

THE RUDDER

The Newsletter of the USS Continuum

FEB 2009



Region 2 Summit / March Command Staff Meeting

The Region 2 Summit is this weekend!

If you have not already signed up, while it is too late to register for the Awards Banquet, it is **not** too late to join us for the Summit itself for the full price of \$35.

The Summit will be held in Jackson, MS at the Budget Inn & Banquet (1525 Ellis Avenue). For more information, check out the Summit website at <http://region2.org/2009.php>.

With the Summit being this weekend, **there will be no regularly scheduled Command Staff meeting for the month of March.**

Ronald McDonald House

Help us clean the Ronald McDonald House by doing some indoor cleaning and light yard work on Saturday, March 14, at 5154 Bayou Blvd.

Yard sale / April Command Staff meeting

Thanks to everyone who made the February 7 yard sale at the Dolans' a huge success!

There has been a slight change from what was reported in the *Rudder* last month regarding the next sale. It will be at DJ Allen's (535 Gallant Fox Lane, Crestview, FL) but on Saturday, March 28 at 7 a.m. If you wish to stay at DJ's the night before, please contact her at OBDJ52@yahoo.com.

With the change in schedule, our April Command Staff meeting is back on at Books-a-Million.

If any crewmembers have items they would like to donate for the yard sale, please contact the Command Staff.

Pensacola Symphony Orchestra

For those interested in going to "Finesse & Elegance" on Saturday, April 18 by the Pensacola Symphony Orchestra, please bring \$20 per person to

the April 3 CS meeting. The concert will be at First Baptist Church, 500 N Palafox, at 8 p.m.

Like we did on January 10, we will meet for a formal dinner at a restaurant beforehand. Location to be determined.

Camping

The next camping trip will be April 24-26 at Hurricane Lake. Food for the weekend will cost \$20; please bring your money to the April 17 Ship meeting.

See http://www.region2.org/usscontinuum/camping_trip.html for more information.

Wrath of Con 2009

The Wrath of Con returns to the Marriott Bay Point Resort & Spa in Panama City on May 29-30.

For more information and to order tickets, check out <http://www.wrathofcon.org/>.

Television review: *Medium* Season 5

By Chris Hammonds. This article originally appeared at Axiom's Edge Science Fiction and Fantasy (<http://www.axiomsedge-scifi.com/>).

Rating (after four episodes):
5 out of 5 Stars (Highest Rating)

I began watching this season of *Medium* with trepidation. I had watched the show from the beginning, held on for a couple seasons, and just kind of drifted off. It's only on for half a season every year, and I don't watch very much

television anyway, so it was easy to let it go. But something still nagged at me whenever I saw that it was on. There something about it that tugged at me, pulled me to it. Whenever I saw the seasons on sale on DVD, there was something about them that called to me. There's nothing really groundbreaking about the show, nothing "edgy". It's just a show about a suburban family with a good father who works hard for the money to support his wife and three daughters, a mother who works for the District Attorney's Office, and three beautiful children who argue and laugh and fight and cry like all children do. The fact that the mother has psychic abilities sometimes seems almost secondary. And that's the key to the show.

Lost in all the glitz and press of cool characters like Buffy and Angel — just to use a couple of names — is the fact that the true essence of their shows, the people that give the heroes their moral center, is the "normal" characters (Xander and Gunn, respectively, in the above case). Good sf (speculative fiction) is never really about the "Oh my God! Look-it the cool ray gun!" or "Look-it that cool dragon that scantily-clad, large-breasted woman is riding!" No — good sf is always about the way a paranormal or futuristic situation impacts normal people. It's about the way regular folk react to inexplicable or just irregular situations. Think about it: The first half-dozen or so episodes of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* were awful but then the show got better. Why? Were the situations suddenly that much better later on? No, the

characters were made to be more human, more like us. Rod Serling was a master at taking everyday situations and giving them a little twist, then showing the reactions of everyday people. It's this sensibility that made the original *Twilight Zone* one of the hallmarks of all sf on tv.

