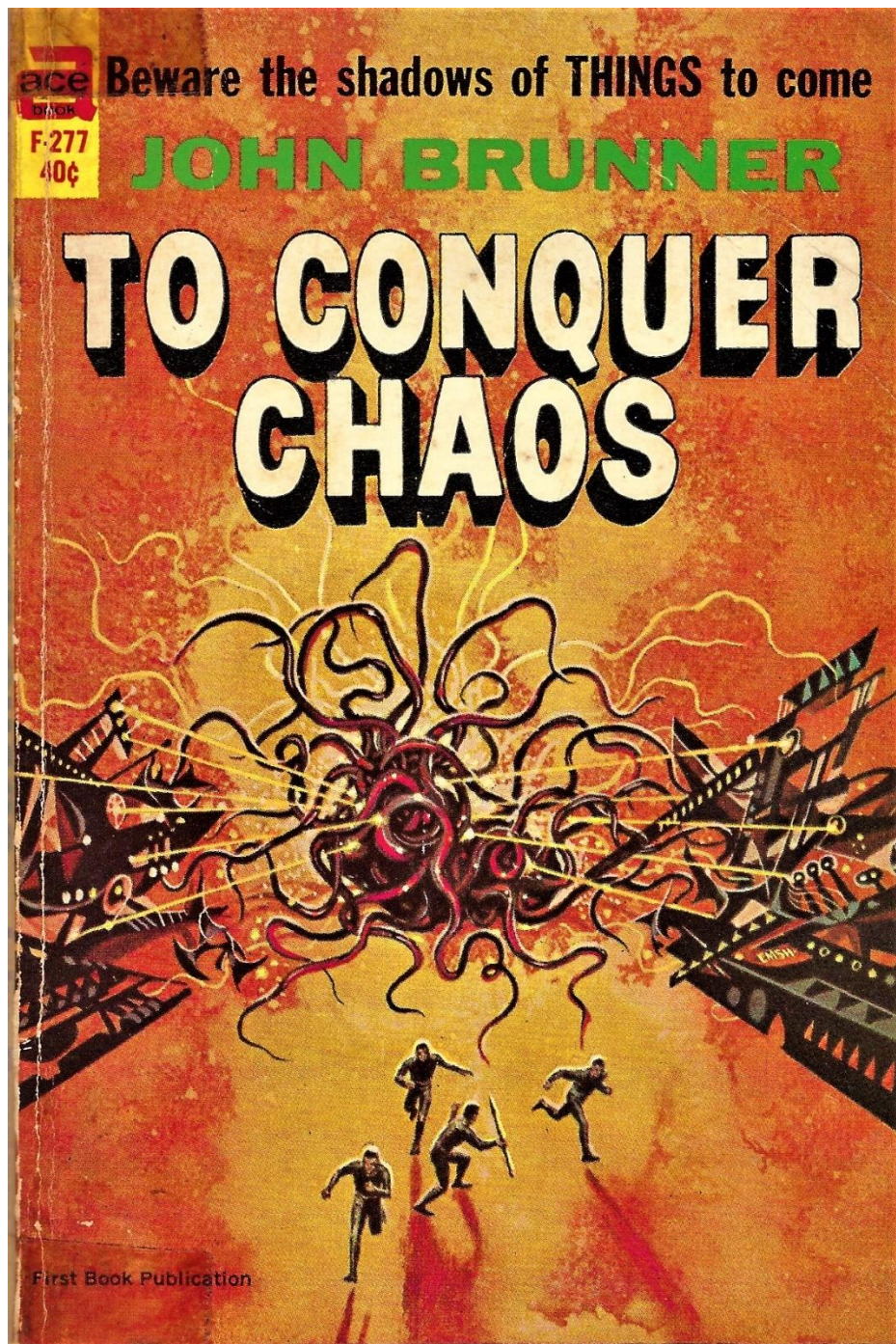


BCSFAZINE

Clubzine of the British Columbia Science Fiction Association
(Issue #542 – July, 2020)



Dedicated to The Fellowship of The Greater BCSFA.

BCSFazine is a Canadian non-profit Science Fiction online PDF Clubzine published by the British Columbia Science Fiction Association twelve times a year.

Distribution of this PDF clubzine is free, either by E-mail or via download.

Copyright belongs to the contributors bylined, and no portion of this magazine may be reproduced without consent from the individual Author, Poet, or Artist.

