



The latest in SciFi, Fantasy, Anime and Cult. Free!

Issue #0

District 9: Our Thoughts!

Cover Feature Page #7

Find out if our members thought District 9 was a Hit or a Miss!

Reviews Page #3

Looking for something to distract you from real life? Maybe our reviews of "Dollhouse", "Cabin Fever", "Prototype" and "Old Man's War" will help you find (or avoid) a suitable distraction.

Artwork Page #5

Shiny shiny art from our shiny shiny members!

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Just another quiet day in Vic's Seedy Space Bar, until a mysterious stranger walks in and the day takes a turn for the worse...

DISTRICT 9

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District 9 #7

What did we think of it? Find out here!

Story: Vic's #8

Short stories, poems, and the beauty of the written word. Relax into a world of make-believe we have crafted for you.

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Welcome

Captain's Log

My fellow Geeks,

It is with immense pride and pleasure that I present to you this preview issue of our new Science Fiction & Fantasy Society fanzine! At the risk of sounding like someone off of The Apprentice, this is a bold move for us into new territory, and I'm pleased to say that so far everyone involved has thrown themselves into it with the passion and dedication I have come to expect from people who have been threatened with extreme violence in the event that they give anything less than 110%.

What you now clutch in your sweaty little mitts¹ and gaze upon with your greedy little eyes is our latest attempt at improving the society and moving away from our image as 'just another film society'. Just another film society? HAH! Hardly! We'll show them, we'll show them all! BWA HA HA HA H- er... sorry, got carried away. Yes, anyway.

The aim of this publication is to be a platform for our members to showcase their creative talents. And by them I mean YOU! Yes, YOU! This swanky digital publication thingummajigery is for YOU. Any member of this great society can submit something, be it a story, a poem, a piece of artwork, a review or an editorial-type-thing. We're hoping for this to get bigger and better with every year, with more and more regular features and wotnot. Perhaps a regular comic strip or two will emerge? Don't worry if you don't think your work is good enough, we'll publish anything you give us! Hopefully by the end of this year the project will have been successful enough to warrant the creation of a new committee post, The Editor, who can take the publication to all-new heights. Or lows. But hopefully heights.

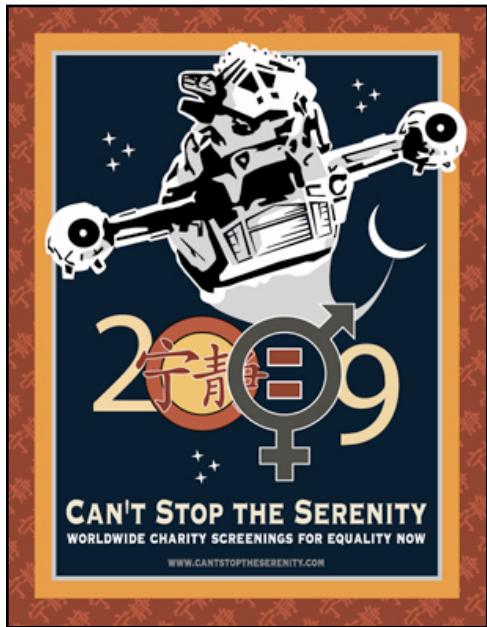
Before that can happen, however, it clearly needs a nice shiny name. Calling it The Zine is all very well and good, but we're looking for a more permanent (and, of course, awesome) name for it. In keeping with the spirit of the whole thing, we shall be leaving this down to YOU! Yes, YOU! Er, again! That's right, the name of the publication will be decided upon by means of A LOVELY COMPETITION! So quickly, dash off to the forum (<http://www.su-web2.nottingham.ac.uk/~scifi/phpbb>) and put your suggestion forward! Besides having the honour of giving this new project an awesome name, you will of course win the respect and admiration of your peers.

If all goes well, then a new issue of the newly named SFFS publication will be put out next term, filled with shinies from as many of you lovely members as wish to help. With your input, we can make this something we can all be proud of. Please help us to leave a lasting mark on the society by making this Zine a beloved part of the society that will hopefully remain long after we have all moved on to pastures new.

1: Or would hold in your hands if it weren't distributed electronically by pdf file – unless you're reading the Master Copy ... but I digress.

Can't Stop the Serenity

Thanks to everyone who turned up and helped (and especially to Sian for organising it), it was a wonderful event and everyone who turned up seemed to have fun. Here's hoping we can do it again sometime!