But back to the show at hand. *Medium* has this self-same sensibility. Yes, Allison Dubois (played by the marvelous Patricia Arquette) has psychic abilities far beyond those of a mortal woman. And, yes, her two oldest daughters, Ariel and Bridgette (Sofia Vassileiva and Maria Lark, respectively), are also exhibiting the same powers; not sure yet about the youngest, Marie (Miranda Carabello). And, yes, these abilities help them solve crimes, find lost keys, and heal disease. But what they do mostly is impact the lives of these girls and the husband/father on the show, normal everyday Joe Dubois (Jake Weber). Poor Joe is forever being awakened by Allison in the middle of the night because she had a dream of someone being murdered, or having to deal with Bridgette's having drawn a naked picture of one of her teachers for reasons unknown, or Ariel reading his mind while he's trying to teach her how to drive. Joe is the heart of this show, the one indispensable character. He is all of us, staring into the face of the unknown and trying to make it fit into a logical worldview.

Allison and the girls are also realistic characters despite their apparent "talents". Allison has visions that usually come to her in dreams, and are virtually always filtered through her own

subconscious. She frequently sees murders and other crimes in the first person, either as victim or killer, then has to backtrack and piece together what really happened from clues she saw in her dream. And sometimes it turns out that she really did personally have something to do with the crime, that she was possessed or lead by a spirit. Watching her struggle with these dilemmas in the realistic way she does is very endearing to the character. The girls are secondary characters and their problems are usually shown as subplot. Ariel's "life partner" in Wellness class is a stoner so every time she takes custody of their "baby" doll she suddenly acts wasted (at least she'll never fail a urinalysis); Bridgette draws picture after picture of her art teacher in the nude, crying as she does so because she's been told not to but can't stop herself, only to find that the strange mole she keeps drawing on his chest is skin cancer. These stories add flavor to the show and the realistic way in which they are portrayed adds substance.

DA Manuel Devalos (Miguel Sandoval) and Police Detective Lee Scanlon (David Cubitt) were more important characters on the show in seasons past than they seem to be for this season thus far. At one time they were more of the "regular Joe" characters but now seem to have been scaled back in their involvement — possibly due to Joe's more prominent role. At times this season, these two seem mere ciphers, almost mechanical aspects of the show, devices to get us where the writers want us to go. This may change later on. From what I've

seen and read Devalos was a major player last season so we may just be being given a break from the character for a little bit.

As stated above, I think that *Medium* is a hallmark of all that is right with tv sf at the moment. The plots are tight and generally well thought out and the characters are spot-on and eccentric enough — especially the amazing Bridgette — to always keep things fresh and unpredictable. Just like life itself. I look forward to seeing what happens next each week while at the same time worrying about the friends I feel I have on the show and their children. Just like life itself.

Comic book review: *End League*

By Chris Hammonds. This article originally appeared at Axiom's Edge Science Fiction and Fantasy (<http://www.axiomsedge-scifi.com/>).

Rating: 4 out of 5 Stars

Dark Horse's nihilistic super hero comic *The End League* is a story idea that simmered in the head of series creator and writer Rick Remender (*The All-New Atom*, *Avengers*) for more than five years — according to him — before seeing print. It is a story idea born of an innate distrust in the motives of others. Give out superpowers to one in every thousand persons at random, he reasoned, and darkness would come to rule over humanity rather quickly. Problem: Remender didn't think he could get Marvel or DC to publish his creation (why, I'm not sure, look at all the off-the-wall stuff being published by them today; of course, he doesn't say but maybe

he pitched it to someone at the Big Two and was turned down, or just didn't think he was established enough to talk about it with them), and superhero comics not published by the Big Two really need a great artist to get off the ground. So the idea just sat around until artist Mat Broome (*Stormwatch*, *X-Force*) contacted Remender about doing a project together and *The End League* was born.

