



Flaming Zeppelins: The Adventures of Ned the Seal

Joe R. Lansdale

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What do the disembodied head of Buffalo Bill Cody, Annie Oakley, Frankenstein, the Tin Man, Captain Nemo, the Flying Dutchman, and the inestimable Ned the Seal have in common? Find out as they embark upon a spectacular set of nonstop steampunk adventures. For the first time, two epic chronicles, Zeppelins West and Flaming London, inscribed by a courageous young seal on his trusty notepad, are collected together in one volume.

Leap from a flaming zeppelin with the stars of the Wild West Show in a desperate escape from an imperial Japanese enclave. Wash up upon the island of Doctor Moreau, in mortal danger from his unnatural experiments (and ignorant that Dracula approaches by sea). Unite with Jules Verne, Passpartout, and Mark Twain on a desperate voyage to the burning streets of London, which are infested with killer squid from outer space courtesy of H. G. Wells's time machine.

It's a raucous steam-powered locomotive of shoot-'em-up Westerns, dime novels, comic books, and pulp fiction, as only Lansdale, the high-priest of Texan weirdness, could tell.

Flaming Zeppelins: The Adventures of Ned the Seal Details

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From Reader Review Flaming Zeppelins: The Adventures of Ned the Seal for online ebook

Bill says

Anytime I was beginning to enjoy this book, Lansdale felt it necessary (or humorous) to throw in a random reference to male sexual organs, self-pleasuring, defecation, farting, rectums, and other crudities. It killed the pace and light-hardheartedness of the two stories. These insertions added nothing, and just seemed like he was trying to get cheap laughs from adolescent teens. "Flaming London" actually includes several references to the Lansdale's short story "The Steam Man of the Prairie and the Dark Rider Get Down: A Dime Novel" that was in Jeff VanderMeer's anthology "Steampunk." Not a good thing, as that tale was very vulgar and not the least bit entertaining. If I had remembered Lansdale wrote that story, I would definitely have given "Ned the Seal" a pass. I teetered on giving this a one star rating, but since I found some amusement between the vulgarities, I will generously give it two stars.

Eric says

This is a combination of two related novellas which could superficially be described as League of Extraordinary Western Gentlemen. It's Joe R. Lansdale going full gonzo toying with history and alternate universes and fake realities. While Joe freed from such base concerns like narrative cohesion and realism sounds like it would be a damn near perfect book (or pair of novellas collected) I found that these aren't really that great.

Nathan Flamank says

So this is Lansdale at his most crazy...Wild Bill Hickok, Annie Oakley, Sitting Bull, Frankenstein's Monster (who goes by the name Bert), The Tin Man (who is in a loving relationship with Bert), Dorothy (who meets her end at the hands of the Lion and the Scarecrow - well perhaps she shouldn't have teased them so with her pigtails and all), Dracula, Captain Nemo, HG Wells, Ned the Talking Seal, Cat (a creation of Dr Memo - as in the island of Doctor.....), Custer, Squid-like martians, talking animals (no are we not MEN!), and all manner of other characters (both fictional and real) are here for one "Royal Mash-Up"... "Zeppelins" rips along from one crazy, zany mishap to the next and is not for readers unaccustomed to Lansdale's writing. It has its faults for sure but once I gave in to the craziness I thoroughly enjoyed the ride.

Jim says

This is an irreverent sci-fi/time travel/historical/pop culture/snicker all the way through book. The book opens with the head of Buffalo Bill Cody (still functioning and stored in a jar), Wild Bill Hickock, Annie Oakley, Sitting Bull, and others riding the Wild West Show zeppelins to Japan. One of their objectives is to kidnap the body of Frankenstein's monster. After this, things start to get weird. The characters are typical Joe R. Lansdale funny, even if the ones based on historical people are probably not that accurate. The loveable Ned the seal steals the show and the hearts of the readers. Did I mention that he

likes fish?

What a really enjoyable light read.

Chadwick Saxelid says

Two thrilling (and amusing) tales of adventure, featuring larger-than-life legends from the American West, literary heroes and villains, and an intelligence enhanced seal named Ned.

Zeppelins West:

There is more than one reason for The Wild West Show, run by the disembodied head of Buffalo Bill Cody and featuring Wild Bill Hickok, Annie Oakley, and Sitting Bull, to have crossed the Pacific Ocean, via zeppelin, and visit Japan.

The "Excuse Reason" is for Buffalo Bill Cody and Wild Bill Hickok to cool the tempers that have been heated by the number of Japanese warriors that died under Custer's command at the battle of Little Big Horn. If the historical accuracy of that sentence sounds a bit off to you, this story takes place in an Alternate History, wherein the Europeans discovered and settled in the East Coast of the Americas and immigrated west, while the Japanese discovered and settled in the West Coast of the Americas and have immigrated east. Both are battling the indigenous population that is getting crushed between them.

