

EXHIBITION HALL 12
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EXHIBITION HALL 12 - AUGUST 2010

I know it's not at all Steampunk, but I've been watching the classic Buffy episode *Once More With Feeling*. It's a great episode, a fun bit of musicality and hilarity. You can see the roots of *Dr. Horrible* all over it. And *Repo: The Genetic Opera*. And on and on and on...

You can see where this is going, can't you? We need *Steampunk: The Musical*!

Now, don't you look at me like that! It's a genius idea. Singing and dancing always draws a crowd and hey, they did a musical about the common household cat, so why not Steampunk?

There are stories that are kinda asking for it. I'd say that there's nothing that I'd like to see musicalized more than the works of Gail Carriger. First off, it's got a great lead female and a raucous set of events. I could absolutely see Lord Akeldama's prancing numbers in my head!

Then there's *Bone-shaker*, which would be nutty. Imagine the set they'd design for the *Walled City of Seattle*! And thinking about Briar belting a 'I've got to find my son!' tune makes me smile a whole bunch!

Now, the most possible fun you could have would be the works of Robert Rankin. *Retromancer* was pretty amazing and anytime you could put a character like Hugo Rune in words and lyrics is a good time. There's already a bunch of music in it, like the *Cult of the Banjolele* and *George Fromby*, and that would be hilarious.

Then again, what I really wanna see is *Ashbless! The Musical* explorations of Powers-Blaylock's famed poet. That could be huge (and I bet Tim Powers would write the book if we asked him real nice-like).

Now if only I had the money to get Sondheim working on them...

I've been prepping for Steamcon by reading more of the *Weird West*. The *Sixth Gun*, a mini-series from Oni Press, and the *Jonah Hex* movie I'll write about in the future.

OK, so what's this issue?

Well, there's a review of *The Apparition Trail*, a novel of the Canadian Wilderness that I came across by reading Mike Perschon's blog (<http://steampunkscholar.blogspot.com/> but you already knew that, didn't you?) and also a look at what was quite possibly the most popular sport in the Victorian World, wrestling, and two of the biggest pioneers. There's more, of course, but then again, when isn't there?

And so, we complete our first year much the same way we started: talking about fun stuff

ART THIS ISSUE

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STEAMPUNK CONVENTION CALENDAR

September 3rd to 6th, 2010

Dragon*Con

Hyatt Regency Atlanta, Atlanta, GA 30303

Quite possibly the biggest gathering of Steampunks in the US, Dragon*Con is a huge event and the Steampunk only a portion. Still, events include academic panels, a Makers Exhibition, a Ball, an attempt at a World Record Photo Shoot, and so much more. A lot of the modern Steampunk fandom formed out of Dragon*Con.

Nov 5th-7th 2010

Icon 35

Cedar Rapids Marriott, Cedar Rapids, IA 52402

Much like WindyCon in 2009, Icon's theme this year is all about the steam! The

writer guest of honor is also a certain Mr. Cory Doctorow, who is always a good guy to have around. I've heard nothing but good things about the fen of Iowa, as apparently they really know how to have a good time!

November 5th - 7th, 2010

TeslaCon

Radisson Inn, Madison, Madison, WI 53719

Two Steampunk conventions on the same weekend! This one had a great party at WindyCon last year and while I did have some trouble navigating their website, it's really pretty!

The con has a lot of great stuff planned (including an 1880s Poker Room!) and I really wish I could make it out there!



Nov 19th-21st 2010

SteamCon II

Seattle Airport Marriott, Seattle, WA 98188

A full 2/3 of the Editorial Staff of Exhibition Hall will be in attendance! I had a blast at the first SteamCon in 2009, and I'm expecting nothing less this year! The Guests of Honor are a good lot: James Blaylock, Shane Hensley and Jake Von Slatt. The theme is Weird Weird West, so this might be the place I debut the latest Chris Garcia lecture!

The hotel is also amazing, though they will be moving in 2011, so you should certainly come and enjoy the only Steampunk convention I know of held in an hotel with a Totem Pole in the Atrium!

March 4th-6th, 2011

Wild Wild West Con

Old Tucson Studios, Tucson, AZ 85735

A big show at the studios where they show so many classic westerns over the last century. The Unextraordinary Gentlemen,

The Strand and Abney Park are all playing, and from what I've seen listed on their website, it sounds like a good time. So far, the only guests listed as O.M. Gray and The League of S.T.E.A.M.. Still, Old Tuscon Studios is really cool.