The story begins with The Green Event, a catastrophic event caused by Astonishman (think: Superman with the internal energy of Marvel's Wonder Man) in May 1962. Astonishman had been given information by a man named Lexington — who would become AM's greatest adversary in the tradition of Lex Luthor — that the Communist powers (he never does say "Russians") had a nuclear facility on the ocean floor. The hero crashed through the roof, planting a nuclear bomb to destroy what he learned was actually an alien ship filled with extra-terrestrials that were only here to help humanity. The explosion created a chain reaction that led to the immediate deaths of over three billion and knocked the Earth out of its orbit. Astonishman pushed the Earth back to where it should be, all the while wondering where his good friend, the god Thor, the only person with the power to help AM, was. Radiation, both due to Earth's nearness to the Sun and the disappearance of the protection of Earth's magnetic field, bombarded the planet, causing all manner of mutation before AM could sweep the atmosphere clear. AM found Thor's body several days later, but the great

hammer Mjolnir was never found. This was the birth of the Magnificents, Remender's name for the superpowered on this Earth. Astonishman recruited those he thought he could trust to form the Squadron of Righteousness to help the world through this crisis that none but he (and Lexington) knew he himself had caused. But there were many more villains than heroes and they gathered and destroyed most of the Squadron on what became known as The Day of Annihilation. That was twelve years before the beginning of our story. There are a great many interesting characters here, nearly all analogs of better known DC and Marvel characters, a deliberate act that I believe ties this story in some ways to Marvel's *Ruins*. Besides the aforementioned Astonishman, Lexington, and Thor, there is also Divinity, a "god-killer" from Mount Olympus who has a secret that, like Astonishman's, would tear the family of heroes apart were it known. There does come a point where it is made clear that AM knows this secret, but he tells no one. She is the group's Wonder Woman. Then we have Codename Black, a non-Magnificent who fights evil through armor and devices bought with a family fortune — and even has a main adversary named The Smiling Man. Sound familiar? Mother Hive is a telepath who cannot move yet coordinates the heroes' missions and occasionally has prophetic dreams, reminiscent of The Martian Manhunter and Dream Girl from The Legion of Super Heroes. Arachnakid, Blur Girl, Soldier American, more — I think it's rather

apparent what they owe to more prominent heroes we all know and love. I don't point this out as any kind of slur on Remender. One, these are iconic heroes that virtually any large team of costumed vigilantes will emulate in one way or another. And, two, I really do believe this "funhouse mirror" approach lends to the story in ways that would be wasted without them. A third point is that this also gives a kind of *Watchmen* feel to the story, as well. I left the story itself out of this review because I really think this is a story that should be read, not talked about. The central idea, that power tends to corrupt, is as old as humanity itself and is given a true hearing here. This could easily have been a Justice League imaginary story or an Avengers What If...? Remender, who I frankly didn't think very much of after his awful *XXXombies* (proving once again that one story is not enough to judge a writer by), has come back with an excellent tale that only gets better for me issue after issue. Artist Mat Broome drew the first three and a half issues to great effect, with Eric Canete (*Satanika*, *Deathlok*) taking over pencils for the foreseeable future and giving it art that fits perfectly with this story.

The first volume of this series is out in tpb and is available at Amazon.com, with the second volume scheduled for release in April.

Book review: *The Last Days of Krypton*

By Chris Hammonds. This article originally appeared at Axiom's Edge Science Fiction

and Fantasy (<http://www.axiomsedge-scifi.com/>).

Rating: 4 out of 5 Stars

I haven't really read very much of Kevin J. Anderson's work before this. I read some of his Dark Horse Comics *Predator* series evidently — I read the series but didn't pay any attention to the fact that he wrote it. He also wrote a couple of *Star Wars* series for Dark Horse, which I haven't read, and the *JSA: Strange Adventures*, which I have. He does a lot of novelizations, too. He wrote one for *Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow*, a film that I love, and one for *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, a disappointing film made from a great comic. He also writes a great many genre-verse novels, delving into the *X-Files*, *Fantastic Voyage*, and *Star Wars* Universes, among others, as well as several fully original novels, none of which I've read. I had seen this novel, *The Last Days of Krypton*, in the book store for months in hardback, but I probably never would have read it if not for the fact that a friend who knew how much I loved Superman hadn't seen the paperback version and bought it for me. The paperback has a 3-D cover that really stands out; I wonder why they didn't do that for the hardcover. Superman is the longest-running superhero in American comics history, over 70 years and counting. Originally conceived as a bald villain bent on taking over the world, Superman was reworked by creators Jerry Siegel and Joe Schuster into an indomitable, supremely powerful super hero who had the power to bend steel in his bare hands, leap