To submit articles, art work, or letters of comment, contact God-Editor R. Graeme Cameron at: < the.graeme.bcsfazine@gmail.com >

Anyone interested in tons of back issues, please go to:

< <https://efanzines.com/BCSFA/> >

CURRENT BCSFA EXECUTIVE

Chair: Position open

Vice Chair: Position open.

Treasurer: Kathleen Moore.

Secretary: Barb Dryer.

BCSFazine Editor: R. Graeme Cameron.

Keeper of the FRED Book: Ryan Hawe.

FRED Organizer: Michael Bertrand.

VCON Ambassador for Life: Steve Forty.

FRED DINNER – (FRED = “Forget Reality! Everybody Drink!”) A local Vancouver area meet-up founded circa 1986. Usually held every second Sunday, but **currently on hold due to the Coronavirus Pandemic.**

FRED ZOOM MEETINGS – (The Graeme’s SF Fen Confab Meetings)

— Every Monday 4:00 PM (PST) to 9:00 PM (PST). All SF Fen welcome.

Contact me at < the.graeme.bcsfazine@gmail.com > and I’ll send you the link.

SUBMISSION DEADLINE

Midnight, July 31st. My simple layout design ensures it will get into the following month’s issue to be published no later than August 2nd. Guaranteed.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 03) – EDITORIAL: THE GOD EDITOR SPEAKS – “The Graeme”
- 06) – ODDS AND SODS ABOUT THIS ZINE – Policies and similar rubbish.
- 06) – WHAT THE GOD-EDITOR WOULD LIKE TO PUBLISH – Stuff by you!
- 06) – VOID BREATHER BOMBAST – Interesting outer space regolithism.
- 09) – LYNNE TAYLOR FAHNESTALK ART PORTFOLIO
- 15) – LITERARY SHENANIGANS – Assorted fake news from the publishing world.
- 20) – BOOKS TO BURDEN YOUR MIND – *To Conquer Chaos* – by John Brunner
- 25) – MAGAZINES DRENCHED IN MAPLE SYRUP – *Speculative North* # 1
- 26) – RANDOM MUSINGS – Virtual Unreality – by **Robert J. Sawyer**
- 28) – TONIGHT’S BLOG – Thoughts on Science and Morality – by **Michael Bertrand**
- 31) – MESSED-UP MOVIE MOPES – *Die! Monster Die!* (1965), *Die Farbe* (2010), *Color Out of Space* (2019), & *Annihilation* (2018).
- 42) – FILMS TO SEE BEFORE YOU DIE – Part One: Genre Films 1895 to 1906.
- 43) – THE LIGHT-HEARTED VITUPERATOR AND JOLLY REVILER – by **Stan G. Hyde**
- 48) – IT IS WHAT IT IS – Mansplaining the State of Fandom – by **Garth Spencer**
- 52) – JUNE 8 – F.R.E.D. SF FEN CONFAB ZOOM MEETING TEXT CHAT – by **Joe Devoy** and **Felicity Walker**
- 56) – UPCOMING CONVENTIONS TO PRETEND TO ENJOY
- 57) – OOK, OOK, SLOBBER, DROOL! – LoCs from beyond: Steve Green, Garth Spencer, Lloyd Penney, & Felicity Walker.
- 63) – AFTERWORDS – by “The God-Editor.”

Cover Credit

Cover – By unknown artist (Not stated in book).

EDITORIAL: THE GOD-EDITOR SPEAKS!

Late-breaking news and last minute insertion into the editorial:

Lance Munro announced that Stewart Smyth passed away in his sleep on June 24th. Stew has been a fixture at both VCON and BCSFA for well on forty years. That he is suddenly no longer with us is an unbelievable shock. Hard to take in.

Not entirely unexpected, mind you. He has had long term difficulties with his sleep apnea and breathing, and had undergone a 14-hour heart operation last December. Nevertheless he seemed to be recovering and remained as sharp and feisty as always. I was beginning to take for granted that he would be with us for years yet. Alas, not so.

Difficult to grasp and to put into words. I'd like those who knew him and appreciated him to go over their memories and perhaps come up with a paragraph or two of fond reminiscences and anecdotes to be printed next issue. A sort of printed wake celebrating his life is what I have in mind. Please contribute if you can. Send your memories and impressions to the E-address shown at the end of the editorial.