March 25th - 27th, 2011

Nova Albion Steampunk Exhibition

Santa Clara Hyatt Santa Clara, California, 95054

The third Steampunk convention in the Bay Area moves to the wonderful Hyatt where BayCon has been the last three years. It's a much bigger hotel and there's tons of programming and just hangin' out space, along with the best fix for the biggest complaint about the last Nova Albion, TONS OF FREE PARKING!!!

Cheri Priest is the Literary Guest of Honor, which is awesome! I'll also hopefully be speaking, and our Fashion Editor is the Chair!



VOX-HAUL & I

Dear Chris, James and Ariane:

I have Exhibition Hall 11 here, no tea for me, please. Time to write my response to yet another fine issue.

There are many great steampunk publications out there and available now...the latest one is The Dominion Dispatch, Vol. 1, No. 1, edited by Adam Smith for Steampunk Canada. There are articles on music, clothing and technology, plus reviews of past steampunk conventions and publications (that's me), and an ad for the upcoming Canadian National Steampunk Exhibition, planned for April 29 – May 1, 2011. Yvonne and I will be part of the committee, and we shall see what we can contribute to such an event. The Dominion Dispatch is available from the editor at 152 Commercial Street, Milton, ON CANADA L9T 2J2. Best to correspond with Mr. Smith first.

Also agree with your assessment of Yipe!. Lots of pictures, and editor Jason Schachat knows even fast connections may have trouble downloading such a big file and the newest issue, so he had hi-rez and lo-rez versions. I must check with Steampunk Magazine and Gaslight Gazette to see if new issues are available.

Great cartoony artwork throughout, and most of it from Paige Connelly. Well done, and very steamy.

May was steamy for us as well, with another steampunk fashion show, this time at Anime North in Toronto. I may have mentioned it in my last letter...this past weekend was Polaris 24, with steampunk as a tertiary theme to the convention. Yvonne

and I had a dealer's table to run, but we still got to the Friday night Dr. Who/steampunk party. Quite a blast, had a great time showing off the costumes, and we won prizes for our fineries. We realized that this was the first time we'd won prized for costuming in more than 20 years. I used to live in Victoria, BC, so I know the Empress has space galore to hold specific shows, and I imagine the Victoria Steampunk Exposition was right at home. Seeing that we have been to high teas before, and there is a wonderful Victorian tea room a short drive away from us, and high tea at our local even in the spring will have something authentic to enjoy.

Ah, there we are on the penultimate page. Those are the very costumes we wore at Polaris, the ones that won us some great prizes. My costume does take some time to get into, with all the various railway pins and other chains and bits; Yvonne's is relatively easy to get into, but yes, both are warm. I usually do not wear the jacket over top, but go in shirt sleeves and vest.

Time to wrap it...there have been few fanzines available in these dog days of summer, but that allows me to catch up to the point where I may not have any fanzines left to comment on! No matter, I have two Drink Tanks I will tackle next, so Chris, you are hereby warned. Take care all, many thanks for your efforts, and I look forward to seeing even more with issue 12.

Yours, Lloyd Penney.

**Thanks, Lloyd!
Always glad
to hear from ya, Big
Guy!**



REVIEWED: THE APPARITION TRAIL

In the days when movie theatres were single-screen affairs built in luscious Art Deco or Arts & Craft styles, there were serials. These serials were an important part of the movie-watching process. They'd show a pair of features, maybe a cartoon, a newsreel, and usually a chapter of a serial. It was amazing stuff, a full afternoon. One of the most popular types of serials that companies like Republic were pumping out was the Wilderness Adventure serial. A wilderness man would be stuck in a different situation every week, would find themselves facing a bear with a cliffhanger that would be solved in the first minute of the next chapter before going through with a new struggle. It was all good fun, though before too long, it all seemed to be running too pat, that the pattern was too obvious.

Reading *The Apparition Trail*, I was completely struck by the feeling of a 1930s serial that it brought about. It was a lot of fun, well-paced for the most part, and left me watching the ending unfold and seeing a few cracks in the process.

The Apparition Trail by Canadian Lisa Smedman, is the story of Marmaduke Grayburn, a member of the North-West Mounted Police. Sadly, he's a dude who has preminitions and has got some troubles with his intestines. He is called in for service in a new section called Q-Division. It's a sorta-1880s X-Files team concept, only not entirely played with. He is given his first

assignment, to discover the secret behind the disappearances of the McDougall family. They suspect the Cree or Blackfoot tribes, and in specific Chiefs Wandering Spirit or Big Bear. From there, we discover that the entire thing is in reaction to the slaughter of buffalos, the starving of the tribes and the McDougalls taking the sacred Manitou Stone.

