be taken and placed in the strong room of one particular Bank in the City, from where I, and I alone shall be able to retrieve it, as when it arrives I shall be sent the necessary documentation to release it from the strong room."

"Is that all?" The Captain asked "Her Majesty's government expects me and my crew to risk our lives for Four Hundred Sovereigns worth of gold? And a simple promise of another Eight Hundred Sovereigns' worth? Forgive me if I don't run back to my ship in eagerness Miss Wood, but we could earn nearly Five Hundred Sovereigns by escorting a shipment of diamonds from Cape Town." The Captain then once

more became silent.

"These arrived today, along with instructions to offer them to you, should you prove reluctant to accept the mission." Eva explained reaching into her handbag, albeit shocked that this man would reject an offer of over a thousand Sovereigns in gold bullion. Only a few dozen people in the Empire had the power to have that amount shipped on such sort notice as this.

The discussion was ended there when a small boy entered the room carrying a large steel tray, struggling under the weight of the collection of bottles and the two glasses which were sat upon it. He came up to where they were sitting and with great difficulty he lifted the tray onto the table top and began walking away, before The Captain called loudly and with authority;

"Josiah!" the boy stopped suddenly and spun around as though he had just been caught with his hand in someone's pocket. The Captain beckoned him over to the table and said simply upon the boy's arrival to his previous position next to the table;

"Empty your pockets" the boy's head dropped forlornly and he slowly reached into his breeches and slowly reached up and placed the items within his pockets onto the table. Eva was not particularly surprised when he removed a piece of string, a button, a bag of boiled sweets and 2 penny coins. The Captain observed this procedure in silence before the boy stopped and look up imploringly into the man's face. However, The Captain was evidently not satisfied and uttered;

"And the rest" Eva was puzzled by this event and was about to protest but she let out a gasp of astonishment when the boy, hanging his head in evident shame reached back his pockets, this time on the small jacket he was wearing and proceeded to place upon the table; a bent briar pipe, a silver engraved cigarette case, a box of matches and a small velvet bag which clinked as he placed it down. The Captain looked upon the items in distain before picking up the cigarette case and turning to the boy asking tersely;

"How many time shave I told you about this Josiah?" The Boy hung his head even lower in shame before The Captain continued, holding the cigarette case in front of the boy;

"Now, go and give this back to Mr Crabbe and apologize. And the same goes for whoever you lifted this from, as well." holding up the velvet purse. The Boy took them in his hands and retreated quickly from the room before the door was closed behind him. The Captain let out a sigh and turning to Eva uttered;

"At least now he's emptying his pockets. Before I had to hold him up by his ankles and shake him." Before Eva could ask why the boy, evidently named Josiah, had left the pipe and matches the Captain picked up the pipe

and began to fill it from a leather tobacco pouch he removed from inside his coat. Lighting his pipe with the matches left on the table he asked Eva;

"Now where were we?"

"I was just giving you the details of your payment."

"Ah, yes. Can I interest you in a drink?" he offered, selecting a bottle labeled as Grant's whiskey and pouring himself a large measure into one of the glasses from the tray, leaning back on his chair puffing methodically at his pipe.

"No thank you." Eva replied

"Oh well, suit yourself" The Captain replied before draining his glass and refilling it once more from the bottle he had placed by his hand. Eva then proceeded to remove the document she had received from N. that morning from her bag. It was affixed to a piece of dark brown leather, bearing the royal coat of arms and had folded in upon itself so that it formed three layers. It was tied closed with a strap of the same leather that the document was fixed to so that the Royal Standard was visible on top. The Captain's eyes widened in surprise and wonderment as he saw Eva remove the document and untie the strap holding it closed before unfolding it and passing it across the table, where The Captain took it from her hand and began to read;

"As you can see these are letters of Marque, bearing the Queen's signature and seal as well as that of the Prime Minister."

"But there's a signature missing here." The Captain pointed out indicating the base of the document. Eva nodded and continued;

"That would be the Signature of one of my superiors. Should you chose to accept the mission and complete it successfully that space shall be filled, and you shall be made a privateer in the service of the Crown and therefore be able to receive all the benefits enjoyed by Captains serving in the Royal Air Fleet at any port in the Empire."

"And lose my freedom in the process." He quickly retorted "No thank you Miss Wood. I'd rather die a free man under my own colors than those of the Crown." The Captain sat in silence for a moment filling the air with acrid blue smoke as he sat with the Letters of Marque in one hand and his pipe jutting out of the corner of his mouth. "So tell me, what is this mission?" He asked, casting a wary glance to the box sitting upon the table before him.

"You are to escort me into France; to a location I shall reveal to you should you chose to accept the mission. Once there you are to leave me and facilitate my extraction following the completion of the mission."

"Is that all? We are expected to look after an agent fresh from training? I suppose your superiors would

like me to do some needlework for them as well?"

"Actually, Captain" responded Eva, barely managing to control the malice in her voice "You are to aid me in the rescue of a captured intelligence agent."

The Captain shock was evident as his eyes widened and he sprayed whiskey over the table.

"From inside France?!" he managed to sputter between coughs "Clearly Her Majesty's government thinks me a miracle worker. Don't they know me and my crew are wanted men in France, those bastards would hang us as soon they laid eyes on us."

"Wanted men." With those two words Eva had an epiphany, and she realized in mute horror where she had seen this man before. She, like so many people across the empire had seen this man's face on a nearly daily basis for the past five years. This man bore a striking resemblance to James Harrier, the notorious airship pirate and Captain of the Falcon. They were so alike they could almost be twins. They possibly were, she reasoned, there was no conceivable way that the

Empire could actually even consider employing a man who had been hounded around the globe, despite what that clerk Saville thought.

Harrier's double continued;

"Given the danger of this mission, I must consult with my crew before we accept or reject it. You shall be informed of any decision we make Miss Wood. I suggest you return to your Hotel." At that moment The Captain rose, placing the Letters of Marque and wooden box into his coat and finishing his drink, rounded the table and was stopped before he could exit the room by Eva, quickly gathered her senses asking him;

"But how will I contact you?" The man scoffed in reply and turned to her and said'

"Miss Wood, do not worry, when the time comes, I shall contact you."

Before Eva could say anything further, he was gone, and she found herself alone in the room, gazing into the dark void where he had disappeared. •

Illustration by Lelia @ deviantART



# The Princess and the Frog

A REVIEW BY HILDE HEYVAERT



AFTER YEARS OF BEING A BIT FAIL when it came to their animated movies and mostly doing CGI, Disney returns to traditional animation with their latest animated adventure: *The Princess and a Frog*, a new twist on the classic fairytale like you've never seen it before.