The first of hopefully many more, this event was part of a yearly global campaign to screen Serenity and raise as much money for women's rights charity Equality Now as is possible. We did our bit by holding a raffle, selling refreshments and homemade badges. When all was totted up, we found that we had raised in excess of £300 – well over the expected sum of a venue hosting their first ever such event. Well done, everyone!

Thanks to everyone who turned up and helped (and especially to Sian for organising it), it was a wonderful event and everyone who turned up seemed to have fun. Here's hoping we can do it again sometime!

Together, We Are Moghty
by Sam Kurd



Nathan Fillion & PJ Haarsma in the
CSTS Intro Video

Conventions

Finding information about coming conventions can be difficult, so many different events, and so little time. So we've got the details of those that caught our eyes, so you don't have to put any effort in:

- ▶ **Who At The FAB Café:** Special Doctor Who guests (including Georgia Moffett & Terrence Dicks) at the FAB Café in Manchester, Saturday 7th November. Tickets £26 : www.fanslikeus.org.uk/fabcafe2.html
- ▶ **FuyuCon:** Anime Convention at the Park Inn in Northampton, Friday 23rd - Sunday 25th October. Day Pass £20 : www.fuyucon.org
- ▶ **GameCity:** Nottingham's own unique approach to a Video Games Festival. Last year we had zombies, this year, who knows. 27th-30th November, GameCity.org



SFFS @ GameCity 08

Game (XBox 360)

review by Brunhilde "Tonks" Hill

Prototype

Prototype is an action shooter game from Activision. You play Alex Mercer, a young man who wakes up in a government research facility with few memories and some strange supernatural powers. The story of the game follows Alex as he tries to piece together what happened to him while New York faces a Resident Evil-esque viral infection.

The main quest mission involve neutralising military bases and infected 'hives' in order to find people and information on what is happening and how you're involved. Alex's ultimate goal is to find whoever turned him into this prototype super human soldier.

I found the gameplay in this game to be excellent. The controls are instinctive and Alex's powers are

fun to get to grips with. I enjoy the fact there are many ways to play this game. The missions themselves involve a mix of destroying everything you see and sneaking around to get what you want. There are also side missions or events which involve anything from infiltrating a particular base to using Alex's powers to do certain things within a time limit.

There's no limit to what you can do really. You can use Alex's powers, pick up guns, take over tanks and call in air strikes. You can morph into other people, climb buildings, fly (almost, it's actually gliding). When climbing and gliding I'm strongly reminded of the movie tie-in Spiderman games, leading me to think they've sued a similar engine.

I like the sandbox element of this game. It means that after a hard day at work, you can come home and unwind by pulling Alex's claws out and turning the people around you into piles of gore. Of course, you don't have to play the game as a murderous rampage; there is an achievement for completing the game without killing an 'innocent' (I assume that means people who are neither military nor infected).

I particularly like the 'Web of Intrigue' element to the game. There are particular people throughout the game who you have to 'consume' in order to see some of their memories and find out information to further the plot.

Film (on DVD)

review by Sam Kurd

Cabin Fever

Cabin Fever is Eli Roth's film debut, and I wish he'd never bothered. It's truly dire in almost every single way.

This pitiful excuse for a horror film seems to aim to disgust rather than scare its viewers, a trend Roth would continue to pursue with his Hostel films. The plot is no more complex than your simple 'teenagers go to a cabin in the woods and bad stuff happens' archetype; this would be forgiveable if the film brought something new to the genre. It does not.

The characters are loathsome, the directing is bland and the story is dull. I found it impossible to care about what was going on beyond

vaguely hoping that the flesh-eating virus would kill everyone nice and quickly so the end of the film could come. There is one genuinely unsettling scene, in which a girl afflicted with the afore-mentioned virus attempts to shave her legs... I'm sure you see where that's going. Which is another problem the film has, predictability.

Though much of the film is unintentionally laughable ("PAAANCAAAKES!"), all but one of the jokes that were intended to be funny were simply puerile or offensive. The funny joke was to do with an old man and his purposes for keeping a rifle (it seems offensive when brought up at the beginning of the film, but in

the last scene there's a great twist that actually had me laughing out loud). All the other "jokes" of this calibre: "Why do you want to shoot squirrels?" asks one character. "Because they're gay," quips the comic-relief character. Oh such hilarity. Truly Roth is a great comedy genius to rival Wilde himself.