And now, back to the original editorial, starting off with a lame, self-serving request (in comparison to the above) which is meant to be humorous. Rather than alter everything in order to match the somber news above I'm going to leave everything as originally written by me or submitted by others. I have the feeling Stew would approve all of us carrying on as we usually do since I truly believe our typical shenanigans are part of what attracted him to fandom in the first place. After all, he's the one who arranged our Community Centre nude swimming parties back in the day. I don't think he would find any attempt at humour in this issue misplaced.

I've been nominated twice for the current Aurora awards in the "Fan Writing and Publications" category, namely for Publishing *Polar Borealis Magazine* and for my Review columns in *Amazing Stories (online) Magazine*. Utilizing my humble powers as God-Editor I beseech you to vote for me. Voting is underway and will continue till July 25th.

Note: You must be Canadian to vote.

To find out more (and to vote) go to < [Aurora Awards Voting](#) >

What is fandom without controversy? I note that a controversy of late has grown up around the concept of all-Zoom-meet conventions. Are they a good thing? A bad thing? Will they doom a return to in-person conventions? Is this yet another case of evolving technology (surely the Ur-dream of science fiction) destroying yet another hallowed fannish tradition? Like so much else that is modern, do we need to shun it and boycott it to preserve whatever humanity remains in trufandom?

Some fen seem to be arguing from an either/or standpoint. I consider this needlessly nitpicky and yet another case of not seeing the forest because of too much focus on individual trees. I would go so far as to state there is no cause for concern. Zoom meetings are merely an additional tool to be used and exploited as needed or required. It enhances fandom because it increases the number of options available. Whether or not it should be used depends on local circumstances, I believe.

Point one: Zoom panels and lectures work quite well, at least in my limited experience (AmazingCon).

Point Two: Pre-pandemic the cost of holding a convention in a hotel rose astronomically (at least in the Vancouver/Lower Mainland Region). Plus hotel head offices were increasingly opposed to such fannish concepts as room parties, fan-run bar and food services in hospitality suites, nude hot tub sessions, etc. These two factors meant it was difficult for fen to find a venue they could afford, and near impossible to find one that would allow them to run a convention according to fannish tradition.

Point Three: Impossible to say what the immediate post-pandemic hotel situation will be. Desperate and eager for any convention, hence a buyer's market? Or intent on maximizing profits in order to recover quickly, so to hell with the small fry?

Point Four: Running a Zoom con would be quite inexpensive and primarily a matter of sufficient enthusiasm and organization.

Point Five: Zoom cons would in no way equal the hands-on interaction of in-person cons.

Point Six: Nevertheless, Zoom cons would be better than nothing, and if a Zoom con is all local fandom can afford, then why not put one on?

Point Seven: In-person cons have been dying for years due to decreasing attendance, though particularly well-run cons are still going strong. Still, dedicated fandom is aging and dropping out. How to attract new fans?

Point Eight: A con featuring Zoom panels and talks could well attract people who are just fans of the stuff and know nothing about organized fandom but happen to be keen and experienced with social media.

Point Nine: Such fen are ripe candidates to be mentored into an eagerness to try out a nearby in-person con.

Point Ten: Small, local Zoom cons could well be the perfect recruitment tool for a new generation of fen to swell the ranks of in-person convention-goers.

Point Eleven: Frequent, small, local Zoom cons may ultimately prove the salvation of large in-person cons.

Point Twelve: Consequently, the future of fan-run conventions may be far better than we think.

An aside on film collecting. First, I'm primarily interested on films I imprinted on as a kid. This includes Universal Studios horror films which I discovered via Shock Theatre on TV in the late 1950s, and numerous 1950s B movies I saw second or third run in the Rialto Theatre in Ottawa in the early 1960s.

Recent acquisitions include either blu-rays or DVDs of gems like *The Slime People*, *Earth Vs. The Spider*, *Fire Maidens of Outer Space*, and *The Monster That Challenged The World*. Or, as one friend of mind would put it, "crappy, crappy movies not worth watching." I beg to differ. Not only do each of these features exude period charm in terms of setting, props, social mores, and quaint contemporary customs, but the crispness of detail is so great it is like seeing these films for the first time; there's so much to look at that is new to me. Besides, to a member of the "Monster Kid generation," (*Shock Theatre*, *Famous Monsters of Filmland*, *The Munsters*, *The Addams Family*, *Twilight Zone* and *The Outer Limits*) these films are fantastically nostalgic and eminently rewatchable. To properly appreciate these films a person requires what is now an obsolete and antique social situational-awareness well outside what passes for normal nowadays. I'm lucky. I'm a twentieth-century kinda guy. These films still speak to me.