And boy do they do it in style! Not only did Disney go back to the style of old classic movies we all love; it's also done it proper Jazz Age dieselpunk style. The characters are dressed in lovely garments of that age, and the city it's set in is New Orleans with its music, flamboyance and of course—voodoo.

Enter the stars of the film: Tiana, a working class girl handling two jobs as a waitress to be able to fulfil a dream she and her late father both shared: owning her own restaurant. She's not a prissy spoiled vapid little girl like princesses far too often (and thankfully not always) are in Disney movies but a strong willed character with a mind of her own who knows exactly what she wants. She's portrayed very human with hopes

and insecurities. And, of course, for the first time, Disney has featured a black princess!

Then there's her counterpart, Prince Naveen, a playboy prince cut off from his fortune because his parents want to teach him a lesson. He's presented with two choices: marry rich (with Tiana's childhood friend Lotte as willing victim/bride) or get a job (a hard thing to do if all you can manage is spend money and make music). Accompanied by his poor often abused butler Lawrence he goes off to New Orleans convinced all will work out just fine without him having to lift a finger. Of course there it all goes downhill.

Enter the villain of the film: *le docteur Facilier*, aka the Shadowman, a bokor of the worst kind out to use his voodoo to gain reign of New Orleans. And of course the source of Prince Naveen's transformation into a frog.

Finally a villain who can tip to the great like Maleficent, the Evil Queen/Wicked Witch, Cruella, Captain Hook and Jafar. Opposing him is the voodoo priestess Mamma

Odie, who is ancient, blind and lives in the bayou in a boat up in a tree with her pet snake Jub-Jub (who is adorable by the way).

The sidekicks to our heroes are brilliant. There's Ray, the Cajun firefly (complete with accent and everything) and Louis the trumpet playing alligator whose biggest wish is to become human and play Jazz with the greats of New Orleans. It's an amazing mix of characters and their interaction ranges from brilliant to hilarious.

I won't give away more of the plot, because I don't want to spoil it for anyone as this is a Disney classic well worth the title of "classic" and definitely well worth watching. The artwork is gorgeous, the music excellent (all Jazz and Gospel), the story is fabulous and the villain is a villain instead of just a bad guy. The royal couple isn't the standard hero out saving the damsel in distress and when they say you've never seen the story of the Princess and the Frog told like this before they're not lying. All in all: a fantastic movie, plain brilliant.

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# Nellie Bly in a World of Smoke and Mirrors

BY CAROL McCLEARY

A chapter from the history of Nellie Bly by the author of *The Alchemy of Murder* and *The Illusion of Murder*.

OUR WORLD HAS CHANGED dramatically from the nineteenth century. We now live in a digital world in which we see life through iPhone's rather than a haze of steam.

In the world of *magic* there has long been an expression: "it's all done with smoke and mirrors." A simple explanation as to how magicians created their baffling and magical tricks, but today I fear this no longer applies. When an elephant disappears off stage, or an object as large as the Statue of Liberty vanishes, you can bet it isn't just with "smoke and mirrors" but other kinds of optical deceptions such as computers and high tech equipment.

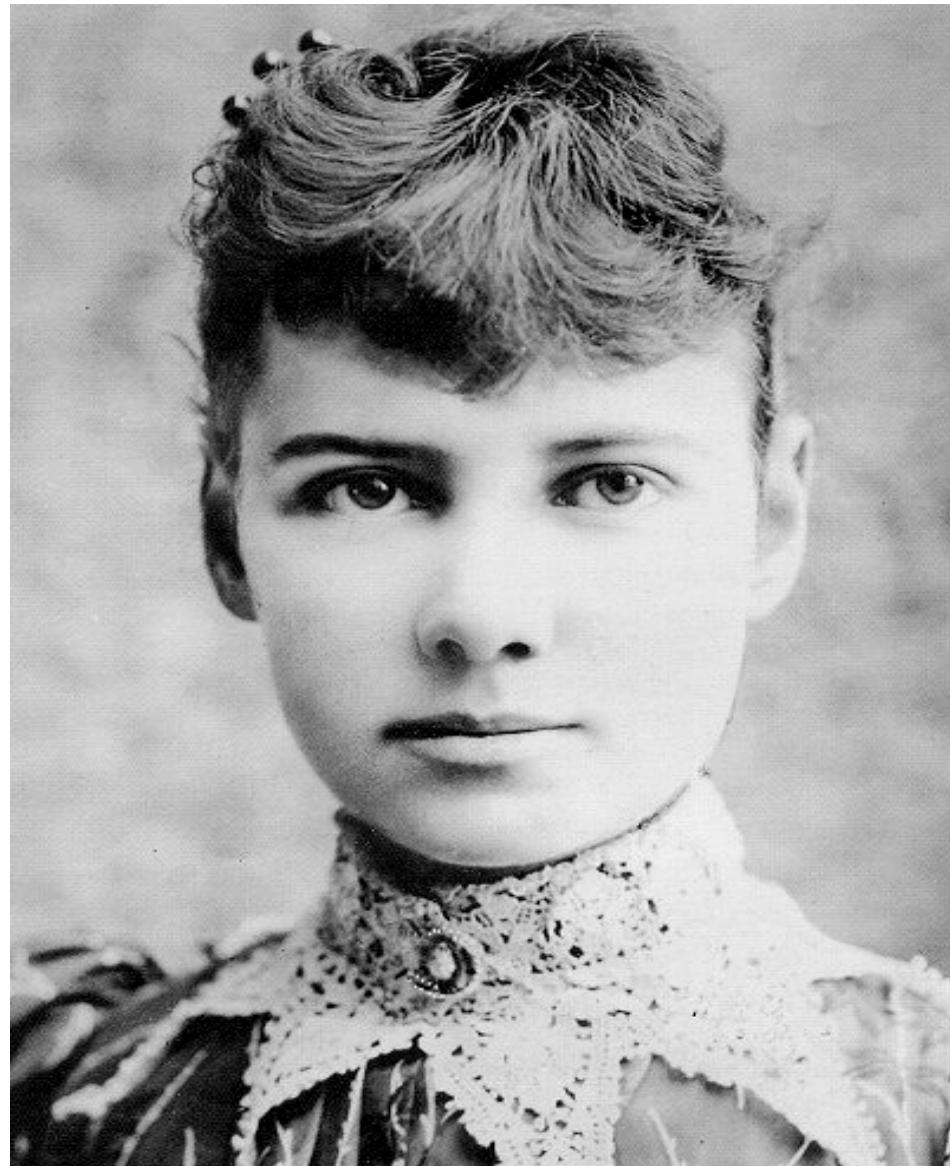
I discovered how much the world of magic has changed from an age of steam locomotives, coal-powered flying boats, ornate submarines and Iron Horses, while doing research for *The Illusion of Murder*, a novel of history, mystery, murder and *magic*.