Admittedly, comedy isn't what the film is about, but when your horror film fails to inspire horror, you could really do with having something to fall back on. This film fails on almost every count - it wasn't scary, it wasn't funny and crucially it wasn't entertaining. In short, it was pants. If I were you I'd avoid this film like a flesh-eating plague.

Book

review by Susan Tarrier

Old Man's War - John Scalzi

This book was recommended to me as a cross between Ender's Game and Starship Troopers, and that is possibly the most accurate summary of it I can give you. The book is about John Perry, who joins the Colonial Defence Force on his seventy-fifth birthday. The Colonial Defence Force are responsible for fighting the many, many alien species for the relatively few planets in the universe that are fit to live on, and they only want people of retirement age in their army.

You may boggle at that, but trust me, the logic behind it is sound and the story works really well. For those who like such things, there IS science in this book, and I've been informed by those who know better than me that the physics used is actually accurate! Yes, even the obligatory tachyons are described in a way that might actually be right. The technology isn't anything you won't have seen before, although the way it's used is quite amusing. The alien races and worlds described are all different and interesting, as are the ways they deal with - and in most cases are summarily dealt with - the CDF John is now part of.

Of course, John Perry happens to be the single luckiest man alive even when all logic, plot and examples made of other characters would dictate he shouldn't be able to survive that - he is good at everything he attempts, comes up with battle tactics that no one else has thought of, and almost everything ends up going his way

eventually. Even the characters that hate or ignore everyone, such as the drill sergeant or the Ghost brigade, find reasons to like him more than they like anyone else. However, he manages to be an interesting and sympathetic character anyway, and his point of view is generally funny and sarcastic - as is much of the dialogue, actually, to the point where it's quite possible to lure people into reading it purely by reading out random sections of it. Most of the characters in the book are just names and one defining personality trait (or, again like the drill sergeant, they're stereotypes with enough of a twist to be interesting - the drill sergeant fully acknowledges that he's a stereotype, but he refuses to soften up and proceeds to explain exactly why he hates every single group represented by the troops he's training.), but they've got enough of a personality that you can get attached to them and so it's a little sad when they die.

The battles are well done - even if you only get what's happening from John's point of view, it's chaotic and the difference in the way they fight different aliens - ranging from ritualized combat to simply squashing tiny aliens - is interesting. Some of them feel rushed, but most of them are as well written as the rest of the book, and it is really well written. In summary, this is a really fun and well-written book with a good plot, likable characters, and SCIENCE! I can't recommend it enough.

TV

review by Sam Kurd

Dollhouse

The odds are you've watched this by any means you can (because Joss Whedon is our master), but in case you missed it, here's a quick list of reasons why you should give it a try on DVD:



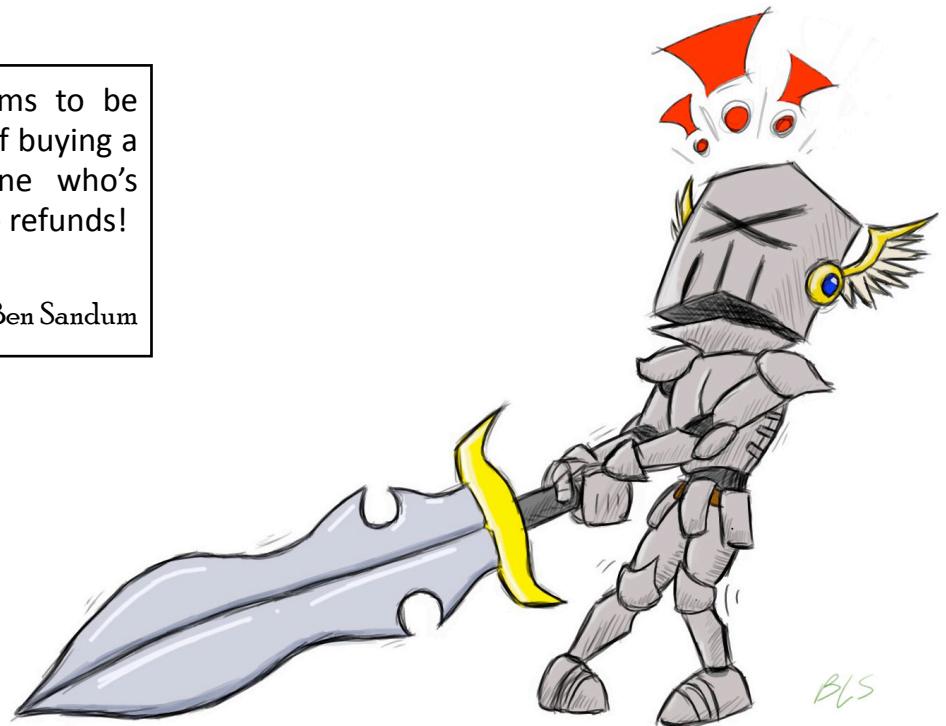
1. It's created and mostly-written by Joss Whedon of Buffy/ Angel/Firefly fame, arguably one of the greatest TV geeks of all time. His stories are compelling and his characters are usually as real and flawed as actual people can be.
2. It's got a great Scifi concept – a shady corporation that takes people, wipes their identity so they are blank slates, then gives them new identities based on what their clients require. Every week same actor/actress, new personality.
3. It has surprise Alan Tudyk & Felicia Day in it!
4. It doesn't hurt that stars Eliza Dushku & Tahmoh Penikett are very attractive!
5. The story progression is excellent – once you get past the first four episodes or so.
6. If you get the DVD, you'll get the unaired pilot & unaired Felicia Day episode, which are both excellent.

