

BOB WILKINS 1932-2009

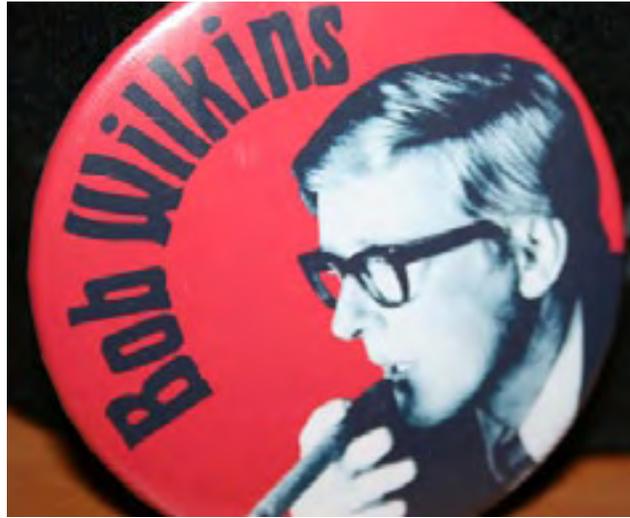


THE DRINK TANK ISSUE 197
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Creature Feature was popular around my house when I was a young kid. My Dad was only 19 when I was born and he was a fan of horror and science fiction. I remember being little, and I'm talking 3 and 4 years old, and Dad would go to watch Rocky Horror or would plop a tape into our top-loading VCR and he'd record whatever KTVU was showing on Creature Feature. What I wouldn't give to have those tapes now.

I only remember seeing a couple of Bob Wilkins episodes, most of the ones I remember were from the man, Mr. John Stanley, who took over in 1979 when I would have been 5. I stayed up late a lot when I was little, and we had a little TV in my room. I remember watching Creature Feature many times, tucked into my bed, my horsey blankie on top of me, my Curious George stuffed animal under my arm. I also remember Dad coming in and commanding me to go to sleep, but that's another story.

Bob Wilkins passed away on January 7th. Bob and Creature Features were a majorly important part of many communities in the Bay Area, and the reason that many are so intimately intertwined with one another to this day. He introduced many to the joy of horror films. Not slasher flicks, but honest to Ghod horror films. He made the B-Movie an appreciable artform in the BArea. He introduced people to



science fiction. I know of at least three different people who heard about their first science fiction convention through Creature Features, and one of them went on to Chair a WorldCon. Go figure.

The list of people that Bob influenced is long and includes Mr. Lobo, one of the standard bearers for the modern resurgence of Horror Hosts. His style is one that's almost impossible to duplicate. It was wry, honest, intelligent, and far from slick. Those were all good things. The interviews he did with the likes of Vincent Price, Christopher Lee and Ray Harryhausen were top-notch. At the most recent Psychotronic Film Festival, they showed a long clip of Bob interviewing Forry Ackerman in San Francisco. That was the weekend after Forry passed and it was a wonderful tribute.

Bob's time on Creature Feature illustrates something about modern

television that I've had bubbling in my head for a while now. Bob Wilkins was talking to us, the geeks who knew films from guys like James Whale and Tim Browning, who loved loved the world of science fiction and those who really loved Plan 9 From Outer Space. Bob Wilkins would talk to us, not about us, not over us. He was both jabbing and respectful, an incredible double to perform on television. Today, there's no one doing that. There's mockery of them, but no one really talking to them. Yeah, you've got Mr. Lobo and some of the other Horror Hosts (and the BArea needs Cinema Insomnia back!) but so few treat those of us who love that stuff with the respect that Bob always did, even when he pinched us gently to remind us of how silly it all was.

I feel lucky that I got a chance to meet him and even did an interview with him and John Stanley at WonderCon a few years ago. He was a really nice gentleman and I was pleased to have the chance. He told a couple of stories, answered a couple of questions and just did great.

Sadly, Bob was afflicted with Alzheimer's, but still he made several appearances in the last couple of years of his life. I've given very little to charity over the last years or so, but every year I made a small donation to the Alzheimer's Aid Society of Northern California. We can beat it if we fund it.