The novel is based upon an actual race around the world by newspaper reporter Nellie Bly in 1890, when she decided to try to beat Jules Verne's fictional character, Phileas Fogg in the novel, *Around the World in 80 Days*. Nellie did it in seventy-two days with steamships and the Iron Horse for transportation.

In the novelized version, Nellie witnesses magic as it was done during the age of "smoke and mirrors." Real magic, I would like to believe, not computerized.

Being a skeptic, Nellie was always looking for answers as to "why" they were able to create such fascinating illusions.

While in Colombo, Ceylon,



now Sri Lanka, she witnessed magicians that basically wore ragged jackets and turbans on their heads, but more often the head was bare, execute a number of tricks in a very skillful manner.

One act which fascinated Nellie was that of growing a tree: the magician gathers a group of people around him and he shows them a seed, then places the seed on the ground and covers it with a handful

of earth. He covers this little mound with a handkerchief, which he first passes around to be examined so everyone sees there is nothing hidden in it.

Over this he chants, and after a time the handkerchief is taken off and having appeared up through the ground is a green sprout.

Those who gathered around look at it incredulously, while the performer says, "Tree no good; tree

too small," and covering it up again he renews his chanting. Once more he lifts the handkerchief and everyone sees the sprout is larger, but still it does not please the trickster, for he repeats, "Tree no good; tree too small," and covers it up again.

This is repeated until he has a tree *several* feet high. Then he pulls it up, and shows everyone the seed and roots.

How was that done? Definitely no computer or mirrors.

While Nellie was at a bazaar in Port Said she encountered a magician that was talking to a crowd of people. As he spoke he raised his staff into the air and pointed it in Nellie's direction, then tossed it right at her. The wood rod hit the ground and instantly turned into a wiggling snake that coiled and rose up, fanning its head at them.

Nellie was shocked and could not believe her eyes. How did he turn his rod into a snake?

In my research I discovered the *Naja haje* cobra, a snake with a unique characteristic—there is a spot on the back of its head, when pressed it causes the snake to extend itself to full length and become rigid. It snaps out of paralysis when it's tossed by the magician and hits the ground. Smoke and mirrors.

There are stories that go back thousands of years about turning snakes into rods. The one I found interesting is when Moses and Aaron asked the Pharaoh to allow the Israelites to celebrate a feast in the wilderness and when he told them no, Aaron took his staff and threw it down before the Pharaoh and it became a serpent. The Pharaoh then called on his sorcerers, "the magicians of Egypt," and they also threw down their staff and it turned into a serpent.

One of the most interesting magical acts I learned about while writing *The Illusion of Murder* was

the Indian Rope Trick. This is considered one of the most amazing feats of illusion ever performed and is almost as old as the Himalayas. Claims are found in ancient Greek and Egyptian texts that the magic trick was observed centuries before the birth of Christ and Marco Polo saw it performed during his travels six hundred years ago.

I have Nellie witness it in Ceylon.

The stage where the Rope Trick is performed is a mostly open air stage formed by cloth over large pieces of bamboo. Gaily colored sheets of cotton covered the sides and back of the slightly elevated stage. The top is partly open with lengths of bamboo coming across to connect the walls. The back side of the stage is enclosed by the trunk of a tall, bushy pear tree.

A *fakir*, the Indian term for a worker of wonders, comes on the stage. The *fakir* has the robes of a

Image of Kandy, Ceylon, 1875



monk, wisdom's white beard, and the dark eyes of a traveling snake-oil salesman. A native boy about ten years old wearing a turban and loin cloth joins him.

After much hand-waving and spoken incantations, the old man's demand to the boy is obvious—he wants the boy to go up the tree and bring back something.

The *fakir* stands over a wide woven basket and plays a horn. A rope slowly appears and continues up, disappearing in the foliage of a tree. Nellie at first is positive the rope is a snake, but there is no fanning neck of a cobra and way too long to be a snake.



Nellie believes it's a rope being pulled up by a thin fishing wire. After the rope disappears into the spread of the tree, and after a bit of coaxing, the boy grabs on to the rope. He begins to climb.

The audience cheers in amazement as he climbs hand over hand until he disappears into the foliage of the tree.

The *fakir* stares up the tree, then moves about the stage yelling up at the boy, obviously demanding the boy come back with the fruit.

Instead of the boy descending, shouting is heard above, then cries of pain as the tree's foliage shakes as

if a struggle is taking place among the leaves and branches.

Something drops into the basket; it's not a piece of fruit but an arm belonging to a small boy.

Then another piece drops. A leg. More pieces drop with the head coming last. The old man goes over to the basket, stares down and shakes his head sorrowfully. Leaning over the basket, he begins to play his horn.

Soon the hair of a head appears—then the head. It's the boy. A raw red gash around his neck with stitches shows that his head has been sewn back onto his shoulders. As he slowly unwinds from the basket, you can see that his arms and legs have been sewn onto his torso.

Finally he steps out of the basket and runs off stage with the *fakir* yelling at him for having failed at his task.

Nellie refuses to believe this happened. "Mirrors, it's all done with mirrors."

Her theory is that the boy disappears into the front of the tree, climbs down the back, puts on the bloody makeup and goes through a short tunnel that ends up in the basket. There is a hole in the basket and a tunnel beneath.

After the *fakir* and boy clean the coins from the stage and leaves, Nellie dashes for the stage and lifts the basket only to find there is no hole in the bottom of the basket, no hole in the stage beneath in, no mirrors anywhere.

This magical trick was also witnessed by Edward Melton, an English traveler who recorded observing the Rope Trick in 1681. He, too, could not figure out how it was done. His only answer was the Devil assisted them.

I discovered that magic was even used to help stop a war.

In 1856, magician Jean Robert-Houdin was sent to French Algeria by Emperor Louis-Napoléon

to use his conjuring skills to break the influence of the Marabouts, Islamic religious fanatics who claimed to have magic powers to drive the French from the country.

After putting on shows in the city, Robert-Houdin went into the desert and performed the most dangerous trick of all for the rebel tribal leaders: the bullet catch.

He had a rebel put a distinctive mark on a lead bullet, then he placed the cartridge in the rebel's own rifle, and had the man fire it at him—stunning the rebels when he caught the bullet in his teeth.

Robert-Houdin, through sleight of hand, had switched the real cartridge for one in which the bullet appeared to be lead but was actually wax mixed with lampblack.