What's not to love? Buy it, rent it, borrow it – just watch it!

Artwork

This unfortunate fellow seems to be suffering the consequences of buying a sword designed by someone who's watched too much anime! No refunds!

Drawn by Ben Sandum



Yikes ... you're going to need a bigger gun!

Drawn by Simon King, a friend of Ben's who has graciously allowed us to publish it here.

The Fire Lord

by Pinaz Pajnigar

The fearsome roar rumbles through the cavern's walls,
A warning to all that trespass his halls.
From the belly of the beast a fire soars,
Fighting with flame, teeth and claws.
The scaled body defeats mortal armour and shield,
Gleaming indifference at weapons we would wield.
For he is a warrior, a soldier, a king,
He rules the land with strong heart and wing.
Beware those fools who would cross his wise eye.
The Dragon bows to none, his place above the sky.

XXXXX

by Lucinda "Tonks" Hill

Space is cold. Really cold. Which is odd considering how hot the laser bolt is as it passes through my space suit and my flesh. I ponder the dichotomy of this hot and cold sensation even as my oxygen supply rushes out into the vacuum. And then the searing pain hits. I gasp, but what I inhale is not oxygen but space. I've lived my entire life in space, it is only fitting that I should die here. But not like this. Not fighting someone else's battle. God this hurts. Asphyxiation is not a pleasant way to die, but oh.

District 9: Our Thoughts

“Alien prawns, addictive catfood and flying pigs - someone was stupidly hungry when making this film.” --Pinaz

“What’s not to love about aliens, mecha, exploding people and pig-launchers?” --Jamibu

“Brilliant but depressing!” --Vish

“Humans are jerks.” --Webmaster James

“Without doubt one of the finest science fiction films to come out in the last decade.” --Ben



This photo was taken by Wikipedia User Canterbury Tail.

District 9 has been described as a blockbuster with a brain, and I'd say it fulfills that promise perfectly. It has high-octane action set-pieces that don't jar at all with the film's mostly-mockumentary style.

The film deals with a race of prawn-like aliens who have been forced to live in the titular slum of District 9 in Johannesburg, regulated by the military and the clearly-evil MNU corporation, for whom the film's lead character Wikus works. Whilst on a routine job (it's always a routine job in these films) to serve eviction papers and confiscate drugs and weaponry, Wicus comes across a strange alien tube that he declares is not a weapon but still worth confiscating – but not before he's stupidly pointed it at his face and accidentally sprayed himself with the contents. It's downhill for him from there, as you can imagine.

Though slow-moving towards the start, the film picks up pace as it moves towards its explosive climax. It makes for very uncomfortable viewing at times, as the humans' treatment of and attitude towards the aliens often borders on the despicable (and crosses that border quite a bit at times). The film's a clear allegory for South Africa's Apartheid history, and as such it was never meant to be a fun-filled romp. Nevertheless, hideous reminders of human ignorance and negligence aside, this is an excellent science fiction film and not to be missed. I'm sure when the DVD comes out we'll end up watching it again on a Wednesday night soon enough!