BOB WILKINS TALKS CREATURE
FEATURES AUGUST 1972:

“I think you are seeing the real Bob Wilkins every Saturday night. I pull no punches and try to tell it as it is. It’s quite simple how I became a horror movie host. I was in a Doggie Dinner and picked up a book of matches that said, ‘become a horror movie host in your spare time.’ I took the correspondence course and then KTVU auditioned me. I didn’t beat out the other ten guys on talent it was a matter of money. The other ten wanted money, but I did it for practically free so I got the job.”

Hey, it’s a Lloyd Penney LoC!

Dear Chris:

You put ‘em out faster than I can respond to them! That’s why everyone wants your job. You can do this and still do whatever you have to do at the museum. Actually, I’m at home sick (thundering headache this morning... change in the weather), but still will respond to The Drink Tank 193, 194 and 195.

**Hope all has healed, my friend!
I’m rushing a bit of late, both news
and over-active typing fingers have
made me over-productive, and if
recent issues are any indication, I’ll
continue in that mode for a while
longer.**

193... Great cover! Send in the clones,
don’t bother, we’re here...

I love this cover. It’s teh awsum!

I saw an interview with Mickey Rourke a few days ago. He doesn’t look much like he used to. He’s got the boxer’s beaten-up face, and frankly he looks like hell. If there’s an award for his role in *The Wrestler*, it will be interesting to see this big mook in a tux. I got Yvonne a copy of *Mamma Mia!* for Christmas, and it’s a real contrast to see Meryl Streep singing and dancing in that movie, followed by her role



as a nun in *Doubt*. We live in an age where there are remakes of remakes, and a character can be reinterpreted over and over again. Cesar Romero to Mark Hamill (voice) to Jack Nicholson to Heath Ledger...I don’t think there’s ever been such a range of interpretations of a character as there’s been of the Joker.

Other than Sherlock Holmes, you may be right.

I didn’t know that Alan White was doing a Forry Ackerman tribute zine, but I did loc the zine as I’d do with any other I’d get, and sent that off to Alan, and put my letter on my LiveJournal. Let me know if you got the Canadian cash I sent you with our TAFF votes.

***Yeah, and it was a great tribute too.
I got your cash, and it’ll get into
the hands of the winner once they
arrive in Montreal!***

194...I never met Algis Budrys, and I tried not to have any opinions I might have had coloured by those fans and pros who seemed to genuinely hate him. I still don’t know why...I am glad there are positive remembrances like John Hertz’ essay.

***I never met him either, I don’t
think. I know we were in the same
room at least once, but beyond that,
I don’t know. I didn’t even know***

that he was unliked by many, as I've heard several people say they really missed him at this year's WorldCon.

I recently heard about this year's inductees into the National Film Registry. The movie *Free Radicals* and the animator remind me of Norman McLaren, the legendary Canadian animator who also scratched images onto film stock in order to create animation.

He's a massively important part of the story of computer graphics having produced *Birdlings* with Renee Pardo in the 1960s. He was also instrumental in the pushing of The National Film Board of Canada towards doing more and more experimental animation and documentary making. He is often considered the Father of Canadian Animation.

195...I think most of us have good years because we know what we like, and we work hard to make these things happen. I know too many people who just sit and hope things will happen, and they are usually disappointed. Looking forward to the Giant-Sized Annual! Going for the hundred pages?

I hope it'll be a big issue, but it's looking like it'll be kinda smallish. Certainly hope to get as much good stuff as I can in there. Perhaps you

could send something!

I just checked my own records for locs for 2008...I wrote you 20 letters! And, that's very likely more than anyone else. It's become my specialty, I guess.

20 LoCs over a year! That's an awesome number! I don't keep track of my LoCs, but I doubt I did any more than 100 or so. I know I missed a lot of the bigger name zines, like *Askance* and *Chunga*, but I did hit most of my faves.

These three issues wrap up 2008 nicely, and 2009 should be mucho fun. We've got to make further plans for the conventions we will be going to (*Ad Astra*, *Eeriecon*, *Polaris*, *Anticipation*), like hotel rooms, costumes, and seeing if we want roommates or not. As you get closer to your plans for coming up to Montréal, let us know and perhaps we can spend some time in T.O. before heading off to La Belle Province.

We'll certainly be doing at least one day in T-Dot before the con, and you know if you need any help in the Lounge, you can call on me.

In the meantime, recharge those creative batteries, and we will see you the next issue.