When the cartridge was fired, the "bullet" completely dissipated—and the magician, who had slipped the real bullet in his mouth, spit out the bullet as if he had caught it with his teeth.

On another occasion before rebel leaders, to demonstrate that his magic was even more powerful than the *jinnis*, the demonic spirits of the desert, he suddenly shouted that a *jinni* was in front of a building. He fired his pistol at the "spirit" and then raced to where the bullet had left a mark on the building. As he ran his hand over the bullet hole, he smeared a red substance and told the amazed tribesmen that the spirit had bled from the gunshot wound.

By the time Robert-Houdin left Algeria, there was no doubt that French magic was more powerful than that of the fanatics and a war was prevented.

Magic will never stop to amaze us.

We are always fascinated by the mysterious, the unknown, the *magical feats* that happen right before our eyes, something modern technology and iPhones cannot give us today.

## SERIES LOCAL STEAMPUNK

Lorenzo Davia explores steampunk culture in Italy

THE PRESENT ARTICLE WILL discuss the state of steampunk culture in Italy. In order to better understand the cultural foundations on which Italian steampunk may be based, we will start with a brief look into the nineteenth century history of the country to go to explore the actual production of steampunk genre creations, including novels and comic books and more, in Italy.

Steampunk as we know it and as it can be found in its representations has solid bases in the nineteenth century. In that period many countries were living a deep Industrial Revolution during which technical progress became a key part of the life of most people. The public had a strong need to metabolize the magnificent changes they witnessed in their everyday lives and many authors caught that need to write novels where the scientific and technological elements

were elaborated and interpreted.

Among those authors we can remember Julius Verne, Mary Shelley, H.G. Wells and many other who have significantly inspired modern day steampunk.

In order to understand the position of steampunk in Italy we should take the nineteenth century industrial development of the country into account.

Italy became a unified state only in 1861 and in most cases, it was a compelled reunification. Before that date Italy was divided in many little states, each following its own political and economic policies, more or less under the influence of major European powers, including France and Austria. The initiative to unite Italy under one crown was undertaken by the Kingdom of Sardinia (which included Genoa, the Piedmont and the Island of Sardinia). The political leader of the

Kingdom of Sardinia was Count Camillo Benso di Cavour.

Count Cavour who was appointed Minister of Marine, Commerce and Agriculture in 1850, was also made Minister of Finance in 1851 and ultimately Prime Minister in 1852. A few months after the formation of the Kingdom of Italy in 1861 Count Cavour died. Without his leadership Italy experienced a decline in its progress toward industrialization.

The Unification of Italy is called, both as period and cultural movement, *Risorgimento* ("The Resurgence"). Italy had to manage its unification and development in a time when other nations were already more advanced. While Germany moved into a second phase of Industrial Revolution during the second half of the century, Italy had yet to commence a first such

Photo by Paolo Landriscina





Photo of the Palazzo Carignano in Turin by Marco Petrino

revolution.

The poor performance of Italy in the nineteenth century was something of a lost opportunity. Throughout the ages, the Italian people had produced numerous examples of ingenious inventors and scientists: the more famous including Leonardo DaVinci, Galileo Galilei, Alessandro Volta, Guglielmo Marconi. Even in the nineteenth century there were many inventors but they and their creations are largely forgotten today.

Just to name an example, it is not commonly known that the first working combustion engine was built in 1854 by Eugenio Barsanti (1821-1864) and Felice Matteucci (1808-1887) who patented their invention in England in 1857 (Patent 1655, *Improved Apparatus For Obtaining Motive Power From*

*Gases*).

Nevertheless, for the above-mentioned reasons, Italy had no proto-science fiction authors as Verne or Wells. The theme was not wholly absent from Italian literature of the time though. Proto-science fictions themes were sometimes employed, even resulting in a high quality of texts, but such examples were rare.

Recently proto-science fiction short stories by those authors have been republished in Italy in the anthology *Le Aeronavi dei Savoia* (published in English as *The Year 3000: A Dream*, 2010). The short stories are from the period 1890-1952 and represent interesting elaborations of the fantastic themes realized by Italian authors. If such short stories were written by American authors, today they would be considered classics: voyages on Venus, the destruction of the Moon, alternate histories, life on other planets and the scientific reality of the supernatural are all themes explored in this collection.

Unfortunately the above mentioned short stories are exceptions. At the center of the attention of nineteenth century Italian writers we can find themes as the dealing with a new sociopolitical situation as consequence of the *Risorgimento*, or the condition of country people in that period.

For similar reasons, science fiction in Italian culture has always been considered a minor genre which deserve little or no attention

from critics and the public alike.

Finally, the Italian current of Neorealism (1940-1950s) and the following 1968 culture eliminated any chance for both science fiction and steampunk to spread in Italy.

Let's have a concrete example. All steampunk fans are familiar with *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, both the comic book and film adaption. Should we like to do a similar work using only characters from nineteenth century Italian novels, we would be in great trouble. There wouldn't be enough characters to fill such a volume.

The only famous Italian writer who wrote adventurous novels is Emilio Salgari, but very few *steam* can be found in his work.

This is particularly sad as Italian literature produced many interesting pieces in the last two hundred years.

Let's examine the current situation of steampunk in Italy. For the already mentioned reasons science fiction is not part of the common culture and is well known and followed only by fans; among the science fiction works little can be found having a steampunk theme, but the few examples are of great interest.

We can begin remembering the novels by Luca Masali, *I biplani di D'Annunzio* (1995), *La perla alla fine del mondo* (1999) and *La balena del cielo* (2008) which are set in an alternative First World War. Matteo Campini is the protagonist of the trilogy, an aviator in the Austro-Hungarian Army who lives extraordinary adventures involving mysteries, time travel and alternate history. The sociopolitical context in which the adventures are set is described with great detail, comprehensive of famous characters of World War II. The novels are written with a quality higher than the average Italian science fiction production and is sometimes referred as the Bible of

the Italian science fiction.

Another interesting novel which is worth mentioning is *Raimondo Mirabile, futurista*, by Graziano Versace, set in 1911, in Milan, with a plot of both science fiction and conspiracies, with an appreciable, even if vague, steampunk atmosphere.

Only one truly steampunk film has been made in Italy: *Natale in Casa DeeJay*, interpreted by deejays working in Radio DeeJay (an Italian radio station) and by well known people from Italian television and music. The plot is based on *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens. The ambience and costumes are slightly steampunk as is the technology used by the protagonist to broadcast his radio, the Tubo Deejay.

Regarding comics the miniseries *Greystorm* deserves mention, edited by Bonelli, which is one of the major Italian comic publishers. It was a twelve issue miniseries published in 2009 and 2010 with as protagonist the wicked inventor Robert Greystorm. The comic is set in England, Antarctica and on a Pacific Ocean island between 1894 and 1919.