The first thing that struck me was way the chapters are headed. Each lists a series of events that will take place in the chapter, which is cool and what initially started me down the road to seeing the novel as a serial. It presents exactly what's coming, not always completely obviously, but you know where you're headed. It's like getting a preview at the start of the film.

The Steampunk elements are also really strong. This isn't just a book of magic set in the 19th Century, but it's one where Perpetual



Motion machines are real, making it possible for things like an Air-bicycle (a neat mash-up of an airship and a Harley) and a sort of miniature version used to send messages. Plus, there's the fact that a comet smacked into the moon, turning what was once the dark side towards us. This is used to explain the fact that they were able to make perpetual motion machines work and 'Indian Magic' to gain strength. An interesting twist, and it would seem that it should set-up a series of sequels that play with the ideas more.

The flow of the story is very strong, and it has the joyous swing

BY CHRIS GARCIA

of those wilderness adventures of the 1930s and 40s. Graybush is a swashbuckler, to a degree, and a soft-heart as well. He sees an Indian woman (or should I say First Nations, it is a Canadian novel?) being abused by her lout of a husband and his heart goes out to her. He's a great character, stiff-upper as it were, and while he's not an enlightened man, he's good stock. That's a troubling character, the one who is a good guy, who we can see has a good heart, but he comes from times when there was no real understanding. Graybush also has the heart of a fighter and the stomach of a 90-year old. It's interesting to see who he plays a little like those addict detectives, or more accurately Dr. House, because he relies on his patent medicine to see him through.

The fact is, Graybush is the kind of character you could build a long series around. He's a strong man, a wonderfully flawed man, and a dogged performer. I did enjoy him, but this was a finish that didn't seem to give him enough for an encore.

The other characters range from stock characters that could have easily walked out of one of those serials to seriously interesting characters of depth and color. There's the brave Indian woman, Emily, who is truly to save her daughter. There's the new recruit who comes from England who is all about the parapsychological sciences. There's the stand-out superior officer who is about as flat as they get. There are a couple of half-breeds that add an interesting touch to the North-West Mounted Police. There are a bevy of Indian chiefs who range from very human to animalistically unhuman, which is part of the point. The treatment of the Indian characters is very good. Yes, they're the villains, and yes, a couple of the Chiefs are given the Noble Majestic Savage hanger to wear about the neck, but Big Bear, Emily and a couple of others are fleshed-out, and given real roles. By the end of the book, you can see that the savagery that takes place in the earlier portions was simply meant to justify an ending that comes a little too pat.

The entire book deals with Indian Magic and there's a tough bit in it. The

magic itself is strongly-structured, mostly logical and internally sensical, which beats a lot of the magic you see in books these days. Smedman builds it well and then slowly unravels it. This is a smart technique, giving us the understanding of the magic through the investigations of Marmaduke Graybush. He comes to understand the magic, and to a degree we do as well, but that's where some of the problems with the finish come up. After he gives in to his own personal powers, Graybush seems to give up and just goes with the flow, knowing that things will work out for him. That's a problem that is not exactly rare, it's the most frequent complaint you hear about the Harry Potter books, but it makes the ending seem a little too easy. The action is still pretty good, as is the prose, and the pacing of the ending is downright precise, but it just seems like a slide. The way that we are shown what the situation evolves into is slight skewed too.

But all of that is indicative of the Serial tradition. Not known for their broad characters or the power of their endings, The Apparition Trail plays in those ruts and does it very well. Reading it, I found myself twisting my brain trying to figure out how Marmaduke was going to get from the current situation to the next one that had been previewed in the chapter notes. Smedman did a great job of holding my attention, of working the traditions and playing with the history. Many of her characters were real people, including Marmaduke, Wandering Spirit and even Charles Dickens' son. The situations are changed, of course, but there is an authenticity that you can feel in the writing. As a historian, I love that.

Overall, I enjoyed The Apparition Trail, and thought that it was a good deal of fun. It was the kind of storytelling that I enjoy, and though far from flawless, it was still entertaining and flowed very nicely. If you enjoy the old serials, or even if you've just seen one, you'll find a lot here that you'll find familiar and enticing. The best of it is as good as you'll find anywhere, though the bad isn't as bad as it could be.