The location : Vic's Seedy Space Bar. No, that's not just a description, that's the actual name of the place. Built shortly after the terraforming of the moon had enabled travellers there to settle with relative ease, it was originally called Vic's Slice of Paradise, and it was intended to be a trendy wine bar. Unfortuntaly Vic soon found out that not many trendy winebars flourish in spaceports, especially spaceports like Luna 1. His clientele were the unwashed masses of scum who drift from planet to planet, moon to moon, searching for that most unobtainable of goals – job security. Trendy winebar people don't drift, they move swiftly and purposefully AWAY from unclean places like Luna 1. Vic grew to curse the day he ever bought the dive, and eventually sold it to a travelling eccentric millionaire, who changed the name ever so slightly, in keeping with his rather odd sense of humour. The clientèle barely even noticed. As long as they had somewhere they could peddle their hallucinogenic drugs, gamble their lives away and drown their sorrows in the kind of rotgut that'd leave their livers with the consistency of damp and mouldy Swiss cheese, they didn't care what the name of the damn place was.

Today was a typical day. Cigar smoke hung heavy in the air, the floor was beer-sticky and muddy, and scruffy rogues played card games using cards with naked aliens instead of Kings and Queens. One tentacled Venusian was sure to lose, as he had a particularly revealing tell – every time he got a good hand he started sweating corrosive acid. In the end he was thrown out for dissolving the card table. Nothing unusual for Vic's. In fact, the only odd thing about the day was that no one had been vaporized in a violent bar-brawl. Yet.

'Yes sir,' thought Steve the Bartender as he dried a pint glass with an oily rag, 'looks like it's going to be a quiet day...'

Just then, the centuries-old-fashioned saloon doors swung forward, and harsh sunlight flooded in, silhouetting the figure at the door. Oddly enough the Bar's jukebox chose that moment to finish a song mid-sentence, and silence abruptly reigned. Everyone looked at the door, cursed the brightness and got back to what they were doing, assuming the newcomer to be just another tough guy. As the saloon doors swung back, the jukebox started up again and the new customer became fully visible.

He stalked through the bar, his dirty brown duster flapping at his ankles. Though slim, he still cut an imposing figure. Several customers had to crane their necks back to get a good look at his face, he was that tall. They soon wished they hadn't. Something awful had happened to that face at some point. Something that had required reconstructive surgery and bionic implants. The kind that can be bought from any dirty grungy run-down garage. The kind that often malfunction, twisting the face into a contorted mess. Half of the stranger's face was thus deformed, but the rest was oddly handsome - a striking contrast. Sat on top of this monstrous visage was an archaic hat from nearby Earth, a cowboy hat.

The stranger leant over the bar counter, and stared Steve in the face. There was a cold fire in one eye and a look that implied years of torment, hardship and suffering had been inflicted on the owner of said eye – but that the owner had been tempered, made all the stronger by the abuse. The other eye implied nothing – like one of the stranger's ears it was gone, replaced with a cut-price rusty robotic equivalent that sparked erratically. Steve flinched slightly, but the stranger betrayed no emotion at his reaction. It was clear he had experienced it several times before, and doubtless would again.

"Got whiskey?" the stranger asked, in a voice that dragged fingernails down Steve's soul. The bartender gulped and nodded nervously. "Double Scotch, straight. Beer chaser. And put an umbrella in it."

Steve poured two measures into a glass, his hands trembling. What was wrong with him? He'd faced down bigger, meaner scumbags than this guy before. He was from Earth, the galaxy's cesspool! He'd even once bottled a Martian who'd been built like a tank and rammed the bottle end into what passed for its - but that was another time, and this was now. This stranger was terrifying, and it wasn't just the face. It was his silent confidence, as if he knew what was going on, was in complete control of it all and simply didn't give a fuck for anything else. This man was a killer. This man Meant Business.

He passed the drinks to the stranger, who handed over his ident-card for swiping through the credit deductor. Steve swiped the card and glanced at the monitor, curious to see the man's name. He was disappointed to see that the personal information of the stranger was garbled, the name and address and criminal record details coming through only in machine code. He glanced up at the stranger and cleared his throat.

"Uh, there seems to be a uh, a problem with the machine. Your name ... your details, they're, uh ... they're missing."

Silence from the stranger.

"It's just that, uh, I need them. Can't really, uh, can't really sell you anything without them, y'see. It's, uh... it's the law..." He trailed off as the silence grew heavy and menacing. The stranger didn't even flicker his remaining eyelid. Steve nodded decisively. "Well, uh, never mind then. Here you go, sir, enjoy your drink!"