Yours, Lloyd Penney.

And I bet we'll be seeing you there!

Creature Features often displays sign, which reads "Watch Horror Films, Keep America Strong."

"I think horror films keep our country strong. First of all, it keeps people in on Saturday nights. Even though the rate of alcoholism has gone up since the show has come on, at least the people are drinking at home."



Art from Genevieve

This look at Bob Wilkins is from our good pal Ken Patterson. You can find more of his writing on dvillage.org.

Bob Wilkins, the original host of KTVU's Creature Features and Captain Cosmic, died yesterday after a long battle with Alzheimer's.

While I can't remember any specifics of what I watched on Creature Features, I do remember watching it. It would have been an event for me at that age to stay up late to watch it. Since I would have been eight when he left the show, I probably watched his successor more than him (and even less at the end of the series' run, when Doctor Who began its late Saturday run.)

I can more vividly recall watching Bob's daytime show - Captain Cosmic. This is where I was introduced to series' like Ultraman and Captain Scarlet. I even remember a little of the opening sequence, an homage to the Superman openings, "Faster than a speeding BART train..." with him running down a BART station platform. I even had the membership/decoder cards - though I can't remember what we had to decode.

Of course, Bob was pretty much relegated to the back of my mind for most of the 80s and 90s. Then in 2005 he was back in my life through his protege, the host (and writer, pro-

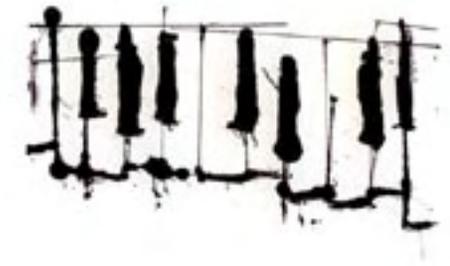
ducer, &c...) of Cinema Insomnia with Mr. Lobo. Like myself, Mr. Lobo grew up watching Bob - except that he was inspired to follow in his footsteps and host his own shows. It was through my collaboration with Mr. Lobo that I would eventually meet - and have the pleasure of introducing to an audience at SiliCon - Bob. Sadly, this was around the period when the Alzheimer's was taking effect, and would be my only meeting with him.

We are, however, lucky to have had Bob Wilkins in our lives, whether you only saw him on the television, or got to know him personally. Thankfully, we have film and video clips to remember him by - and not just our faded memories. I'm also glad that the internet will keep his memory alive.

As a launching pad to memory lane, why not try Scott Moon's official Bob Wilkins site (www.bobwilkins.net) If you are from the Sacramento viewing area, maybe you'd want to head over to Blog Wilkins (bobwilkinsthemanbehindthecigar.blogspot.com), which not only has memories of Bob on KCRA and KTVU but also continues to look at the state of hosted horror movies in the two markets (and where I got the top image.) I would also be remiss in not suggesting the site for Cinema Insomnia (www.cinemainsomnia.com), which Bob not only inspired but was an adviser for.

"Watching horror films, people lose their tendency for violence. It's an outlet for them. Our society is so violent today and the movies dull the edge. You've noticed that since I have come on the air there have been no major riots in the Bay Area"

- Bob Wilkins



Art from Martha Tombes

And now, a LoC from Steve Green!

Hi Chris,

I can understand your problem with the movie adaptation of Will Eisner's *The Spirit*; whilst its visuals echo those of *Sin City*, its simplistic approach to the various protagonists is closer to that of Warren Beatty's take on *Dick Tracy* (itself no major hit at the box office). Must say I still enjoyed Miller's debut as a solo director on its own level, though, and yes, *Scarlet Johansson* in a Nazi outfit was disconcertingly hot.

I liked Dick Tracy, though I recently

rewatched it and it didn't hold up as well as I'd have liked. Like *Dick Tracy*, *The Spirit* is beautiful and has at least one performance that saves at least part of the film (Dustin Hoffman in *Dick Tracy*, Sam Jackson in *The Spirit*) and they both have gorgeous ladies (Madonna was at the hottest point of her ever-changing hotness).

As for *The Golden Compass*, I believe I made clear my disappointment with that fantasy "epic" back in *The Drink Tank* #155. Little chance of a second instalment in the trilogy, I thought, and given that *The Subtle Knife* is still designated "in pre-production" on IMDb despite a 2009 release target, I was probably right.