WRESTLING: THE VICTORIAN YEARS

Through the centuries, every region has had its own wrestling variant. In Japan, there's Sumo. In the Nordic countries, Svengen. Mongolia, Iran, Turkey, Brazil, you name it, they've had their own wrestling styles, typically done during festivals. Most of the heavy-lifting professions, mining, lumberjacking, railroad-building, all had long traditions of wrestling. Wrestling wasn't the only sport that these groups participated in, but there are few other sports that require less equipment. Leading up to the Victorian Era, we saw the birth of baseball, forms of football and other sports we recognize today. As leisure time grew, athletes were able to form outside of occupational organizations and form free-standing clubs and troops. Wrestling was one of the first to start to go pro in a way.

England was one of the biggest venues for early pro wrestling. Lancashire wrestling was well-established, and the Scots developed a form that evolved into Collar-and-Elbow, which became the popular form to gamble on, which meant that they could pay wrestlers participating in it and that led to our modern version of Pro Wrestling once television got started. English wrestling became a huge deal in the late 19th and again in the mid-20th Century. American wrestlers would often go over to the UK for the bigger paydays in the 1880s and 90s, but seldom was there coverage of that in the US. In fact, it was common for American wrestlers to go across, work under a different name and drop matches, making a killing by having folks bet against him.

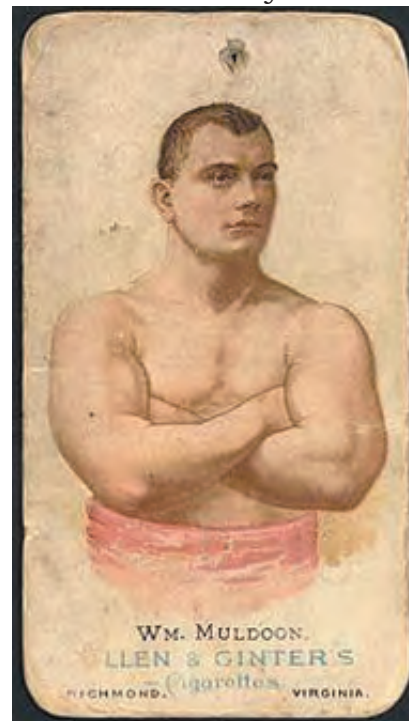
That gambling also changed what wrestling was. It started as a legitimate sport, two guys fighting without plan or 'booking', as it's known. With a lot of money to be made, things started to change. Many matches were turned into shows. At carnivals, where wrestling was one of the most popular events, you'd have a 'shooter' who would take on all-comers. Sometimes, they'd work a bit where they'd call a couple of guys out from

the crowd and they'd make the Shooter look terrible, with him only managing to win after a single lucky move. That'd bring up the local bad ass who thought that the other, smaller guys had shown that he'd be able to beat him. This would get the action going, then the shooter would handle them easily.

This led to more and more 'booking', but there were still big matches that were still legit...or at least mostly. Many would be 2 of 3 falls. The first two falls might be worked, but the final fall would be legit. After a while, even that mostly went away. By 1900, most wrestling was 'worked'.

But the two most important figures in the pre-1900 years were so important that their effects can still be seen today. They were two men who moved beyond wrestling into the mainstream consciousness. One was a cop who turned New York into the Pro Wrestling and Boxing Mecca we know it as today. The other made Iowa the place where serious wrestlers went to learn their craft.

William Muldoon fought in the Civil War as a teenager. He was a big guy, a tough guy, a strong guy. He wasn't a major hero, but when the regiment would have impromptu wrestling events, he was always happiest and won almost every match. It was here that the



future of wrestling in the United States was forged.

Muldoon was made a member of the New York Police Force in 1876. He was an ardent trainer at that point, and was instrumental in setting up the NYPD Police Athletics Club, which would go on to be the group we call PAL today. He was the hardest training guy in

BY CHRIS GARCIA

the world, and had an amazing record in wrestling. In 1880, he left the force and went out on his own.

Most wrestling in the 1800s was a part of carnivals, and only sometimes in large arenas. It was boxing, and to a lesser extent wrestling, that led to the building of places like Madison Square Garden. Muldoon put together a crew and went around the country as a wrestling promotion, the forerunner for the way the WWE promotes today. He was the star, but there were several others in the crew. One of them, Clarence Whistler,



was his main opponent for several important matches.