We first meet Robert Greystorm and his glorious dreams for a technological future in Britain. We follow him to the South Pole where he finds an ancient mummy from which a terrible contagion spreads. The contaminated people turn into zombies, at Greystorm's order. Led by the voice of an ancient conscience present in the mummy, a voice Greystorm remembers hearing since childhood, he starts his plan to conquer the world. The only people to try to stop him are the sons of his best friend Jason Howard. Howard was Greystorm's companion for many years, before being killed by him in revenge.

All across this story, we find old looking submarines, airships

and other inventions, which make *Greystorm* a full steampunk adventure.

This series had many ideas that were not original but dealt with them in an interesting manner, creating interesting cues which are unfortunately not developed very much, especially regarding the characters' evolution across the story. Apart from these flaws though, *Greystorm* probably represents the first tentative to bring the steampunk genre to the average public in Italy, and this has major merit.

Regarding comics, it is worth mentioning *Ruber Maximum* by Claudio Franchino and *Le Strabilanti Vicende di Giulio Maraviglia, Inventore* by Alessandro Bilotta, Carmine di Giandomenico and Emiliano Colantoni.

In *Ruber Maximum* the protagonists are Galvano and Mesmer who across the years try to take possession of a mysterious device known as the Rubor Maximum. The story spans many epochs (1751, 1847, 1855 and 1912) and many places.

*Le Strabilanti Vicende di Giulio Maraviglia, Inventore* is set in Rome at the beginning of nineteenth century and depicts a steampunk city with airships, smoke and various steamy devices created by the inventor Fulco Maraviglia.

There is really only one main steampunk community in Italy, the one based on the forum "Laboratory of Time" created by Federico Gussó (aka Frederick Von Guss). The community is active as a place where Italians can share ideas regarding the various declinations of steampunk, and the website's staff organize events including meetings and conventions in

concomitance with themed exhibitions and manifestations.

In this community there seems to be, in my opinion, a continuous research for a definition of Italian steampunk, in order to characterize and differentiate it. Nice ideas have been proposed, like "Dolce Steel Novo" with reference to the "Dolce Stil Novo" (Italian for



Photo of the Piazzo Carlo Alberto in Turin by Barbara Tempel

"Sweet New Style") which goes back directly to Dante Alighieri, the author of the *Divina Commedia*.

As in other countries around the world, also in Italy steampunk is caught and catching the attention of people who are interested in its visual style; in its cultural message or because, as authors, they think that steampunk is the best way to represent their ideas.

Italy's nineteenth century history, though markedly different from countries as England and France, is interesting from both a technological and social point of view. Nineteenth and early twentieth century Italy can be a beautiful setting for steampunk adventures, and the works utilizing this settings are there to prove this statement. •

Special thanks to Frederick Von Guss and the *Laboratory of Time* community as well as Duca Carraroran of [steamfantasy.it/blog](http://steamfantasy.it/blog)

## COLUMN THE STEAMPUNK WARDROBE

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

STEAMPUNK LOLITA IS ONE OF THE HARDER SUB STYLES of Lolita and steampunk. It's a fine line between a good juxtaposition between the two seeing both styles are so radically different. They may both seek inspiration from the Victorian era and other times past, but while steampunk has a distinctive *laissez-faire* attitude toward its followers' fashion, Lolita is bound by quite a few rather strict rules. Quite often you end up with something too Lolita for steam or too steam for Lolita.

It is, however, a common misconception that steampunk Lolita's can only be the steamy nice girls; the precious dolls. They can be anything really: girly mad scientists or explorers, sky pirates with a love for girly pouf in their skirts—your imagination is the limit! Think about what you want first though, because you'll need a firm picture in your mind of what you want your outfit to look like before you're able to put it together.

For those wanting to attempt this style, it's important to keep some Lolita key rules in mind. The shape of the skirt for starters: not too short and poufy enough. Touching your knee or just above it is a good length. Lolita skirts are generally bell skirts with a waistband, which is thankfully easy enough to



make (one of the simplest things to put together yourself really). Most of them have a lace or ruffle trim at the bottom, sometimes a combination of both. A good petticoat is pretty essential. It's best to start with the basics and build from there.

You could look for bits and pieces with Lolita brands like Metamorphose, *temps de fille*; Baby, the Stars Shine Bright; Innocent World and Angelic Pretty to name but a very few, but *burando* (as Japanese Lolita brands are commonly referred to) have limited steampunk basics in stock and are very expensive. If you don't know much about the style, looking at *burando* to familiarize yourself with the type of garments common with Lolita can not only educate you but inspire you for your steampunk outfit as well.

Doing it yourself and searching the high street for good bits and pieces is generally the way



forward with this style. If you can sew well enough yourself, you could buy historical inspired patterns for ties and dresses, modify them and make your own jumper skirt in a nice steampunk print. Shirts with puff sleeves are easy enough to make yourself or buy in chains as H&M. Ruffled long sleeved shirts are also easy enough to come by in chain stores, or more Gothic oriented ones (although the color range will probably be limited there). Neckties, hairbows and spats are awesome accessories that are each and all easy to find online or make yourself. Faux pearls, keys, romantic bits and pieces like roses are all excellent also.

Top it off with a bowler or top hat, a hairbow or your trusty pair of goggles, a nice steampunk coat and your trusty steampunk shoes or the Lolita variety thereof (I personally have brown Mary Janes with bows with spats over them but I'm equally happy to wear the boots I generally wear with steampunk, with or without spats).



<http://www.wix.com/nourakhenfi/portfolio>

# The Frock Coat Conundrum

BY IAN BRACKLEY

GENTLEMEN! WHO AMONG YOU longs to step out clad in the stark, black, patrician majesty of a double breasted frock coat? Ladies, how many of you would like to appear at the season's event escorted by a gentleman in a coat that emphasizes his masculine physique while quietly announcing a power held in reserve? I suspect the appeal of this most iconic garment is not inconsiderable. Today it stands as a sartorial emblem of the Victorian age, as invocative of the era as the bustle or top hat.

If the endurance of the frock coat's image is any indication it is probably destined to remain a much

"sack" coat (aka "suit jacket"). The complexity of the construction meant that only the top tier of artisans could make them. The close fit along the curves of the body required more *personalized* service than is provided today. This defining aspect is what is most often missing from modern reproductions sold online. These garments consequently lack a critical aesthetic when compared to the original article. Let me pause here to clearly state that what I speak of is emphatically not "historical accuracy" but rather the balance and harmony of proportion that make the frock so beguiling.