one-eighth of a mile, and with skin impenetrable by anything less than an exploding shell. The ultimate immigrant, he was said to have been from a world of supermen named Krypton, the last survivor of a planetary disaster that even the Kryptonians couldn't avert. Sent to Earth as a baby, Superman grew up with a Midwestern US farm family, the Kents — who have had various first names over the years, the most common being Martha and Jonathan — who named him Clark and taught him the good old-fashioned virtues of Truth, Justice, and the American Way. He then grew up to work as a reporter on a "great Metropolitan newspaper", the *Daily Planet*, in a city named, appropriately enough, Metropolis. Over the years, the story would change and evolve, with Superman becoming more and more powerful and running characters coming and going and changing along with the times.

But two constants in every change of the mythos were the destruction of Krypton and the singular brilliance of Superman's biological father, Jor-El. The disaster has been a planetary eruption, a stellar event involving the planet's red sun, Rao, and a plague of the Kryptonians' own design; no matter the cause, though, the Kryptonians are always killed off. The Kryptonians themselves have gone from being the supermen of early days, with their super senses and leaping abilities, to being just ordinary folk on their homeworld, gaining super powers on Earth due to our lighter gravity and the stronger radiation emissions of our yellow sun. Superman himself has gone

from gaining his powers instantly in our atmosphere to being a sort of slow-charging solar battery who only gained his powers over a period of years. Jor-El himself, though, has virtually never changed. Even with the mid-80s John Byrne revamp of the Superman mythos in the wake of the DC Universe event, *Crisis on Infinite Earths*, in which Krypton was made into a “Brave New World” type of technological society, antiseptic and unemotional, Jor-El kept his love for his wife Lara and their child, Kal-El. He was also shown to be a brilliant scientist even in a world filled with geniuses. Jor-El has always been the messenger of Krypton’s doom, the brilliant man who sees what’s coming and struggles in vain to warn his brethren.

Anderson’s work is an amalgam of several incarnations of this story, leaning most heavily on the *Superman: The Movie* version while expanding it into a story in its own right. Here, we see a Jor-El whose description fairly closely matches the detached scientist played by Marlon Brando in the film. This is the story of the last year of Jor-El’s and Krypton’s life. We see the arrival of the friendly alien, Donodon, who attempts to help Jor-El prove Jor-El’s brother, Zor-El, correct in his worries over internal pressures in the planet’s core. We see the alien Brainiac come and steal the capital city of Kandor. We are shown the rise to power of General Zod in the aftermath of the Kandor disaster, a ruthless man who listens to Jor and Zor-El’s warnings and allows them to act — something the ruling Council had never done —

provided Jor aids him in the creation of weapons, supposedly for the defense of Krypton in the event of Brainiac’s return. On the more personal side for Jor-El, we see his meeting with the artisan who would become his wife, Lara, and witness the death of his father, a brilliant scientist in his own right who has become the victim of The Forgetting Disease — what we would call Alzheimer’s.

This is a story that almost everyone already knows the ending to. The world ends and a baby is sent to another world in a spaceship. Some may not know how the story of Zor-El and his home Argo City works out, although most will see the irony in Zod and his followers’ punishment being the means to their salvation even though Anderson does not spell it out here. This story serves to once again remind us that stories, like lives, are not about the destination as much as the journey. It’s the way we get there that makes any story great. Over time the great stories are retold and retold by so many different people that different points are emphasized, and the legends changed and revised over time, usually because the results are all that are remembered and recorded accurately. That’s true in history, and even more so in fictional backstories like this book.

Enemies and Allies: A Novel is Kevin J. Anderson’s sequel to *The Last Days of Krypton* and shows the first meeting between Superman and Batman. It is due to be released on 5 May 2009.