That was not Muldoon's only fame. He also started to appear in the legitimate theatre. We appeared with Maurice Berrymore in *As You Like It* on Broadway. He was also in *Spartacus* on Broadway and was a popular guy all around town. He was *The Rock* a hundred and twenty years before *The Rock* became *The Rock*.

He would retire in 1890 and started a major push for Physical Culture. He would later be named the first commissioner of the New York State Athletic Commission and would be an instrumental force in bringing boxing back to New York after a ban starting in 1900. He worked hard to bring major title fights to NYC, and was later named to the Boxing Hall of Fame.

Almost immediately rising to the level of William Muldoon, but from a seriously different background, was Martin Burns, better known as Farmer Burns.

Martin Burns was born in 1861 in Springfield, Iowa. According to legend, he had his first match for money at the age of eight, beating a kid who was 11. The stake was supposedly 30 cents. His father died when he was 11, so he had to take small jobs like digging graves and plowing fields on a neighbor's farm. This likely helped him gain his famous physique. He would work during the day and wrestle every night. He gained quite a reputation for his skill throughout the state. He wrestled his first major match with a wrestler who was on the Carnival circuit in 1880. That match turned out to be a draw, but it did go a full two plus hours.

Burns really started to make an impact when he went to a work camp. Every payday he would take on all comers and he would always win and walk away with the money. He developed many of his famed techniques during this period, including his famed double wristlock.

After that, he was established and started wrestling the big names. One of them was Evan "The Strangler" Lewis, who would go on to write a wrestling book that would inspire Ed "The Strangler" Lewis, the

biggest star of the 1920s. The final defense of Muldoon's World Greco-Roman title was against Even Lewis in 1890. Burns fought Lewis several times, losing in their first meeting, but taking most of the others.

It wasn't until an 1889 trip to Chicago that he got the nickname Farmer Burns. A comedian named J.W. Kelly was emceeding the night of his match with Jack Careek. The show was only part wrestling, and the rest was a typical Vaudeville comedy night.

Kelly, apparently drunk at the time, came out and said 'What would you call a man who hoes potatoes and squash and shucks corn?' 'A farmer' replied one of the musicians in the pit. 'Well, then, if this farmer would get locked up in a house and the house would catch fire, what would happen to the farmer?' 'I do not know,' 'Farmer Burns,' replied Kelly.

This dumbfounded the audience, but then Martin came out in overalls and shook hands with his opponent. When the match started, it was obvious that Burns was going to be the next big star. William Muldoon had been the first major star in the US, but he never had a match like Burns had that night. He throw Careek all over the mat and tossed him about the stage, knocking down some of the scenery for the other portions of the show. Burns was declared the winner after 15 minutes since he had not been thrown by the "professional" in the match. The next night, he took on Evan Lewis again and Lewis couldn't throw him in 15 minutes either. The papers picked up on the Burns phenomenon and made him a star in the Mid-West.

During this period, the product was certainly a mix of work and shoot, with wrestlers throwing matches occasionally to build to returns and get odds up from the bookmakers. Wrestling was mostly about gambling, since there was little to no national exposure.

From 1890 to 1893, Burns didn't lose a fall. He beat wrestlers from all over the world in all sorts of types of contests. He excelled in matches where pinfalls were the rule, as well as those where submissions or takedowns were the way to victory. In 1893, he opened

a gym in Rock Island, IL, where he trained hundreds of students in his style of wrestling, but also in general fitness. This was the time that Sanitariums like the Kellogg's Battle Creek facility were all the rage. He made huge advances in the state of the art of fitness.

By 1899, Burns was doing the old "If you take me off my feet in fifteen minutes, I'll give ya 25 bucks" gimmick. One of two things happened: either Frank Gotch lasted the time limit or Burns managed to beat him in 11 minutes. The version with Burns winning goes that Burns was impressed and took Gotch under his wing and trained him. The two went about building an empire. The two of them set out and made history, with them wrestling and trading victories and losses to build up gates for return matches. Along with Gotch, future world champion Earl Caddock and Joe "Toots" Mondt trained under Burns.

He also began what would evolve into a big business by selling mail-order wrestling lessons. His 1914 course Lessons in Wrestling and Physical Culture is the classic work of that era. He made good money and actually



helped introduce techniques from Judo and other forms in to the US. To this day, there is a huge mail order business in fitness and fighting training.