So long as the frock continued to be worn conventionally there were efforts to cater to an "entry level" sector of buyers.

A late example of this is found in the 1901 Eaton co. catalogue. Through it, anyone with access to a post office anywhere in the Dominion of Canada could order a frock coat through the mail. Importantly the mail order client was asked to provide a more esoteric list of measures than seen in today's online order forms, as well as their height and weight. The inclusion of the latter two figures allowed the master cutter who received the order to better estimate the shape of the client's body. For corpulent and stout men this was most important as a frock for a larger man was not simply a larger version of a thin man's coat. Rather, the individual panels were shaped very differently. The fit of a mail order coat could still be expected to be inferior to a coat which had gone through several in person fittings but the traditional

tailoring skills of the tradesmen Timothy Eaton employed allowed the end product to more closely approach the frock coat ideals of fit and proportion relative to each individual customer's body. This is a far remove from current mass production standards of fit and means of achieving it.

The Eaton co.'s ability to buy materials in bulk meant that their frock coat retailed for roughly \$500 in today's Canadian dollars.

Which brings us to today and the options for gents coveting a frock.

I would advise that the first step is to asses intentions. Is this for a costume in the strictest sense of the word? Is your intention a whimsical bit of meta-theatrical cosplay? Or is your goal an article of *clothing*? Is this a coat you will wear daily in the spring or fall? Might this even be the coat you will be wearing at your wedding in front of your family and friends?

A sober appraisal tends to leave those with costume motivations with more options than persons seeking clothing.

The first option is to settle. There are plenty of replica "frock" coats that can be ordered in standardized ready-to-wear sizes. Beware though, for even vendors advertising under claims of "historical accuracy" too often shill what are basically modern ready-to-wear suit jackets with falsified historical features shoehorned in for looks. The wedding industry also offers many long skirted, quasi-tuxedo coats commonly called "Prince Edward" or "wedding coats" of varying quality and price. The problems with all garments in this class are the same ones encountered in ready-to-wear men's clothes in

## What are the options today for gents coveting a frock?

coveted item with a frustrated following. The devotee of this dignified garment is given few satisfactory options to include it in his wardrobe. Obvious solutions are often shortcuts to cheaply made, badly fitting quasi-costumes that even at a cursory glance fall far short of the dignified elegance that stares back at us from sepia tinted antique photos.

The greatest problem for the retro centric dandy is that frock coats as the Victorians knew them are incompatible with mass production. Frocks are creatures of the hierarchical culture that produced them: The materials required to obtain their myriad subtle effects were costly (and still are). It required more hours of labor to construct a frock than it did the more egalitarian, informal lounge or

general: aiming to be wearable to the widest range of bodies statistically possible results in boxy, uniformly shapeless clothes. Aesthetically these garments share nothing with the ideals embodied in the historical frock and instead bear all the hallmarks of the soulless, mass produced, bland version of modernity that steampunk so often stands in opposition to.

Another option is to seek out local craftspeople and hobbyists. Theatrical costumers often have knowledge of and experience with traditional tailoring techniques that can nudge the end product closer to the historical standard. US Civil War and similar living history groups boast sizeable contingents of hobbyist artisans who study traditional garment making, some of whom create very professional looking clothes. While the steampunk client may not require all the visible historical details (e.g. hand-worked button holes) the ancient techniques used within many living history produced garments contribute toward a credible impression that stands apart from the crowd.

Not every home or hobby sewer will have the skills set to construct a viable frock coat. Anyone who approaches the project lightly underestimates the complexity of the task. Ask in particular about coat making experience and request to see examples of people's work. Consider starting a relationship with a hobby tailor by first commissioning several waistcoats or sack coats so together you can gradually build up knowledge of what constitutes a good

personalized fit for *you* before essaying what has been called "The Omega of garment making".

A quick word on commercial patterns: the aforementioned problems with ready-to-wear men's clothes are also found in commercial patterns, most if not all of which don't make provisions for stout or corpulent bodies. Historically frocks were made from the pattern up for each individual client and this remains the best way to go about having one made. Pattern drafting is yet another esoteric skill that not all hobbyists are versed in so be prepared to compromise. As much as steampunk advances a DIY ethic as has been stated above, a frock is not a trivial undertaking. It is most certainly not a first project (*nor a fifth, nor even a tenth*). Remember, it was for good reason that apprentices spent years learning to first make trousers, then vests, then lounge coats and only after long mastery of these would they learn to make frocks. Every amateur strives to improve their skills, but this requires the humility to know not to jump ahead of one's present

abilities. The frock will only regain something of its former glory once willing amateurs appreciate this fact and approach the challenge at a measured pace. No one should expect to equal Victorian craftsmanship overnight, nor should they be discouraged from striving.

Finally, do not attempt to commission a frock at a contemporary tailor's shop. There are many reasons that make this a dead end. Suffice to say the reader is welcome to try but expect to be politely shown the door.

A demand for corsetry in the Goth, Fetish, Neo-Burlesque and Industrial subcultures helped create an entire cottage industry of corset makers, effectively reviving a near dead art. With the proper motivation a demand for elegant, individually crafted frock coats may see this repeated but such will only occur if we gentlemen are prepared to educate ourselves about proper fit and proportion (it's more than being able to shrug a garment over your shoulders and button it across) and are unafraid to demand quality over affordability. •



Photo of US President William Howard Taft, speaking at Springfield, Massachusetts in April 1912, sporting a frock coat.

Old  
Paper Doll

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# It So Hurts

A SHORT STORY BY E.B. JOSEPH

HE DIDN'T NEED TO LOOK UP TO KNOW THAT HE wasn't alone. The door was locked, he knew that for a fact, and despite the relentless drone of the engines he would have heard the shifting bolt had someone entered his quarters via conventional means.

Captain Hanson Polyakov zeroed his sensors in on the sting the chilli soaked noodles had left on his lips. He lifted another spoonful from the bowl he was hunched over and grunted his annoyance. "There's a cabinet hidden behind that panel." He indicated with just the slightest jerk of his head. "I imagine I will need a stiff drink very shortly."

He didn't hear the intruder's footfalls on the velvety carpet, but not even the stealthiest of invaders could disguise the clink of the glasses.

Polyakov sat back in his chair and pushed away the not quite empty bowl as his unheralded visitor set about pouring two large measures of gin.

It wasn't until he had drained the glass that the airship captain mustered the courage to look at the man stood before him. He was surprised. Civil Servants were normally as prim and proper as they came. All elegantly cut suits and polished brass buttons. But the wild haired young man looking back at him was about as far away from that description as it was possible to get. His clothes were stained and ill-made, his hands black with ink, fingernails filthy. If it wasn't for the Government insignia woven into his travelling coat, and the short black cane the man carried, Polyakov might have dismissed him as an imposter.