He handed the glass over to the stranger, who held a hand to his hat and tugged it down ever so slightly in salute. He moved silently to a small table in the corner by the jukebox and sat, staring into his whiskey glass. Steve whistled in relief under his breath, glad that it was all over. As he resumed drying the pint glass he noticed with mild annoyance that Scrotey Jim, a Vics regular, was sidling up to the bar.

Ever bar in every spaceport had a Scrotey Jim. This is not to say that there was an army of clones of a dirty, scruffy man bent on the annihilation of all stocks of cheap sherry and cigarettes. No, it is simply that in all establishments of a less savoury nature, there's always an older man who hovers around the corners of the room getting paid by bar patrons to be a good chap and cross the room to bother someone else for a bit. The smell of stale alcohol and cigarettes follows them like a lost puppy. It has been speculated that after a while this smell gains a sentience of sorts, and that certain Scroties have trained it to seek out and assault richer bar-patrons, but this is rubbish. The smell is far too stubborn to be trained.

One thing that the Scroties were good for, however, is the flow of information. When you're a sub-class citizen, people say things in front of you that they'd never say in polite company. Usually along the lines of "Quick, Fred, stash the body here, no one'll suspect a thing". Scroties knew the value of information, and as such they usually guaranteed a free drink or two from suspicious people with reason to believe a Scrotey might know something important that they don't. Scroties tend to take this business opportunity rather seriously. A Scrotey who takes free drinks and dispenses advice like "Don't run with scissors" is a soon to be dead Scrotey.

Steve eyed the Scrotey and nodded cautiously. Strangely, there was no smell. Somewhere across the room someone started coughing violently, but that was probably just a coincidence. Scrotey Jim grinned one-toothedly at Steve and nodded amiably at the newly arrived stranger, who appeared to be dipping a finger into his beer.

"Now there's a war vetrin if'n I ever saw one, eh?" Jim chuckled, his breath an almost visible cloud of halitosis and pickled onions. Steve raised an eyebrow.

"Didn't think they allowed implants in the military, Jim," he said. Jim cackled and tapped the side of his nose.

"Naw, they don't. Not in OUR military, leastways. Course, he might've served and then got 'em, but I don't think so. Somethin in his face is forrin. I don't mean alien," he spat, eyed the non-humans around him distrustfully."Naw, he's human alright. But he ain't one of us. I reckon..." he trailed off here and snuck an appraising glance at Steve. Seeming to come to a decision, he coughed twice, pitifully. Steve rolled his eyes.

"Come on, Jim, I'm sure it's not exactly life or death information," he objected. Jim sighed deeply, as if from the depths of his soul.

"I don't know," he said mournfully. "My throat's bin awful parched lately." Just behind him, another customer broke out in a coughing fit, tears streaming from their eyes. Steve gritted his teeth.

"Fine," he hissed. "One drink. Just ONE, though. It comes out of my wages, you know."

"Bless you, m'lad!" Jim cried, arms flung wide. "Yer a true philanthropist, and don't let none of em tell you no different!" He grinned as Steve's hand reached below the counter, but his face fell dramatically when it returned clutching nothing harder than a cheap fizzy beer. He shrugged. Alcohol was alcohol, after all. He waited until the bottle was opened for him before nodding his head.

"Thank ee," he said solemnly. Manners maketh the space bum. "Now, our impressive looking friend in the corner. I reckon..." He looked around in mock caution, as if his next words might be controversial somehow. "I reckon... he's been on The Fringe!" He leaned back with a triumphant grin.

Steve blinked. The Fringe? For this he'd just spent ten credits? It was obvious to any fool that man had just come back from The Fringe! It was the only area of Earth's fledgling space empire that wasn't at peace. There was no war out there with aliens, though. No, this was old-fashioned war, good old-fashioned man against man. The enemy didn't have scales, tentacles, antenna or prehensile slime-bodies. It was a war between Mother Earth and her children, the colonists of Neptune and Pluto. And Mother Earth was winning.

"I've got to say, Jim, you're not wowing me here. I've seen Fringe veterans before. None of them looked quite like that, but they're certainly battle-scarred and tough. Mean too, usually."

Jim grinned slyly and turned to look at the stranger again. He was now staring intently at his palm. Steve suddenly realised what the finger-dipping had been about – he had a scanner implanted into his hand. The finger was the measurement device, and his palm obviously had a tiny inbuilt computer display. He was probably checking the alcohol level of the drink. Steve figured he'd be satisfied with it – Vics never watered down their beer. Well, not very often. Well, not regularly. Steve gulped.