In regard to modern films I am by no sense a completist. I haven't even heard of most films, there are so many of them, and in general what films I do come across that sound interesting I am content to watch on you-tube or Amazon Prime. If I really, really like a film, I will attempt to acquire a copy of my own, preferably in Blu-ray. This is rare, however.

In general my film habit boils down to collecting oldtime movies in physical form to watch on my big screen TV, and downloading newer movies on my laptop. This serves me well. I am content. I watch maybe four movies a week.

By the way, I will admit *Fire Maidens of Outer Space* is rock bottom crap. Saw an admission online the other day by one of the "Fire Maidens" that she hates the film with a passion. Evidently didn't do her career any good. Nevertheless, it scared me when I was a kid. I still remember being in awe of the terrifying conundrum of how to get over a ten-foot wall. And the monster! He who screams "Arrgh!" Never occurred to me the first time I saw it he was just a spotty-faced mask with black leotards inhabited by some luckless actor hoping to be uncredited.

When the film arrived in the mail I watched the whole thing with a huge smile on my face. Instant, overwhelming nostalgia. Pure pleasure. For anyone else, boredom is all the film can offer. I might be the last person on Earth capable of enjoying this film from beginning to end. Come to think of it, I could well be the first person ever to do so. That makes the bond between *Fire Maidens of Outer Space* and myself unique. Cool.

Cheers! *The Graeme*

Send your letters of comment, submissions, ideas, etc. to:

< the.graeme.bcsfazine@gmail.com >

ODDS AND SODS ABOUT THIS ZINE

Note – All articles unless otherwise stated are by the God-Editor The Graeme.

Nature of zine – Pretty much anything to do with SF Fandom and whatever the fen are interested in. Or, to put it another day, whatever pops up in my fevered thoughts and the agitated minds of the contributors.

WHAT THE GOD-EDITOR WOULD LIKE TO PUBLISH

Basically, contributions by fen like you!

VOID BREATHER BOMBAST

Black Hole Eats Neutron Star – Who knew? Neutron stars may be failed black holes. Both are extremely dense objects. Apparently the largest neutron star = 2.5 X the mass of our sun. The smallest black hole = 5 X the mass of our sun. Both are very small objects in actual size. A neutron star evidently not massive enough to shrink to a singularity. So there it sits. But recently Astronomers observed a black hole swallowing a neutron star measuring 2.6 X the mass of Sol. This raises the exciting possibility of even bigger neutron stars out there on the cusp of converting into black holes. Sucking in a wandering planet might trigger the collapse. At any rate, the black hole in question is becoming a bigger black hole (in mass, not size). I suppose, truth be told, black holes are the universe's vacuum cleaners. Which makes us microbes living in the dust?

Speaking of Greedy Black Holes – Back in February Astronomers detected evidence of the largest known explosion since the original Big Bang. Seems a supermassive black hole burped while swallowing a galaxy. It blew a bubble of nothing in the hot gas surrounding the local cluster of galaxies, a “hole in space” with volume enough to contain a galaxy 15 times the size of our Milky Way Galaxy. The energy it took to achieve that absolutely and uniquely titanic in scale. Seems to me the old Space Opera dream of simply zipping about deep space at FTL speeds without hindrance is rather naive in light of modern knowledge about the level of violent

energy, not to mention amount of material, existing within the interstellar ether. The gap between galaxies just as bad. We need to know more about reality before we spend our vacation visiting Andromeda. Just saying.

Pluto Got an Ocean – It used to be thought Pluto (and other distant worlds) accreted from solar grains and was never hot and melty like the inner planets. Now enough indirect evidence has accumulated to suggest early Pluto was hot because of huge impacts and is still hot, or at least warm enough to contain a vast ocean of water billions of years old beneath its outer, icy shell. This may hold true for many a Kuiper Belt object as well. In short, the best place to look for life may well be the outer Solar System and beyond. I wouldn't mind finding out what's up. I vote NASA place an orbiter around Pluto to check it out further. I love it when foreign countries spend money to entertain me. So I'll be mighty pleased if NASA heeds my plea.