His influence was felt in the next generation, as Frank Gotch became the best-known wrestler in the US, even though some of his tactics may have been frowned on by Burns himself. Many of the men he trained went on to grand status in both professional and amateur wrestling.

His influence is still felt today. He taught wrestling in many Iowa high schools, which led Iowa to become the top state for amateur wrestling. They have produced more national and international champions than any other municipality. It's amazing how powerful his influence was. His death in 1938 was really the last nail in the coffin of the pre-1900 era of wrestling.

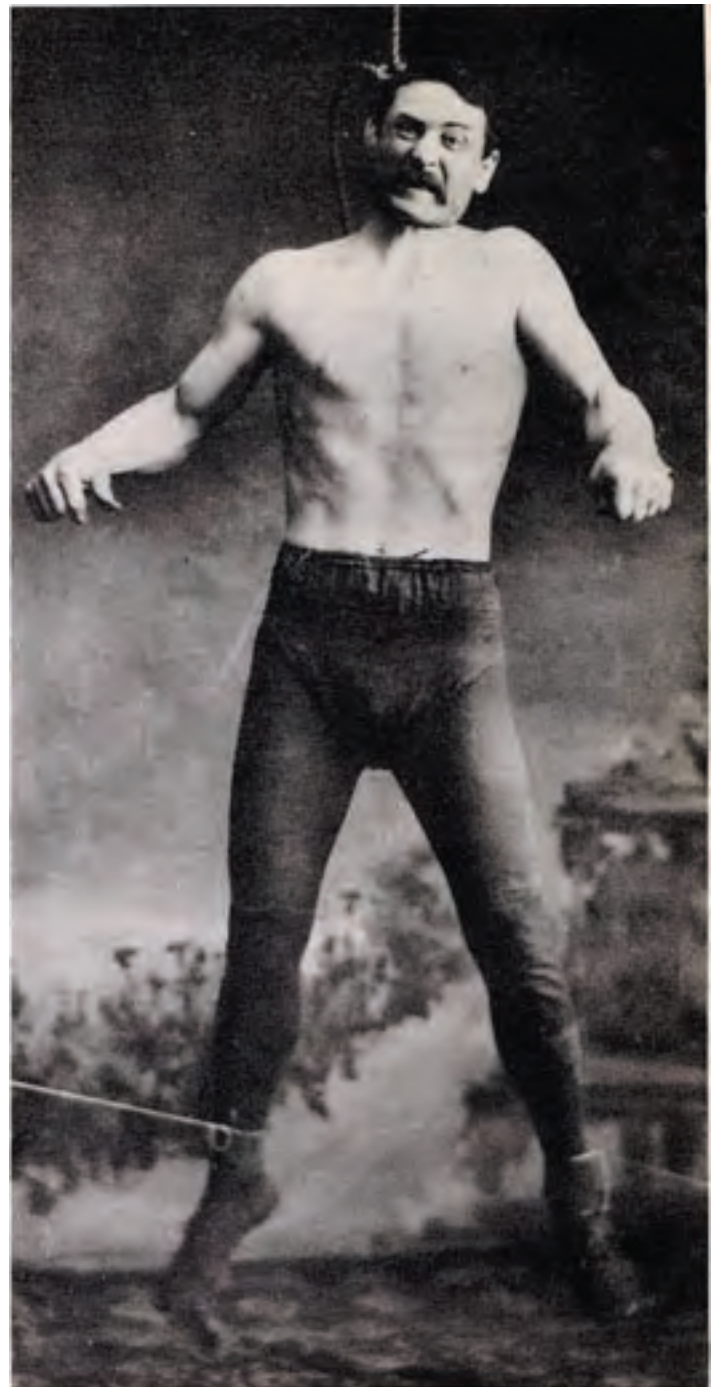
I should also mention that Farmer Burns was not only a great wrestler, but a great personality. He would talk to the papers everyday and would perform on many of the Vaudeville stages. His most famous carnival stunt was made possible by the fact that he had a 20 inch neck on a 165 pound frame. He would actually tie on a real noose and jump off a platform and hang there by his neck, smiling for the crowd and sometimes whistling Yankee Doodle Dandy. He did this stunt hundreds of times before tens of thousands of people. That's showmanship from a man who would probably say that today's wrestling is a bunch of hooley.