"My name is Emeric Asimov," the man introduced himself.

"What do you want?" Polyakov growled, eying the cane fearfully and conscious of the heavy weight of his holstered pistol.

"I am on a journey," Emeric said without inflection. "And now, so are you."

Captain Polyakov's senses instantly sharpened. He felt the steady motion of the gondola, listened to the relentless wail of the engines and allowed the extra-sensory perception that only experienced airmen possessed to plot his ship's position and course: nothing had changed.

"A journey to where?" the captain asked, irritated. "We have not changed course. Doesn't your influence extend that far? Or do you need me to twist the wheel and move the pieces?" For an instant Polyakov expected to be dead. No one spoke to officials of the Government like that. But Polyakov was not afraid—he had long

been immunized against such petty emotions as fear, and being thrown overboard as ballast would have been a blessed relief compared with the alternative, which was to continue the sad dance that was his inexplicable continued existence.

But the interloper was not outraged by the insult. In fact, he seemed delighted. He smiled as he said: "There is no need to change course, Captain. It doesn't matter which direction we go, only that we keep going."

"What are you babbling about man?"

"My dear fellow, we are going to the Fold."

"The Fold?" Cadence asked stabbing Captain Polyakov through the wrist. "Why should we want to go there?"

As the thin blade entered his flesh Polyakov inhaled sharply through gritted teeth. The weapon cut right through his arm until he was speared to his desk. It took him a few moments until the pain subsided enough for him to reply.

"Who knows..." he gasped, "the man's a lunatic. And those two he brought with him...they're..."

"Strange?" Cadence offered as she began to work the knife, shifting it ever so slightly this way and that, which would have been painful enough, but the blade was flayed along its ridiculously sharp edges. Tiny barbs pulled and sliced at the flesh, muscles and nerves inside the captain's arm, some of them detaching so that even once the instrument of torture was withdrawn they would remain, producing random, hot flashes of agony for months to come.

"Yes," Polyakov managed when he could speak again. "The man, his bodyguard I suppose, is an uncouth thug, not fit to scrub the underbelly of *Hardest Win*, and the woman is nothing more than a painted harlot."

Cadence grinned, showing the old captain the adolescent impetuosity that he so loved to be tormented by. "I imagine you should like to get on the wrong side of her. Have her play with my toys."

As if to reinforce her point Cadence picked up a Needleterror by its tiny, spiny tail. She knew that the captain had a particular phobia of the creatures so she only used them on special occasions.

The fat old man began to tremble uncontrollably, which caused him to gasp and yelp as his involuntary shaking worried the blade impaling his wrist.

Cadence dangled the thing over the man's head, his spindly legs flailing, pincers nipping with wild insect rage. "Open wide," she smiled.

Polyakov peed his pants, and obeyed.

Inky fingers probed pale flesh.

"This is absurd," the captain of the *Hardest Win* hissed, trying to remain firm even as his constitution attempted to betray him. "Absolutely preposterous."

Emeric looked up from the still convulsing woman, into the careworn face of the disgraced airship captain.

Such scrutiny from such a man would have been enough to reduce a normal person to a jibbering wreck. But Polyakov stared him down fearlessly, as if daring the Government's agent to strike against him. There were worse ways to go and he'd taken care to ensure that it would be a hell of a fight if it came to it. His crew were whipped up into a frenzy already, the weak-minded fools ready to send their precious ship down in flames should the need to avenge their captain arise.

There was a mechanical click as a gun was leveled at Polyakov's head. Si Askeu stepped into view, his eyes fixed on Captain Polyakov. 'Not getting the jitters are we?' Si asked with a genial smile. "I should hate to explain your unfortunate demise to your crew."

"Kill me and you'd be dead before my body hit the ground," Polyakov replied as he tensed and flexed the muscles of his left wrist, causing agonizing stabs of pain to shoot up his arm.

"Oh you really have no idea," Si chided. "What's going on here. Who we are. What this all means. You're just a sick little pervert who threw away the keys to the kingdom for your own debased pleasures."

"You don't know me," Polyakov growled. "You know nothing about the man I am."

"Then we are all strangers," Emeric declared before Si could shoot back any sort of retort, or just shoot the captain. He turned back to the prone woman, whose fit had abated. "She's coming out of it."

"What the hell are you lot?" Polyakov spat, unwary of the gun pointed at his head. "If you're from the Government then I highly doubt it's the real one."

"Whether or not our brief comes from a real department of the Government makes no difference," Emeric replied curtly, as he attended to the stricken woman. "All you need to know is that we continue. Whatever happens, we continue. You don't have any objections do you?"

It was a dangerous question, a loaded question, but Polyakov met it with a shrug. He understood then exactly why this gaggle of suicidal misfits had chosen his ship. Any sane captain would have demanded that they turn back—would rather have died than continue. But he wasn't any captain.

"Good," the Civil Servant declared. "I can take a look at that arm if you wish. And see about that fever too. Looks like you've eaten something that's disagreed with you."

The two men faced off for a moment.

"No thanks," Polyakov sneered, then pushing past the man who still had a gun aimed at his head, he stormed out.

There were tiny wires attached to each exquisitely carved piece. The wires ran away from the board, into the shadows, where hidden machinery lurked. No one understood the machines. No one had made them and no one knew what they did, only that they must be maintained at all times. And the only way to do that was to play the game. Over and over. Again and again. Forever.

Polyakov's hand hovered over his knight. It didn't matter, but he liked to win.

"Why are you here?" the man sat opposite him asked.

Polyakov looked up sharply, surprised. Surely, that was the question he should have been asking the Civil Servant, not the other way round.

"I am the captain," he said, returning his attention to the board.

"Why are you the captain?" Emeric persisted.

"I think you know. I think that is why you are here. You know my story. And you have written me an ending. I might even be grateful if I didn't hate you so much."

"I know the truth." Emeric conceded. "I do not know your truth."

Polyakov snorted a derisive laugh. "Oh very good. Evil is a matter a perspective I suppose? Do you expect me to justify myself to you?"

"No. I expect you to be belligerent and difficult. But there is little to keep me occupied on this voyage. And needling a psychopath offers at least some sport."

He made his move, his heckles rising. Somewhere in the darkness there was an accompanying movement, a sound further away than the limit of the gondola, out in untold distances that a simple human mind could hardly conceive of.

"You play a dangerous game," the captain warned the younger man.

"I work for the Government."

"Do you think it's real?"

"Perhaps, but as I previously indicated it really makes no different."