I was just not at all happy with it, though struggling all the way through, I did kinda like the ending. I've never read the books, so I'm untainted in that area. The Subtle Knife probably won't be made, and certainly won't be at this time when studios are seriously cutting back.

Meanwhile, I hear Disney and Walden Media have decided not to exercise their option on the third "Narnia" movie -- not because the second, *Prince Caspian* didn't make money (reportly grossing US\$419m on a \$180m outlay), but because it



didn't make *enough* money (the same source stated *The Lion*, *The Witch* and *the Wardrobe* grossed US\$745m on a \$200m outlay).

Prince Caspian hasn't done well on DVD and even with 2.5 times earnings, that's considered soft because of the large amount that's also tacked on. I remember reading that Batman, the original 1989 version, didn't make its actual output back until it was released on video and set all the records there. Also, Prince Caspian merch didn't move nearly as well as The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe stuff did. You know, I've still never read any of the books.

I'm reminded more than a little of the rush of sf movies which followed in the wake of the original adaptation of Harry Bates' "Farewell to the Master", *The Day the Earth Stood Still*. Many opportunist film-makers rushed blindly into the genre, with no sense of its history, tropes or dynamics -- and, as a result, a huge number of those movies were at best juvenile. Similarly, you don't get to follow in Peter Jackson's footsteps just by buying the rights to the work of one of Tolkien's fellow Inklings and ramming cash into the pocket of a CGI team.

All best

-- Steve

I'm one who truly believes that some films need to be remade, and that CGI versions are required to get a portion of the audience into the theatres to see them. But you can look at CGI in films like Constantine and Anaconda and compare them to the same techniques used in The Dark Knight and Lord of the Rings. On the other hand, I think that there are movies that desperately need to be remade. I'm thinking of B-Films from the 1950s. I'd love to see someone take a shot at making a good version of This Island Earth.

Of course, Peter Jackson isn't the worst offender, if you look at it. It's all George Lucas and the Spielberg hack's fault!

“ I would advise my fans that want to become a horror movie host to find gainful employment before they take on the thing. I couldn’t live on what they pay me for the shows.”

-Bob Wilkins

Mongol: This Ain’t John Wayne’s Činggis Qagan

Steven H Silver

When I was an undergraduate, I was enrolling for a semester of courses when one of the history classes I wanted to take was full. I didn’t have the course brochure and needed a class. I called out into the hall, where Elaine was and asked her for a history class that met a time and credit requirement. She glanced through the brochure and called back a course number, C394. I registered for the class and went out to join Elaine.

I asked what class I had signed up for and she got a horrified look on her face, realizing that I had blindly signed up for the class she had selected. She showed me the course brochure. *The History of Inner Asia Before the Mongol Conquest*, taught by Ruth Meserve. The class covered pretty much what the title said, from the earliest times, long before history began until 1162, when Temüjin was born. It turned out to be one of the most interesting courses I took as

an undergrad. So much so that the following semester I took its sequel class, *The Mongol Conquest*.