President Grant wants the United States to own all the land to the western coast, so he is gifting a powerful Japanese warlord named Takeda with weapons, in the hope that Takeda will use them to seize power and, as a thank you, sell the western lands to the United States at a reasonable price.

But Buffalo Bill doesn't care about any of that. He just wants his disembodied head put back on his body, which is being kept on ice, and that is his primary reason for bringing the Wild West Show to Japan. He wants to steal the Frankenstein monster from Takeda, and learn its secrets.

Flaming London:

Samuel Langhorne Clemens, best known as Mark Twain, has fallen on hard times. He is destitute, depressed, and something else that starts with the letter D. After selling off the last of his library to a Tangier Casbah dealer named Abdul, Clemens purchases a ferry ride to Spain. There he hopes to become the guest of dear friend and fellow writer, Jules Verne.

While en route to Verne's seaside home, Clemens finds an injured seal on the beach. An injured seal that has thumbs on its flippers. An injured seal named Ned.

Shortly afterward, Martians begin to invade Earth. Things get kind of silly after that...

Wait a minute, you might say, or think, "It gets kind of silly AFTER that? The whole thing sounds silly!"

And it is, almost distractingly so. There is not a single moment during the entirety of Flaming Zeppelins: The Adventures of Ned the Seal that is not absurdly silly. Both novellas overflow with the same kind (and amount) of weird, twisted, and maniacal energy found in the more surreal episodes of Written By A Kid.

I think that watching the following episode of Written By A Kid, which features a story called Rainbow Town, will be, for you, pretty damn close to what the experience of reading Flaming Zeppelins: The Adventures of Ned the Seal was like, for me.

<http://youtu.be/EWQQpA5x0ac>

Now just try and imagine what reading 285 pages of that would have been like, and that is pretty much what it is like for me to read Flaming Zeppelins: The Adventures of Ned the Seal.

Not that I am saying that is a bad thing. It's more like way too much of a good thing.

That good thing is the reason why Joe R. Lansdale has been one of my All Time Favorite Writers for 30 years. He is absolutely fearless in the face of his insane storytelling instincts. No idea is too strange or outlandish for him to explore fully. He will happily, and energetically, lead the reader to wherever the story takes him. The two stories in Flaming Zeppelins take him everywhere.

The two synopses that began my review are just descriptions of the set ups for each tale. They are just the starting points for an insane game of creative hopscotch, played out with a wide variety of iconic historical figures and/or iconic characters/events from pop culture. Which is how you get the disembodied head of Buffalo Bill Cody trying to rescue the Frankenstein monster, only to crash land on the shore of an island "paradise" ruled by a mad scientist. One that bears a strong resemblance to a certain mad scientist named Moreau. That mad scientist just so happens to have a Tin Man henchman. The Tin Man, even though he has no heart, falls passionately in love with the Frankenstein monster, who has named himself Bert.

That comparison to Written By A Kid doesn't seem so ludicrous now, does it?

Each story is less a journey and more of a large canvas, upon which Lansdale splashes together comically distorted parodies of historical and/or literary figures to see what happens, and a lot happens. If some plot development, or character, doesn't have the zing that Lansdale feels the story needs, decides within a mere paragraph, perhaps two, at most, there is a major plot turn that will have changed the story and removed the character from the story. After a while, it got kind of tiresome.

I am aware that comically gonzo stories such as these are an acquired taste. I got the taste for them from stories reading a great many of Lansdale's outrageous (and hilarious) short stories. Stories like Godzilla's Twelve Step Program or Fire Dog. I think those stories are superior to the two novellas collected in Flaming Zeppelins. Because a little gonzo can (and does) go a very long way, and the stuff kind of overstays its welcome in these two kinetic yarns.

Colleen says

I'd prefer to give the first story zeppelins west a 3 and the second flaming London a five, but, as they are together here they get a combined four. Each is a send-up/ tribute to characters, real and fictional and there is generous borrowing of plot. I prefer the London story as it is a bit more fun and innocent, perhaps due to the more central place of Ned the seal. I am warning you, very seriously, that if you have a special place in your heart for the Wizard of Oz, you may want to skip zeppelins. Joe lansdale, I have a bone to pick with you on that score

Frank says

This was a real hoot! Lansdale pulled out all the stops in this irreverent blend of fantasy and science fiction featuring some of the most beloved characters (both real and fictional) of the 19th century including Buffalo Bill Cody (at least his head), Wild Bill Hickok, Annie Oakley, Sitting Bull, Mark Twain, Jules Verne, H.G. Wells, the Frankenstein monster, Dracula, the Tin Man, Dr. Moreau (Momo), Captain Nemo (Bemo), and a giant talking ape from Mars reminiscent of King Kong! This was actually the first two novels in the trilogy of Ned the Seal's adventures: *Zeppelins West* and *Flaming London*. There evidently is a third book in the works titled *The Sky Done Ripped*.