With lightning efficiency Emeric made his move and the whole game changed. Infuriatingly, in his favor.

Somewhere in the impossible depths of his ship something clicked and whirred.

"What do you want with the Fold?"

"Perhaps I just think I have a pretty face," Emeric grinned.

Taking a moment to consider that, Polyakov made another move. "Well I don't. So I'll hardly be thrilled to

arrive at our destination."

"Oh, I do believe that you may find it stimulating." Emeric, without even looking at the board, checkmated Polyakov.

The machinery sang with alien delight as the pieces shifted back to their starting positions.

"You have become lovers," Cadence observed she pushed the spike deep into his brain. It was a delicate operation. One wrong move and the captain would be impaired for the rest of his life. But it wasn't a move that she was likely to make, expert as she was. No, it was an involuntary spasm or jerk from Polyakov that was the danger.

Blood clouded his vision as sheer agony momentarily blotted out all his senses. "We all have our vices," Polyakov struggled. "I'm sure you do too."

"None that I can think of," Cadence replied as she pushed the spike a little further into his eye socket. She sounded, Polyakov managed to observe between deafening mental static blasts of pain, a little hurt by the implied accusation.

"Most of us then," he gasped. He wanted to be sick, violently sick, but such uncontrolled reflexes would be the death of him. So he endured. He always endured.

"We are almost there," Cadence said after a moment, easing the blade back a few millimeters.

Polyakov could not tell whether she was talking about the torture session or their voyage to the Fold. Both eventualities filled him with dread.

"Yes," he breathed. "Yes, we are."

After every bout of violent fucking Emeric would ask him the same question: "Why are you here?", "Why are you here?", "Why are you here?" And as time wore on, as their ungodly journey progressed towards its unholy end, Polyakov gradually exhausted his supply of answers.

The old captain wept as he finally submitted. He slumped naked in a corner of his quarters as Emeric Asimov stalked towards him, equally naked, cane in hand.

"Why are you here?" Emeric asked. "Why are you here?"

The monotonous drone of the engines would not lull him into sleep. The familiar sway of the gondola had deserted him. The motion, the endless, relentless, exalted motion of flight dissipated within his ailing mind.

Emeric raised his cane. "Why are you here?" he asked.

"It so hurts," was the answer that Polyakov finally gave up.

They gathered on the bridge at the moment of their arrival. The landscape beneath them had changed,

becoming desolate, and an eerie fog had closed in on the mighty airship. There was no boundary per se, no line in the sand, so they merely continued in reverential silence until the Officer on Watch sighted the other vessel.

After his confession Emeric had deserted him. Polyakov cherished the bitter acid of betrayal, which was almost as keen as anything Cadence had offered him in recent months. He even nurtured a hard kernel of jealousy. Was Emeric fucking his bodyguard, or the woman, or his entire crew? Did he disappear with Cadence to indulge in all manner of vile torments? The notion was enough to drive him mad with fury.

The two airships closed on each other, sailing out of the fog; resolving from ghostly shadows into physical constructs.

Nobody spoke. The sheer wrongness of the situation permeated the entire ship. No one visited the Fold. The entire human race fled in exactly the opposite direction, congregating in the Capital, almost clambering over each other just so they could be that extra few feet away from the edge of the Folded Earth.

At last the other airship was close enough to decipher its markings. As they all knew it would be, the other ship was the *Hardest Win*, identical to their own vessel in every respect. Polyakov wondered at his counterpart across on the other ship. *The poor wretch, he thought. The poor mad bastard.*

His hands shaking, he raised his binoculars to his eyes. He saw himself staring back, and Emeric, and then Civil Servant's idiotic bodyguard, and...

Every part of him chilled to absolute zero as realization dawned. There was an absence. He looked sideways, his eyes wild, his heart in fits.

"The woman!" he gasped.

The young woman that Emeric had brought aboard his ship was not mirrored on the opposing version of the *Hardest Win*.

"Now do you believe me?" she asked Emeric.

Emeric bowed his head thoughtfully, contemplating this abomination as if it was an idle curiosity, something for the amusement of children.

Polyakov reached for his gun and was shot down by Si.

The crew of the *Hardest Win* reacted at once, some rushing his assassin, others fleeing the bridge.

As the life slowly bled out of him Captain Polyakov watched Emeric's vile bodyguard dispatch three of his officers. The man strode over to him then, weapon leveled squarely at his head, eager to expedite his departure to the Dredge Waterfalls.

Emeric stayed his hand, his cane coming to rest on the other man's weapon, easing it away from Polyakov.

"More pressing matters, wouldn't you say?" Emeric raised his eyebrows questioningly.

Si looked mildly frustrated, but answered respectfully enough: "Of course."

As Emeric's bodyguard departed, off to slaughter more of his crew, the man himself knelt down beside Polyakov. He smiled sadly. "How do you like your ending?"

"It will suffice," Polyakov spluttered. "Could be worse." He spent a moment or two coughing up his insides. Then: "Please, make it worse."

Down below a loyal crewmember entered the Requitorium and swept the pieces clean off the board. The wires sliced through the flesh of his arms and hands, nonetheless in the moments before he was shot to death he grasped and tugged for all he was worth, causing the airship to howl with otherworldly pain.

Polyakov felt the lurch as the ship began the not so long process of crashing. Through the window he could see that the other ship, the one that was not carrying the strange woman that Emeric had brought aboard, was untroubled.

"Divergence," Emeric confirmed as he pushed his finger into the bullet wound. Polyakov screamed and writhed in exquisite pain. "A parting of the ways."

A few moments later, as explosions sounded

throughout his falling ship, Polyakov's arched back landed back on the deck. The angle of descent had increased and the woman, clearly panic-stricken, was pressed hard against the front of the bridge, clinging on for dear life.

"We have to go!" she demanded.

"Damn..." Polyakov mustered as Emeric wiped the blood from his finger, "amateurs."

"Forgive me," Emeric apologized, ignoring the increasingly desperate pleas from the woman. "This is not my area of expertise."

Cadence came to his side then. The girl stroked his face and cooed into his ear. She told him things. Confirmed his worst nightmares. Teased his mind into hitherto unexplored abysses of despair.

"Goodbye, my friend," Emeric whispered as he rose back up to his feet. The man seemed quite unaffected by the shifting focus of gravity. "Safe journey."

"Why?" Polyakov managed as he squeezed the last few breaths out of his lungs. "Why are you doing this?"

Emeric looked down at the man. Everywhere was on fire now and outside the ground was rushing to meet them with indecent haste.

"Because," Emeric answered as the man at his feet expired, "it so hurts."

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Photo by Diane DC