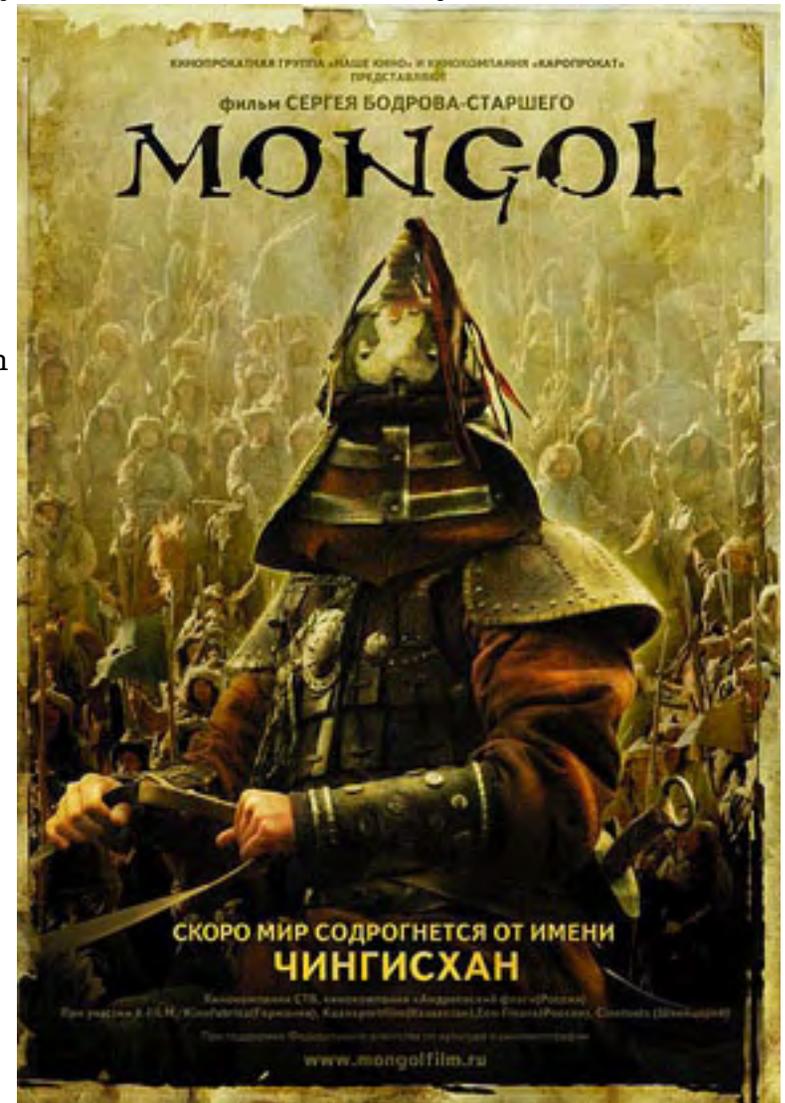
For *The Mongol Conquest*, the professor was Larry Moses and the primary text was *The Secret History of the Mongols*, one of those books whose title is so evocative that you just wanted to dive in and learn those secrets. Despite a lengthy period of reading the strange names in science fiction and fantasy, the names of the Mongols were even stranger...Sorqaytani, Beqi, who married Temüjin’s son Tolui, the great mountain Borqan Qaldun, where Temüjin was born and later buried as Činggis Qagan, and Jamuqa, Temjuin’s *anda*, blood brother, who later betrayed him.

And while the copy of *The Secret History of the Mongols* we used for our classroom text was a photocopy of an unpublished translation by Igor de Rachewiltz, I searched out the only published translation, by Francis Woodman Cleaves and picked it up. De Rachewiltz eventually published his translation in 2004.

All this is a roundabout

way of coming up to a film released in 2007: *Mongol*, directed by Sergei Bodrov.

Mongol is an adaptation of *The Secret History of the Mongols* that was filmed in China, Mongolia, and Kazakhstan. It stars Tadanobu Asano as an adult Temüjin and Khulan



Chuluun as his wife, Börte. Jamuya is portrayed by Honglei Sun.

When *Mongol* first hit the theatres, I heard excellent things about it, most notably that the cinematography (by Rogier Stoffers and Sergei Trofimov) was incredible. I mentioned to Elaine, the same person who got me into the Mongols in the first place, that I wanted to see the film and she grudgingly agreed to go. A huge sacrifice since seeing a foreign language film is a horrifying experience for her. As it happens, we didn't get to see it in the theatres, and I instead watched it on DVD. *Mongol* is, of course, in Mongolian subtitled in English, but it is so engrossing that you hardly notice.

The film follows its source material quite closely, for good or bad. Its presentation of Temüjin as he grows to become Činggis Qagan pretty closely matches the impression I got from reading *The Secret History of the Mongols*. He was driven by two main things: the need for vengeance for wrongs, both real and imagined, and a need for security for those he loved and those who looked to him for protection. Both of these motivations are clearly shown, whether it is his long-running feud with Taryutai (Amadu Mamadakov) or his honoring the monk who kept faith with him.

The weakness of the film (and *The Secret History of the Mongols*) is that in order to make Temüjin's rise more triumphant, there is the need to show him at his lowest. As a slave, as a captive, ostracized from Mongol society. He is occasionally allowed to spend time with Börte and, eventually, his children, but he is not allowed to be show interacting with regular Mongols. This is a narrative problem because there is no clear route that allows Temüjin to go from being an outcast to leading a mighty army against his enemies, even if the titles do inform the viewer that a couple of years have passed.