Jim leaned in close to Steve. Steve leaned back a bit. Jim's face was solemn and serious now.

"That man," he said seriously, "is a colonist."

Steve couldn't help himself. He laughed.

"A colonist? Here? This is Earth's moon, Jim! There's no way a colonist could get this far into our territory."

Jim shrugged. "Mebbe so," he conceded. "And mebbe not. But I can tell you one thing fer certain : that man ain't one of us, and him bein here is trouble. I've heard tell of a colonist, mean sonuvabitch, powerful ugly, makin his way from the outer Fringe to Earth to settle some old debts. And I'll tell you this for free – every time I hear of him agin, he gits closer and closer. You mark my words, Mr. Bartender. That's him. And I reckon hell's about to break loose, cos if'n he's here, he's here for a reason."

Scrotey Jim raised his bottle in mock salute and faded into the shadows in the recesses of the bar. Trouble or no, he wasn't about to up and leave when there might be the chance of a show. Besides, there might be a drink or two in it later.

As the stranger finally lifted the glass to his lips, there came a hostile croak from a dark corner of the bar.

"You. I thought I told you never to come in here."

Steve gritted his teeth and sighed. The stranger stood and turned, his bionic eye sparking as it automatically scanned the room for the speaker. He stopped, facing the corner the voice had come from. Out of the shadows stepped a giant lizard-like alien, eyes glowing with rage. Several other lizard people stood up, sliding their chairs back, hands reaching for belts. Their race was renowned for its skill at manufacturing bladed weapons, and they were all carrying. Steve cursed and slid his hands under the counter. 'Why didn't I get a quiet job,' he thought, 'maybe in accounting, with a desk and a calculator and absolutely no barbrawls between terrifying colonists and scaly aliens?'

The stranger murmured something under his breath, and slowly raised his arms peaceably. He gazed steadily at the lizard people and their giant leader, and shook his head slowly.

"I don't want trouble," he said, quietly yet clearly. "I don't need to kill anyone today."

There was scattered nervous laughter at this, but the stranger's face remained serious. The Lizard people hissed, and closed their ranks to form a diamond of fighters. As one, they drew swords, knives and pulveriser sticks. The lizard leader pointed at the stranger.

"We have unfinished business, scum!" he howled, and pulled a blaster from his belt. The stranger, in a blur of movement, swung both hands to his hips and reached into his duster.

"No blasters!" Steve bellowed, and ducked behind the counter as the lizard man opened fire at him. Glass shattered and sprinkled his head and shoulders as he yanked the bar's automatic blast-rifle from its clasps. 'Well, he's barred, for a start,' he thought wryly, hearing the blaster discharge twice more. He was startled to hear two rather loud explosions in reply to this. Bracing himself for the worst, he jumped upright again and pointed the rifle at the fighters.

Chaos greeted him. One of the lizards was down, dead, with a neat little hole in his forehead. Steve couldn't see it, but most of the back of the creature's skull was missing, disintegrated. Another lizard was writhing on the floor, howling with pain, tail thrashing around, surrounded by bits of table. It appeared to have a very painful gut wound. The wall behind the stranger was scorched and blackened; evidently the alien leader gang leader was a lousy shot and had missed each time. The leader was fiddling with its blaster and swearing loudly - it had jammed. There were bits of broken chair lying around on the ground by the stranger's feet, but he didn't appear to be fazed. He was standing his ground, feet planted apart, arms raised. Sparks flew as old mechanical joints groaned at the speed with which the stranger, though still, fought. A contradiction in terms, perhaps but it was the only was Steve could comprehend it. The man as moving so fast he was almost standing still.

In left hand he clutched a small weapon, much like a blaster though, like the rest of the stranger's equipment and attire, strangely low-tech. The gun had a smaller barrel, for a start, and was a lot slimmer than any blaster Steve had ever seen. When it discharged, it did so with a frankly terrifying bang, and there appeared to be a recoil. No gun had done that for decades. By all rights, fighting with a gun like this, the stranger should be dead. The gun had a leather thong attached to the butt, and looped round the stranger's fist, which allowed him to 'drop' the gun and clutch his enemy with his free hand. This done, he could bring his second weapon into play - Steve's eyes widened as he clocked it. Not quite a knife, not quite a sword. It was a machete, and it was easily as long as Steve's arm.