NASA Launches Toilet Design Challenge – Apollo era astronauts stuck plastic bags on their behinds with tape. The shuttle featured zero-gravity toilets using fan-driven suction, as does the ISS. But what with the Artemis program designed to return people to the surface of the Moon, NASA now wants a toilet system that can handle both zero gravity and Lunar gravity. The winning design will receive \$20,000 USD. The “junior category under 18 years of age” winner will get NASA merchandise.

What are the required specifications?

- Be able to collect urine (up to a litre) and feces (up to 500 grams) at a time and simultaneously.
- Be able to collect up to 114 grams of menstrual blood per person per day.
- Be able to collect vomit without the crew member having to stick their head in.
- Be easy to clean and repair.
- Be able to store waste or toss outside vehicle.
- Be no louder than 60 decibels.
- Take up no more than 4.2 cubic feet.
- Take no more than five minutes till ready to use again.

So, what are you waiting for? Head off to your garage workbench and get busy!

Spaceship Unity Flies Again – Virgin Galactic successfully dropped Unity from its massive twin-fuselage Carrier at a height of 51,000 feet over New Mexico on Thursday, June 25th. This be the second glide test without a hitch. Unity reached .85 Mach before coming in for a landing. The next test will involve firing Unity's engine in flight. Eventually, it is hoped, it will be ready to fly tourists fifty miles high for suborbital hops featuring splendid views and brief periods of zero gravity. More than 600 people have purchased tickets. All first class. No economy.

Monster Quasar Discovered – First of all, we see it as it was only 700 million years after the universe was created. It's taken 13.02 billion years for it's light to reach us. Pretty amazing. Secondly, it's unbelievably gigantic outpouring of energy is triggered by a supermassive black hole with a mass = 1.5 billion of our sun. It is the most distant, and therefore earliest, quasar ever found. Quasars don't exist in the current universe. They are products left over from the original Big Bang which we see as we look back in time (distance, same thing) but cannot find nearby in

time/distance. They're an early passing phase in the evolution of the universe.

To be sure, black holes everywhere continue to swallow stuff, including entire galaxies, and blast out energy but the superduper-sized ludicrously-humongous supermassive black holes of the Quasar type are found only at the edge of the universe, which is to say, during the beginning. You know what? I have enough trouble figuring out how a lightbulb works. Cosmology gives me a headache. All I can say is, when God thinks big, he thinks really, really big! Quite the showman, actually.

Giant Wings Seen Flapping in Space – They call it the “Bat Shadow.” Hubble telescope snapped a series of pictures showing the shadow of an accreting planetary disk against the background dust of a star-forming region. The disc is evidently warped, and as it rotates the shadow it casts changes in a repetitive fashion, giving the impression of batwings flapping up and down. But we know better, don't we? It's obviously Rodan getting ready to leave his roost. Seems to have grown much bigger than the last time he visited. Hopefully the Earth is now too small to merit his attention.

First Helicopter on Mars – When the Perseverance Mars Rover lands on Mars on February 18th next year the Ingenuity Helicopter will be strapped to its belly. During the first couple of months spent trundling about Perseverance will, among other tasks, be looking for a suitable airfield, namely a flat, obstruction-free zone about 33 feet in diameter. Round about day 60 Perseverance will halt in the middle of said field and lower Ingenuity 5 inches to the ground, then back off a safe distance. As soon as everything checks out, Ingenuity will begin 30 days of test hops and flights.

Ingenuity's fuselage is only about the size of a soft ball, but its rotors, once unfolded, are four feet across. The entire machine weighs only 4 pounds. It's strictly a proof-of-concept experiment. If it works, it will pave the way for drones exploring the surface of Mars from low altitude. Be handy for seeding microbes I should think, if and when it is ever decided to terraform the planet. And how long before drone races are a thing? Say, deep inside a canyon, or around the crater edge of Mons Olympus? Hmm, organized Martian drone races could help fund a Mars program. Good idea?