Bodrov also presumes that his viewers are intelligent. Rather than explaining aspects of Mongol culture to the viewer, he shows them much of what is necessary to understand and allows the viewer to infer the rest. Having some knowledge of the period does help so the viewer doesn't see the film in the oversimplistic terms some reviewers have brought to it, but the film can be enjoyed without prior knowledge of Mongolia or Činggis Qagan's life.

The film's depiction of warfare is interesting. Partly realistic, but every stab and slice is accompanied

by a very unrealistic spray of blood. The first time it happened, it called to mind the Monty Python sketch "Sam Peckinpah's 'Salad Days'," however it quickly became just another stylistic choice made by Bodrov. In some ways, it was a good choice since it put a distance between the violence and the viewer. Similarly, Bodrov mostly implied sexual intercourse, rape, and various other acts of violence. My ten year old watched the first hour of the film with me, and there was nothing in

it that was objectionable for her to see.

Although *Mongol* is a straight historical epic, even Temüjin's interaction with the Mongol sky god, Teb Tengri is downplayed and completely naturalistic, its epic scope, historical content, and battle sequences will appeal to fans of Peter



Jackson's Lord of the Rings trilogy. And *Mongol* is the first part of a trilogy. The second film is slated to begin filming in 2009 with a 2010 release date. I look forward to the release of the second film, which should focus on the beginnings of Činggis Qagan's empire and will, it is to be hoped, remain faithful to *The Secret History of the Mongols*.

“People have said we’ve never shown a good science-fiction film on this show. Well..... tonight we’re keeping that record intact.”

-Bob Wilkins

And how about a LoC from Taral Wayne!

The cover. Yes, now that you mention it, I can see the resemblance. But we’ve never met so you’ll have to forgive me if my first thought was that it was a sketch of Mike Glicksohn. Given how many well-known fans have passed away over the last couple of years, my first *horrible* thought was that this was a memorial issue... Of course, I would probably have heard a little sooner than this since Mike and I live only a couple of miles apart. Let me go out on the balcony and take a look his way. Okay, all’s well...

Well, it’s a shame that this is partly a memorial issue that’s running this LoC!

Here is, first week of 2009 and I’ve already written a review of The Dark Knight that I sent to Alexiad, and I’ve an essay of personal thoughts on past Rotsler Winners in the typer that I’ll offer to Mike Glycer. A good start to another year of fanwriting, I think. I still have “GoH” and “Vaster Than Empires” from last year that I haven’t made up my mind what to do with.

Well, you know they can always have a home in The Drink Tank if you can’t find anywhere better. I’ve not written nearly as much as I would have liked in the last week. I got a couple of LoCs, the long thingee in last issue, and the Obit for Bob Wilkins that’ll run in SF/SF. Not nearly as much as I was averaging during the

Christmas slowdown.

I haven’t quite given up on being an artist. I finished up a small number of sketches in the first days of ‘09 that I dated last year, since that was when they were started. I have to ink a couple of commissions next, and I’ve several drawings taking place on Mars that I want to get started on as soon as I can. Then I should probably ink the Anticipation T-shirt art, now that I’ve approval on the design. Other long term ideas will have to be sifted for the most urgent.

Oh, Mars! Sounds interesting. I’m so excited for Anticipation that I’ll certainly be buying one of the short. I seldom do that, but this seems like one of those moments when I should.



A friend, Paul Wilson, has just assembled a photo montage model of my apartment. He took the digital photos last month, and overlapped them to complete a mosaic of both my bedroom and living room. The original idea that came from Anticipation was to pack up the contents of my apartment and reassemble my place at the Worldcon. I didn’t think this a very good idea, though a fascinating one. It would take a month to pack up and another month to unpack, for one thing. And too many books, toys, fanzines, collectables, and other kipple are fragile. If broken, they couldn’t be fixed. If lost, they couldn’t be replaced. So I suggested a mock-up using poster size print-outs. The idea was adopted and we seem well on the way to realizing a full-size, walk-in reproduction of my place at the Montreal con. There might be both rooms, and perhaps glass cases of some selected display items.

That’s bizarre and incredible! I have to admit that a photo display wouldn’t have the same effect as a reconstruction, but if the Montreal folks are thinking that far outside the box, I really wanna see what they come up with.

