

By the WAY #15

by W. Andrew York
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Commentary

Happy New Year! We're back with a fresh, brand-new, issue of *The Abyssinian Prince* and *By The WAY* to brighten your January and lift those post-holiday doldrums. As this is a good time for a fresh start to things, I'm going to revamp the subzine a bit, rethink the reoccurring subjects and reset the game (see game section for commentary). If there's something that you would like me to keep or add – let me know. On the other hand, if there's something you never read, clue me in on that. And, of course, if you'd like more or less of something that'll be helpful to know. I'd like to focus on the things that interest the readers rather than spending time on an unread bit. So, this'll be a shorter, transition issue of *BTW*.

Right now, I expect to keep the opening commentary, a review, the movie watch list, LOCs (when I get them) and the playlist. I'm leaning towards keeping the observation, but if isn't read, it isn't necessarily worth doing. The "Coming Up Next Time" is gone as it was highly inaccurate. It might return in the future once I get into a disciplined writing schedule and keep to it. Comments, suggestions and thoughts are always welcome!

I don't know how I'll revamp the feature and/or Texas spotlight. I do want to keep writing something that will require some research and composition effort (presuming I can find the time to do them); but whether they become a single effort, remain separate or get replaced with something else I don't know right now. Some of the topics I hope to include, and learn about personally, are one on the Austin City Limits television show, Texas state capitals, movie/television production in the State, the Texas Rangers, the State's contribution to the military effort in WWII (and, maybe, WWI), the New Mexico campaign in the Civil War and a few others.

As for what's going on with me, work is still a large time and energy sink. My evenings are spent resting and rather than working on something at home on the weekends, it is much more tempting to go to a movie, watch a DVD or read. I'm hoping that in the next four months or so we'll be over the big hump with the IT outsourcing effort and move into a more routine working environment (though one more "hump" will occur early in 2009). Then, I can start devoting more time to my primary job as part of the IT Security unit.

I was able to take a short vacation in August - I went to Galveston for the first time for a few days. Enjoyed the Gulf, saw the airplane museum (nice selection of WWII planes), visited Moody Gardens, had great seafood and such. I wish I could have had a week to really relax. On the other hand, my laptop died my first night so I couldn't check Email and telecommute to work.

On my way back, I finally was able to visit the USS Texas and the San Jacinto battlefield. It is a massive ship that needs a fair bit of refurbishing. Fortunately, as part of last November's ballot, the Texas voters approved a bond package that, in part, provides for it to be repaired. The battlefield was, well, a battlefield. As it was such a short engagement, there isn't that much "to see" and the tour doesn't take all that much time. I would have liked to have gone up the tower for a bird's eye view; but, the elevator was out of order (and had been for some time - according to one of the staff I overheard, it had been about three weeks and they were finally expecting a repair crew that afternoon).

The conventions I attended over the past few months were quite enjoyable. ArmadilloCon had a great slate of speakers and sci-fi/fantasy authors. I was able to catch up with some friends at the Regional Gathering of our local Mensa group (LonestarRG). The MilleniumCon gaming weekend was wonderful, as always. I played "Settlers of Catan" for the first time face-to-face (quite educational), enjoyed another "Circus Maximus" event on the large miniatures track and won a fantasy miniatures game. I picked up some good items at the flea market, including a 2/3 complete collection of the "History of the Second World War" magazine from the early '70s.

LOCs - none received this time, but are always enjoyed.

Review: S. M. Stirling has created a compelling series of books released under the “Novels of the Change” moniker. Currently, the series is comprised of three trilogies with the first book of the third trilogy recently released. From what I’ve read, it is a compelling and thought-provoking concept that takes different approaches to basic questions.

The first trilogy, what I’d called the Nantucket trilogy, begins with Island in the Sea of Time followed by Against the Tide of Years and On the Oceans of Eternity. In it, a storm precedes the dislocation of the island of Nantucket and a nearby ship (the *USS Eagle*) into the distant past (1250BC). They have technology, tempered by limited resources with little ability to repair and replace it, and extensive knowledge. Stirling takes this starting point to create a narrative that is far reaching, believable (given the plot’s starting point) and entertaining. As a side note, the trilogy depends on the Alternate Worlds theory - nothing they do will change “their future”.

The second trilogy was launched with Dies the Fire and continues in The Protector’s War and A Meeting at Corvallis. At the time Nantucket falls back into time, an intense white flash circles the Earth and alters the physical laws of nature. Advanced technology fails, gunpowder does not explode and other scientific properties don’t work as expected. The initial story centers on Oregon and how an advanced society reacts when they, literally and suddenly, have only the technology of the early medieval times. The second book originates in England and gives an idea of the “state of the world” before returning to the primary story line. I’ve just started the third book and am enjoying it thoroughly.

The third trilogy starts with The Sunshine Lands and is set a generation after the second trilogy. I’ll pick it up as soon as I see it, and the succeeding volumes, out in paperback.