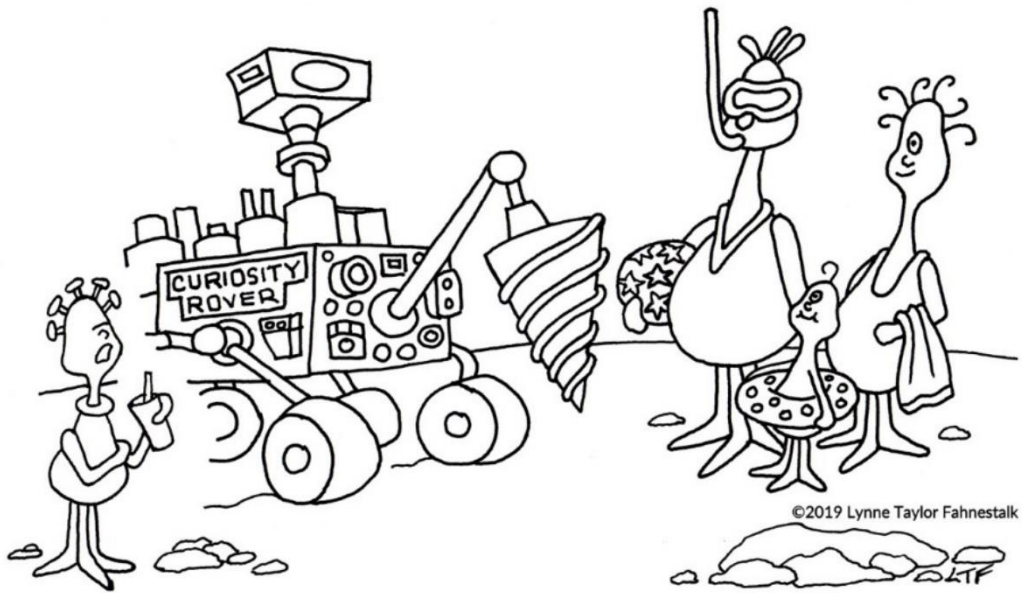
Russian Space Tourism Ramps Up – Russia's Energia Corporation has signed a deal with the American Company Space Adventures to bring two space tourists to the ISS in 2023. They will fly aboard a Soyuz spacecraft launched by Ruscocosmos, the Russian Space Agency. Each tourist will have the opportunity to conduct an eva spacewalk outside the ISS in company with a Russian Cosmonaut. This is new. No tourist has ever done a spacewalk before.

Lest the idea strike you as ridiculous or far-fetched, bear in mind Energia and Space Adventures have worked together in the past, bringing a total of 8 tourists to the ISS between 2001 and 2009. The first was Dennis Tito, who paid \$20 million USD to visit the ISS for 8 hours. The last was Cirque de Soleil founder Guy Laliberte.

And Space Adventures has also signed a Deal with SpaceX to launch 4 tourists aboard the Dragon space capsule into deep orbit 2 or 3 times higher than the ISS. Could happen as early as 2021. Ticket price? “It won't be cheap.”

ART PORTFOLIO: LYNNE TAYLOR FAHNESTALK

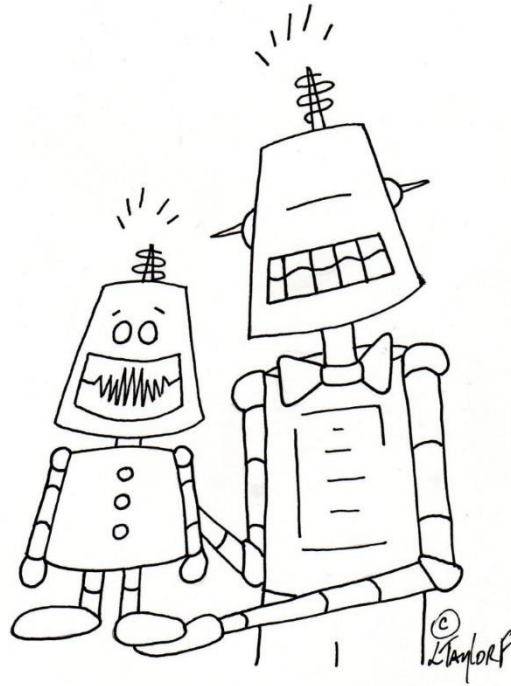




"They think you're here to dig the new pool."