These were far from the only wrestlers of the 1800s, and they were terribly important to the development of the sport. There's a story of a French wrestler who wrestled in a mask starting in the 1890s, some 50 years before it would become the standard in Mexico and a full 25 years before an American named Mort Henderson would become The Masked Marvel.

There were touring groups and a number of stars would tour with Vaudeville troops and carnivals. Some would stick around well into their 50s. Others would become known as friends of royalty and even early radio stars. Most of them became trainers of other

wrestlers, which led to a tradition that continued for decades. The techniques that Burns and Muldoon pioneered have been passed down from trainer to trainer ever since. Not only pro wrestling, but amateur wrestling has been formed by these first men to become professionals. The way they did things may seem very different from where we are today, but you can't deny they were tough old coots.

And so, Wrestling might be the sport of the Century we all so admire, even though we might not have known it!



REVIEWED: THE JAPANESE DEVIL FISH GIRL AND OTHER UNNATURAL ATTRACTIONS BY ROBERT RANKIN

This is a delightfully fun adventure story set in the aftermath of a *War of the Worlds* that occurred in 1885, a fantastical mixture of alternative history and steampunk, with a good mix of joviality and Victoriana from Britain's finest Science Fiction humorist.

Set in 1895, initially we are introduced to young George, in charge of a showman's grotesque, a pickled and quite rancid Martian, and with his employer, the feckless Professor Coffin who runs the Cabinet of Human Curiosities they are showmen. I thought we might have another Rune and Rizla dynamic, but I was very wrong.

Following some interesting 'precognitions' George and the professor, who seem quite a pair of bounders, are soon both on an adventure on board the *Empress of Mars*, a massive trans oceanic lighter than air vessel, with sumptuous trappings and incredible Victorian facilities, as they seek out the Japanese Devil Fish girl, the ultimate showman's freak, or is it folly.

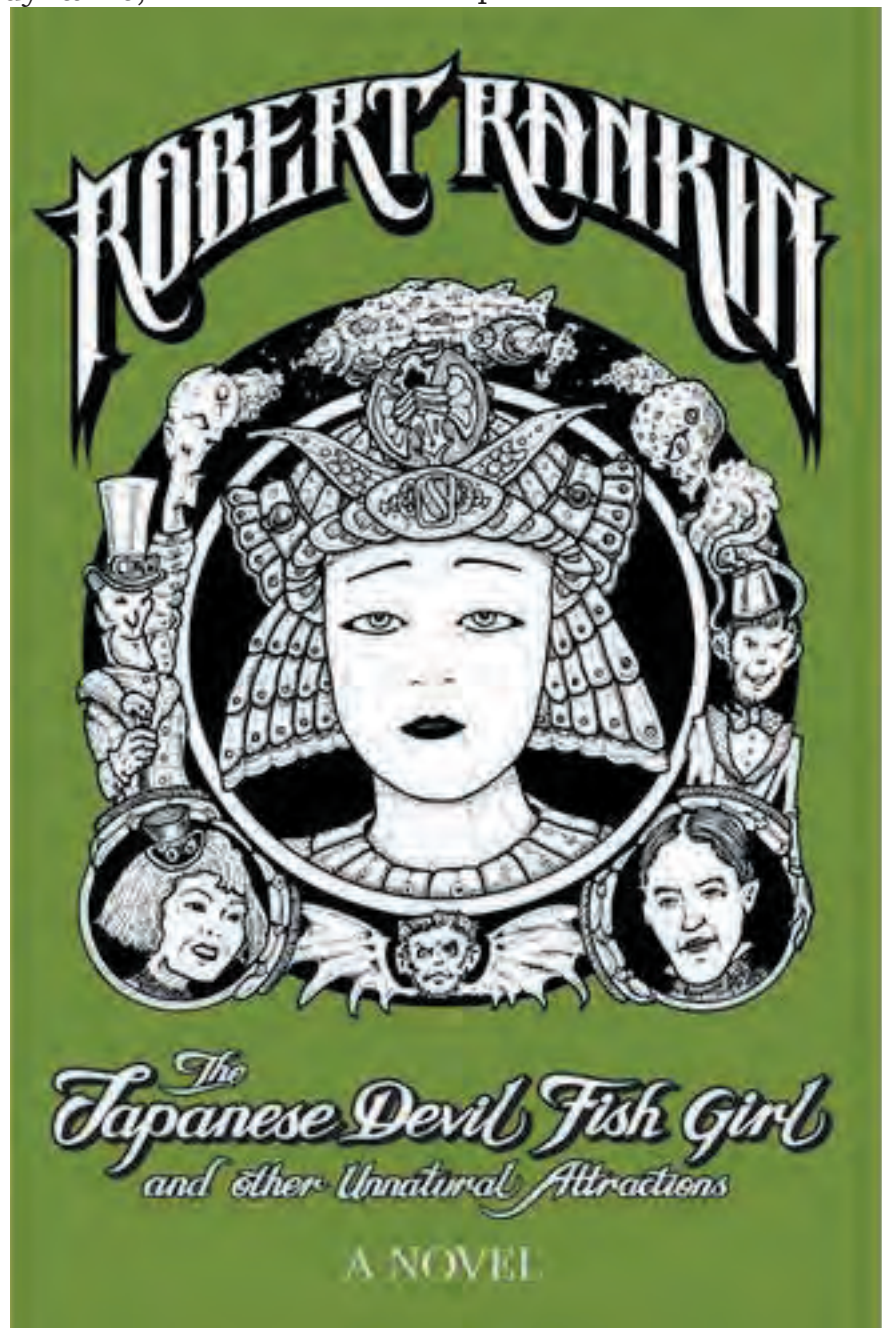
Rankin conjures up a beautiful vision of Victorian Splendour, laying it on in a manner that sets it slightly apart from reality, but which still feels truly of the age, where solar system trade and travel is a given. Between Babage and Tesla, and some nifty back engineering, the world is slightly askew from our own, or even that at the end of the original Wells work.