I loved reading Verne, Twain, and Wells along with a lot of pulp fiction including *Doc Savage* when I was younger so I really enjoyed this although it definitely is not for children given Lansdale's frequent use of vulgarities in the stories. The first book has Buffalo Bill and his wild west show traveling to Japan via Zeppelins on a mission to rescue Frankenstein's monster who is being used by the Japanese as an aphrodisiac by cutting off and powderizing pieces of the monster! The action then moves on to the Island of Dr. Momo where some very disturbing experiments involving animals takes place. This includes making a seal able to read and write (the titular Ned the Seal). The second story is a take-off on Wells' *The War of the Worlds* and has Verne and Twain in a battle to save the world. The story ends with the remaining group headed out in a time machine to try to mend the time and dimension rifts that have developed by Well's time traveler. This will probably be the subject matter of the projected third story in the trilogy.

Overall, I liked Lansdale's vivid imagination and his humor in telling these tales and would recommend this.

Tazio Bettin says

Two books in one

Which requires two separate votes and comments. To *Zeppelin East*, I give a full five stars because it never loses that crazy rhythm and genial scenes that managed to make me laugh at every single bloody page. To *Flaming London*... I can't give more than two stars. It only feels like a dull sequel, and although there certainly are moments of brilliance, the characters soon grow boring, and even Ned's jokes and humour scenes become repetitive.

Ron Martirano says

Sophomoric (in the best way), fun, and occasionally irreverent, but perhaps more enjoyable to read the two novellas separately with some time in between than as one long volume. For me, tedium set in somewhere in the middle of the second story, making the balance an effort to finish. Still, it's hard to go totally wrong with an abundance of fun references, some trippy multiverse action, and a literate seal with a healthy appetite.

Nigel says

Joe R Lansdale goes off the reservation with this affectionate but irreverent homage to dime-store westerns and early science fiction. Buffalo Bill's Western Show in zeppelins! Kidnapping Frankenstein's monster from a Japanese shogun! Get stranded on the island of Dr Moreau - or 'Momo.' Dracula comes for a visit! Things explode! Later, Martians invade and Mark Twain, Jules Verne and a talking seal, amongst others, fight them off while a rip in the fabric of reality threaten to tear the world apart! Don't even try. I mean, it all makes sense, because it's Joe R Lansdale but it's as mad as a box of cabbages. Hilarious, violent, tragic and utterly gonzo vulgar and strange. I'd be tempted to call it old school, but there's no school that'd have it.

Malcolm says

Joe Lansdale is a fine Texan smart ass raconteur, telling fine stories and keeping it just a little (well, more than a little) weird; I rather enjoyed the Hap & Leonard 'mysteries' – the genre is pretty fuzzy. In this double story he take on *The Island of Dr Moreau* and *War of the Worlds*, through the eyes, note pad and journal of a surgically enhanced (it was Dr Moreau, after all) seal – the Ned of the title.

We find ourselves in a vaguely steampunk land-of-Momo (Moreau) with Bill Cody (well, his head), Bill Hickock, Annie Oakley, Sitting Bull and other of the wild west show – with a bit of Frankenstein, a brief Dracula appearance, and alt-Oz-ending for Dot and the Tin Man; frankly, all too much for one short book (at 130 or so pages for *Zeppelins West*). Then we're off to the adventures of Mark Twain, Jules Verne, H G Wells along with the Flying Dutchman and assorted *fin-de-siècle* science fiction to Flaming London, a less cluttered and slightly more satisfying story.

Alas, in this case Lansdale just doesn't hit the mark, and what's more misses it by a mile; there are times I really enjoy a good piece of dime novel-esque intertextual alternative history satire (even more so when it parodies the classics) but in too many places this is just lazy writing, and while a bit of scatology (eschatological or not, and a lot of it is pretty eschatological) can be funny, there are just too many too-much-like-the-last-one fart jokes throughout. Sorry Joe – I really wanted to like it but it barely makes it to being OK; even then it feels a bit mean. Of course, there is always the sense that the middle aged me is the wrong audience for this; if I was 14 it might have been different.

Ian says

Ever have a six year old tell you a story? ("We got in my fire engine, which was a space ship, and went to the moon and a gorilla fought a dragon and then we had cookies!") Well, these two related novellas seem to have been written with the same general principle in mind. In the first one, "Zeppelins West", Buffalo Bill (or rather his disembodied head -- long story) takes his Wild West show to Japan as part of an undercover mission to rescue Frankenstein's monster and ends up on the Island of Doctor Moreau, while in the second, "Flaming London", Mark Twain and Jules Verne find themselves fleeing from an invasion by H.G. Wells' Martians. Oh, yeah, and the connecting character in both pieces is a superintelligent seal. Now I won't deny that these stories have a certain ADD-addled charm, due to their author's insistence on throwing in every steampunk trope he can think of, but at the same time, I'd be hard pressed to say they ultimately added up to much beyond their rather feverish name-checking.