Robot Ventriloquist

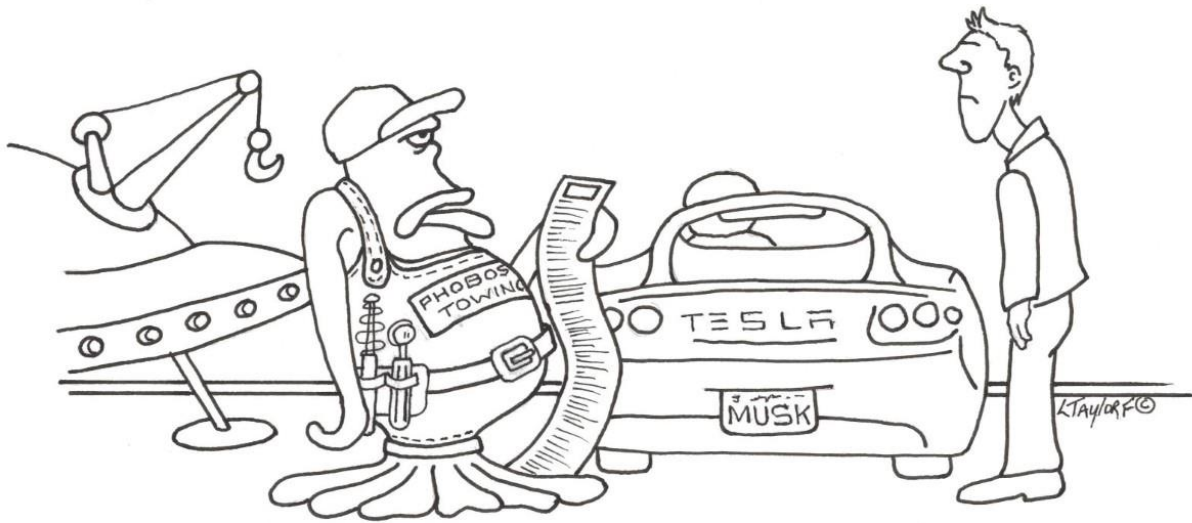


"... and the bartender said, "So that's why they call it 01010011010101!"









*Found this in an illegal orbit around Phobos.
Your fines and towing come to....*





Lynne Taylor Fahnestalk Biography

Lynne spent most of her childhood drawing dinosaurs and purple bunnies. Since then she has served as Art Director for three national magazines, started her own printing company, created a comic strip for cows, produced a science fiction colouring book and *The Really Silly Cartoon Book*, and illustrated a book about fish. She has also discussed composting toilets with Frank Herbert and penmanship with Harlan Ellison.

Lynne is an illustrator, cartoonist, and sculptor. She is a two time recipient of the Canadian Prix Aurora Award for Artistic Achievement and her work has appeared in numerous publications including *Amazing Stories Magazine*, *On Spec Magazine*, *Polar Borealis Magazine*, *Auroran Lights Magazine*, *Fantasy and Science Fiction Magazine*, *Marion Zimmer Bradley's Fantasy Magazine*, and *Science Fiction Review*.

Lynne also creates one-of-a-kind robot sculptures from upcycled metal objects which have been described as 3-D cartoons and she likes that comparison. The question she is asked most often about her Bots is, "Do they move?" and her answer is "Not when I've been looking."

Lynne lives in Vancouver, British Columbia, with her wonderful husband and a house full of amazing things.

See: <http://www.facebook.com/rivetofrobots>

Note: All of the cartoon illos and the pictures of robots above have appeared in *On Spec magazine* and are listed as the basis for her current Aurora Awards nomination. If you like what you see, by all means bear that in mind when you vote in the Best Artist Category! See below for the complete list.

LITERARY SHENANIGANS

Aurora Award Voting is ongoing and lasts till July 25th. Meanwhile, go to the CSFFA Aurora site, join up, and download all the books and stories, poems, magazines, etc. that are up for awards and start reading now! Then vote!

Go to:

< [Aurora Awards](#) >

2020 Aurora Award Ballot

This ballot is for works done in 2019 by Canadians. The Aurora Awards are nominated by members of the Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy Association. The top five nominated works were selected. Additional works were included where there was a tie for fifth place. The awards ceremony was to be held online in conjunction with *When Words Collide* (Calgary) on August 14th but, now that that

writers festival has been cancelled, the award winners will be announced online instead, probably on the same date.

Yes, I am repeating the list of nominees I published last issue because I want you to be reminded of all the excellent and creative people you, as Canadian fen, are entitled to vote for. This is your opportunity to thank all the wonderful people who stirred your sense of wonder with their imaginative creations in 2019.