I highly recommend these books - they provide a reflective look into how our society is dependent on technology and how that technology has promoted certain mind-sets, assumptions and drives our civilization forward. I wonder, if Stirling will ever write a speculative book on how an event like he’s presented here would play out in a society twenty years in the future when automation has replaced even more of the “basic” skill sets necessary to support civilization, information exists solely in an electronic format with printed/written materials are relatively rare and the globalization movement world-wide dependencies in food distribution results in many areas with mono-crops - therefore without the homogenous crops necessary to locally support any substantive number of people.

Movie Watch: The Day the Earth Caught Fire B; Ratatouille B; Live Free or Die Hard B+;

Transformers B+; Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix B+; Stardust B+;
The Bourne Ultimatum C-; Hairspray A-; Superbad B-; Self-Medicated C+; Once B; Wildfire B-;
3:10 to Yuma A; white light/black rain A-; In the Shadow of the Moon A; Death at a Funeral B-;
December Boys B; Into the Wild B+; The Seeker: The Dark is Rising B-; Michael Clayton B+;
American Gangster A; Gone Baby Gone A-; August Rush B-; Beowulf A-;
No Country for Old Men B+; I’m Not There D; Darfur Now B; The Rape of Europa B+;
Charlie Wilson’s War A+; National Treasure: Book of Secrets C+; Juno B+; Atonement A-;
Walk Hard: The Dewey Cox Story C+

Observation: The current race for the White House is almost refreshing this year. Without a incumbent (though some could give that moniker to Clinton), there is no strong front runner in either political party with, at the time of this writing, nine (give or take) potential nominees between the two parties with a strong independent candidate hovering in the wings. This has allowed quite a few ideas to be floated, more and livelier debates, and increased public awareness of, and involvement in, the political discourse.

That being said, the primary system needs serious revision to prevent the recent rush to move each state’s voting day earlier and earlier. I worry that, if some limits aren’t enacted, the run for the 2012 presidential election will start this November 12th.

Playlist for this issue: KASE (Top-40 Country Radio)

Recommendation – Try out “The Adventures of Young Indiana Jones” DVD sets. I’ve purchased and watched about half of the first volume (pre-WWI adventures). The show itself is enjoyable and, as an added bonus, there are all sorts of educational featurettes on the events and personalities Indy is involved with.

=====GAME SECTION=====

On TAP:

A new “Everyone Plays” game or Scattergories! resumes
(Join in Then - Open to Anyone at Any Time!)
Let me know what else you’re interested in seeing here.....(sorry, we’re out of Bud Light)

SCATTERGORIES! Thoughts

When I was publishing *Rambling WAY*, over a decade ago, this was one of my favorite games to GM and to play. It was a game of making educated guesses (or just a plain WAG) on which of the well known, limited, responses to each selection would be the least chosen. Occasionally, a player might know a specific exception to those limited responses; but, those weren’t that common. Also, I’d use some wider scope questions just to see if anyone inadvertently provided a duplicate entry.

It seems that time and technology has significantly altered the play of the game. With the ease of research provided by the Internet, Scattergories! has evolved into an effort to find the most obscure answer that, hopefully, fits the category. The fun I experienced in the game by trying to outwit the other players now pits the players’ googling skills against one another.

From a GM’s perspective, that significantly alters the game and makes it frustrating to GM - devolving into a question of where to draw the line on tangential answers and being as fair as possible in applying that line across all the responses. From a player’s perspective, it seems you’re dissatisfied as well with the “new” way to play the game. A number of folks have sent in a set of answers to use, stating “if this doesn’t qualify, use this one...., then this one....”.

Plus, I have to be very careful in wording each of the selections. For instance, ten years ago, I would have stated “President on Mt. Rushmore” with the intention of having only four potential responses. Unfortunately, today, someone could argue that a certain president visited the site and, therefore, was “on” the mountain or that in a certain movie, a fictional president was added to the display. Based on my wording, yes, they did give a valid answer to the presented selection. So, maybe I should have said “President currently carved into the Mt Rushmore physically located in the Black Hills of South Dakota” and hope someone doesn’t find a loophole to that description.

Bottom line, in my opinion, Scattergories! is no longer a viable play-by-(E)mail game and should be relegated to a face-to-face parlour game - as it was originally. That being said, I’m willing to complete the game if that is the readership’s desire. Please give me some feedback and your thoughts on this game.

Next issue, depending on the responses I get, we’ll continue the game, have another round of commentary looking into Scattergories!’ evolution and how to “fix it” or I’ll start a new game. If a new game, is there anything y’all like to see?

If the game does continue, I’ll accept additional player’s order and/or revised orders. Here are the selections:

Round Four

Letter: “Any Letter”

- 01) Primary Color in the Visible Spectrum
- 02) Planet in “Our” Solar System
- 03) Continent on Earth
- 04) Major US PC Manufacturer
- 05) Permanent Country on the UN Security Council

Submit Email entries and comments to wandrew88@gmail.com or
by mail to W Andrew York; POB 201117; Austin TX 78720-1117

Deadline is: February 16, 2008 at high noon Central Time