Mind control features, and also bullying of a sort, as we find the relationship between George and the professor mellow, as the professor is truly a cad, and George is intrinsically really quite an incredibly good natured fellow.

I was reminded of Flann O'Briens Novel, the Third Policeman

and the odd inescapable relationship between O'Diveny and the narrator, one younger man beholden, through tricks and slights and impositions, to the older trickster, who knows best. Rankin once again employs slight of mind as a tool of confusion in this novel, and a form of mind control rears its ugly head.

There are so many exciting and thoughtful ideas, the way that Rankin manages to extrapolate the solar system that we live in, and provide us with Jovian's and Venusians to complement the Martians of



BY JAMES BACON

invading fame. The callous and most horrid manner in which the war with the Martians is brought to their homeland and to an end, is quite inspired in its despicability, but then, not unimaginable from those in a position of power. The Empire was never fair and sometimes diabolical.

As George embarks on the adventure, he meets Ada Lovelace, who quickly becomes a love interest as well as able adventuress accompanying George and the professor and forming a quartet, that is fulfilled by the company of Darwin, the Butler, who is a monkey. Ada is a true find and a wonderful character, strong of mind and ability and compliments George.

We visit New York, and the show of one Phineas Taylor *Barnum*, and the trip takes quite a few twists and turns, leading us to a massive predicament, for humanity and most importantly for London and leading to a wonderful battle between the various worlds of the solar system, in London's skies.

It's a terrific adventure, really quite good fun, but Rankin excels here at his descriptions, and intricate knowledge of Victorian detail real and invented. At times one yearns for more prose, and more descriptions in greater infinite detail, yet he sates the reader, with his knowledge in a great tongue in cheek manner. I was especially taken with how he manages to include many people who should be dead, but in this alternative history, of course are not.

There is also an embedded moral message within this book. That goodness and Love will overcome. This sounds rather whimsy, but it is unavoidable, as our Heroes battle against a number of evils, in many forms, extra terrestrial and well dressed and George's intrinsic goodness, allows him to overcome evil. There are many other references, I was impressed that there may be a metaphorical reference to Britain's current state of War, for we are at War at the moment, not that in London's fashionable streets, one would know it, and also the recurring anti-war message throughout Rankin's work.

Robert Rankin is well known for his light, fun humour and easy going patter, the

ability to wink at the reader, and sometimes to break that fourth wall, and in this novel as always, there is much to enjoy, and to be fascinated by, but again, there is a deeper meaning, a deeper reflection, perhaps some sort of subconscious reaction to the modern twentieth first century horrors, that we can comfortably laugh at, in a science fiction novel set in 1895. And later think about.

A splendid story, from an author who seems to be at home in a very farfetched, yet wonderfully realised Victorian Scientific Romance world.

The Japanese Devil Fish Girl and other unnatural attractions. By Robert Rankin UK Release is from Gollancz, September 2010 (368pp £12.99)

The US release date, also from Gollancz is set for March, 2011