Before Steve's very eyes, the stranger gripped an enemy by the arm, swung it around and swiftly hacked its head off in two immensely powerful strokes. Dropping the decapitated alien, he jerked his left wrist up suddenly, swinging the pistol back into his grip and swivelling on one foot just in time to plant a bullet into the chest of an enemy who had silently flanked him. Steve flinched involuntarily as the explosion sounded, his finger convulsing on the trigger of his own weapon in reflex. A lizardman fell. Oops. The bar's insurance would cover it.

"Behind you!" Steve called to the stranger. The stranger leant into a lunge from the lizard in front of him, grabbed its arm and swung around, dragging the helpless alien before him. Not a minute too soon, as three shots from lead alien's blaster slammed into the hostage, killing it instantly. The stranger threw the lizard's corpse at his remaining enemy, a move the alien was not expecting. It tumbled to the ground, its blaster slipping from its grip.

In an instant the stranger's foot was pressing down heavily on the alien's chest. The lizard clutched the stranger's leg feebly, wheezing as the breath was slowly driven out of its body. It stared fearfully into the barrel of the stranger's gun, and at the cold, merciless face that had remained expressionless throughout the small massacre. The stranger spoke, slowly, quietly, deliberately.

"When you get to Hell," he said, "you can wait for McNeal and Jensen to join you."

The lizardman's eyes widened fit to pop out of its head.

"You're taking on McNeal?" it whispered with its remaining breath. "You're -"

Steve never found out what the alien reckoned the stranger was, because the stranger emptied his gun into its head. At that range, the head was pulverised. The floor underneath it took a beating, too. Whatever bullets were in that gun, they weren't the conventional bullets to go with that weapon.

The stranger looked around slowly, appraising the room. No one said a word. No one breathed. If there had been tumbleweed on the moon, it would have rolled across the room. And what a state that corner of the room was in! Debris from broken furniture, damaged walls and floor, dead bodies lying around – and one very alive one, still squealing like a stuck pig. Or a stuck lizard, rather. The stranger strode over to it and picked it up with one hand. It howled in protest.

"You can live," he said simply. "Tell him I'm coming."

And with that he threw the lizard through the bar's main window, shattering the glass that had only been replaced yesterday. Insurance would cover that too. The lizard lay unconscious on the pavement outside, and that was the end of that.

Steve set the blaster-rifle down on a stool beside him and appraised the damage. It could have gone much worse. The stranger downed the rest of his beer, walked over to the counter and regarded Steve unapologetically.

"This will cover the expense," he said simply, dropping a small hessian pouch on the counter. He made as if to leave, but stopped. He stared into Steve's eyes, and Steve felt a shudder run down his spine. The stranger nodded slightly to himself.

"Reckon you saved my life back there," he said softly. "I'm not much of a one for thanks. But seems I owe you something." He leaned forward slightly. Steve leaned back a bit.

"Leave," the stranger commanded. "Hell is coming. Think maybe you don't deserve to bear the brunt of it." And without another word, the stranger turned and left the bar. Steve stared silently at the doors as they gently swung shut. Every patron of that bar was gazing at Steve, and he knew that they had all come to the same conclusion he had just come to.

He didn't know who McNeal was, or Jensen. He didn't know how the stranger defined Hell, or why it should be following in his wake. But he did know he didn't want to be around here when it arrived, that was for certain.

He wondered if the weather on Venus was nice this time of year.

Caption Competition



Can you come up with the perfect caption to sum up this photo? Let us know! Email your caption suggestions to : sffsoc@gmail.com

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Well, you've reached the end of The Zine. Well done! We hope you've enjoyed it, everyone involved worked terribly hard to get it out to you. Now I'm afraid there's nothing left to read. Sorry. You'll have to look elsewhere for your entertainment. This issue of The Zine's finished, there's nothing more for you here.

You could read a book (we've got plenty in the Library you can check out, just go and ask Susan). You could eat an apple. You could go climb a tree, or play hopscotch. You could stick a film on, or go for a walk, or have a nice picnic by the lake on Campus. You could gather together man expedition and trek out to the deepest darkest portions of The Congo in search of a lost land full of dinosaurs and improbably-sized creepy crawlies. Or, more likely, you could close this program, open up your internet browser, click on the Stumble button and allow the internet to wash over you in a never-ending tide of digital information (most of which is utterly useless but highly amusing).

You don't have to go home, but you can't stay here!

Now shoo!

Shoo!

Oh, and we lied about leaving this page blank. BECAUSE WE CAN!

The Zine Will Return...