Heath Lowrance says

This volume contains two short novels, "Zeppelins West" and "Flaming London"; in the first, Buffalo Bill Cody's travelling Wild West Show winds up in Imperial Japan on a secret mission, where Cody (who, by the way, is just a head in a Mason jar), Wild Bill Hickok, Annie Oakley, and Sitting Bull rescue the Frankenstein Monster from an evil shogun. Then, with the Japanese in pursuit, they crash in the ocean, are rescued by Captain Bemo (standing in for Captain Nemo), and taken to the Island of Dr. Momo (standing in for Dr. Moreau). And that's just the beginning. You might get the impression that this is a seriously goofy, everything-but-the-kitchen-sink, romp, and you'd be right. It's wildly anarchic and over-the-top.

The second volume, "Flaming London", continues the bizarre fun, as Ned the Seal (introduced as a minor character in the first one but taking more center stage here) teams up with Mark Twain and Jules Verne to battle invading Martians a la War of the Worlds. Along the way, they encounter a giant steam man, a talking Martian ape, pirates lost in time, and the Flying Dutchman.

So, yeah. Crazy stuff. Lansdale without a filter, basically. The first novel has a nice, flying by the seat of your pants feeling, as if Lansdale is making it up as he goes and is having a helluva good time. The second one is more cohesive, and maybe a bit more satisfying in the long run. But both of them are well worth reading.

James Hill says

from Ryan:

Buffalo Bill Cody's disembodied head, kept alive inside a mason jar filled with a scientific concoction (mostly pig urine) atop a steam powered robot body operated by a midget. Yes, this is the Wild West like you've never imagined! They even travel by zeppelin! Little miss sure shot Annie Oakley, Wild Bill Hickok, Sitting Bull... The whole Wild West crew make an appearance in the first book.

Zeppelin's West and Flaming London were later combined into a single volume called Flaming Zeppelins. These are not for the young, or faint of heart! Lansdale can be quite vulgar and crude in this tale... so be warned... but it's a wonderful read! It's a very campy parody of dime novel westerns, alternate universe tales, classic scifi, horror, comic books... all expertly mashed together.

Case in point; the first novel features Buffalo Bill Cody (well, his head anyway) and the Wild West Show. Along the way, they have contact with Frankenstein, the Tin Man and even Ned the Seal who narrates a good portion of the second half of the story, Flaming London. This book is completely insane, it had me chuckling the whole way through. Especially Ned the Seal. He is quite the narrator! Ned is intelligent, witty, courageous... but still a seal.

To give you an example, here's a little narration from The Autobiography of Ned the Seal, Adventurer Extraordinaire: "...and I was there when the Martians came, and all the horrors that accompanied them. I was a companion of Samuel Clemens, otherwise known as the great novelist Mark Twain. I knew his friend, Jules Verne. I knew H. G. Wells. I knew the Lost Island. And I knew London when it was in flames. In my

life, I have eaten many fish.”

Alan says

Zeppelins are in everything these days, it seems, except our real-life skies. Alas. But not every steampunk novel (well, actually, two short novels crammed together) features Buffalo Bill Cody's preserved head in an electrified jar, right there on Page 1.

Drug-addled, sex-crazed and excrement-obsessed, this is not your ordinary steampunk. Joe R. Lansdale, whose other credits include the novel from which the film *Bubba Ho-Tep* was made, is unafraid to Go There, wherever and whenever There might be—seal farts are the least of it (hey, at least they're not as bad as *walrus farts*).

In Lansdale's kitchen-sink approach to transgressive storytelling, major historical figures rub shoulders with their fictions, regardless of chronology, sense or good taste. It's a lunatic farrago, in which Victor Frankenstein's hapless monster can find true love with the Tin Man, Chuck Darwin and H.G. Wells are clandestine super-scientists, and everyone seems to have at least one steam-powered robot stashed away just in case things get *really* hairy. The narrative is primarily by—yes, Ned the Seal is an actual seal, and though his brain and flippers have been surgically enhanced by the evil Dr. Momo, Ned still retains a love for fish, seal nookie and dime novels, all of which influence the prose.

Flaming Zeppelins is a horrible mess, a bloody locomotive crash of a book... but eerily fascinating nonetheless, a macabre look into the seething Id of a no-holds-barred Texan writer, unlike anything else I've ever seen in print. You can take that as a recommendation if you want to, kids.