I just wish I could give all this my proper attention instead of wasting time on what’s laughingly called gainful employment... as though the world so desperately needed another grocery bagger, or Wal-Mart greeter, that a philistine Fate has to divert me from art and writing at all cost.

Three years from early retirement...

My Mom’s already thinking about

retirement in the next couple of years (she's 53 now, so 2 years). I, on the other hand, completely understand that it is my fate to work until the day I die.

Just one TV spot for "Don't Mess With the Zohan" convinced me that I'd rather read a book than watch it for free on a plane flight. On the other hand, expecting very little, I rather enjoyed Steve Carell as Agent 86 in "Get Smart". It was faithful to the original, but didn't beat it to death either. "Horton Hears a Who" is on the list for watching next.

Zohan is so bad, despite some funny performances. I think that the less freedom you give Adam Sandler, the better his films are. I liked Get Smart. It was funny and just silly enough to keep the thoughts of the original fresh. Then again, I like Anne Hathaway and The Rock, and Steve Carrel and Allen Arkin are awesome. They also didn't skimp on the script, though they did crowbar some jokes in.

Frank Miller is probably one of the last people who should have directed The Spirit. The *absolute* last was Joel Shumacher, who obliterated the old Batman franchise. I've heard nothing but bad things about The Spirit from everyone, and their detailed criticism all seems predictable in

retrospect. Miller is an ultra-violent director/writer with an obsession with sleaze. What idiot in a suit decided that what The Spirit needed was violence and sleaze? In many of the best stories by Eisner, circa 1950 or '51, the Spirit was largely a walk-on character, with the important action going on just outside of his ken. I would have liked to see a script in which the Spirit was not quite able to grasp quite what the matter was until the end, when he surveys the mess and said something like "Okay, what the hell happened here?" Did we really need just another brutal urban crime/revenge film? But that's the trap people get into when they become famous and influential, as Miller has become. They're given all the rope they need to make idiots of themselves, waste millions of dollars of studio money, and place an attractive property like The Spirit out of reach of a better treatment for years to come.

There were so many problems, the script and the pacing were the biggest. Yeah, Frank "More whores!" Miller is not the guy to give the ball to. The performances were all kinda muted, save for Scarlett and Samuel. Sarah Paulson deserved better! The cinematography was great, as was some of the set dressing, but mostly, it was a loss. I do think there is life in The Spirit concept, but not as they presented it. The violence didn't bother me,

even as I'd read most of the The Spirit stuff over the years and it really didn't have that feel to it. Maybe it was the over-sexualization that bothered me most. There were points where it was certainly The Spirit and there were points where it was Frank Miller's The Spirit Returns...

Tales of the Dork Knight reminds me an awful lot of The Tick. While not the subtlest of animated cartoons, I really enjoyed its combination of broad humour and twisted logic.

Spoon!

I love Tick. I wish I could be Batman.



That's going to wrap up this here issue. I'm glad that I got to run some Bob Wilkins tribute material along with the great stuff folks sent my way. I'm always glad when I get good stuff to work with.

The next issue will be next week, most likely. I'm trying to give a little more lead time for Steve Green and such. One thing I know I'll be talking about is the election of the Baseball Hall of Fame. Rickey Henderson is up, after playing for a quarter century, so I'll have a lot to say.

I'm also working on the Fourth Annual Giant Sized Annual. It's gonna be some fun stuff mixed with my typi-

cal world. I've got a Dann Lopez cover and things are slowly floating in from folks.

Of course, this weekend I've got Evelyn to watch and we're doing recording for Guidolon at Frank Wu's place. It's not easy juggling Evelyn and other stuff, but I'm gonna do my best. She's a handful! At least I know that movies soothe that savage beast and I've got enough good stuff to keep her at bay for at least a while.

There's also a coming look at various potential Hugo nominees that's going to get going and will hopefully include the BASFA recs list.

I also wanna say thanks to John Stanley, the man who took over from Bob Wilkins on Creature Features. He was kind enough to inform me of Bob's passing and sent all sorts of material for this tribute and the one you'll read in SF/SF. I can't say thanks enough.

"It's amazing what you can get away with after being on TV. I can cash checks anywhere, get better service in restaurants, and mothers love me!"

-Bob Wilkins