Best Novel

Haunting The Haunted - by E. C. Bell, Tyche Books

The Gossamer Mage - by Julie E. Czerneda, DAW Books

A Brightness Long Ago - by Guy Gavriel Kay, Viking Canada

The Quantum Garden - by Derek Künsken, Solaris Books

Jade War - by Fonda Lee, Orbit Books

Gods of Jade and Shadow - by Silvia Moreno-Garcia, Del Rey

Best Young Adult Novel

Wolf's Bane - by Kelley Armstrong, K.L.A. Fricke Inc

The Brilliant Dark: The Realms of Ancient, Book 3 - by S.M. Beiko, ECW Press 17

The Ehrich Weisz Chronicles: Metamorphosis - by Marty Chan, Fitzhenry & Whiteside

Bursts of Fire - by Susan Forest, Laksa Media Groups Inc

Murder at the World's Fair - by MJ Lyons, Renaissance

Best Short Fiction

This Is How You Lose the Time War – by Amal El-Mohtar and Max Gladstone, Saga Press

Clear as Quartz, Sharp as Flint – by Maria Haskins, Augur Magazine, issue 2.1

Alice Payne Rides – by Kate Heartfield, Tor.com Publishing

Little Inn on the Jianghu – by Y.M. Pang, The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction, September

Modigliani Paints the World – by Hayden Trenholm, Neo-Opsis, Issue #30

Blindside – by Liz Westbrook-Trenholm, Amazing Stories, v. 77, issue no. 1, Fall

Best Graphic Novel

The Handmaid's Tale: The Graphic Novel – by Margaret Atwood and Renee Nault, McClelland & Stewart

Krampus is My Boyfriend! – by S.M. Beiko,

Webcomic It Never Rains – by Kari Maaren,

Webcomic Carpe Fin: A Haida Manga – by Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas, Douglas & McIntyre

Dakwākāda Warriors – by Cole Pauls, Conundrum Press

Best Poem/Song

The Girl who Loved Birds – by Clara Blackwood, Amazing Stories Magazine, v. 76,

No. 3, Spring

At the Edge of Space and Time – by Swati Chavda, Love at the Speed of Light, Ancient Hound Books

Steampunk Christmas – by David Clink, Star*Line, v. 42, no. 4., Fall

The Day the Animals Turned to Sand – by Tyler Hagemann, Amazing Stories Magazine, v. 76, issue no. 3, Spring

Totemic Ants – by Francine P. Lewis, Amazing Stories Magazine, v. 77, issue no. 1,

Fall Beauty, Sleeping – by Lynne Sargent, Augur Magazine, issue 2.2

Bursts of Fire – by Sora, theme song for book trailers

Best Related Work

PodCastle – by Jen R. Albert and Cherae Clark, Escape Artists Inc.

Nothing Without Us – by Cait Gordon and Talia C. Johnson, Renaissance

Neo-opsis Science Fiction Magazine – published & edited by Karl Johanson

Lackington's Magazine – published & edited by Ranylt Richildis, (online)

Dave Duncan's Legacy – by Robert Runté, On Spec Magazine issue 111

Augur Magazine, Issue 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 – published & edited by Kerrie Seljak-Byrne

On Spec Magazine – Diane L. Walton, Managing Editor, The Copper Pig Writers Society

Best Visual Presentation

The Umbrella Academy – Steve Blackman, Dark Horse Entertainment

V Wars (Season 1) – William Laurin and Glenn Davis, High Park Entertainment

Killjoys (Season 5) – Michelle Lovretta and Adam Barken, Temple Street Productions

Murdoch Mysteries (Ep. 10-18/Season 12 and Ep. 1-9/Season 13) – Peter Mitchell and Christina Jennings, Shaftesbury Films 18

Van Helsing (Season 4) – Jonathan Lloyd Walker, Nomadic Pictures

Best Artist

Samantha M. Beiko – cover for *Bursts of Fire*

James F. Beveridge – cover for *Fata Morgana* and cover for *On Spec* #112

Lynne Taylor Fahnestalk – *A Rivet of Robots* in *On Spec Magazine* and *Cartoons* in *Amazing Stories Magazine*.

Nathan Fréchette – covers for Renaissance Press

Dan O'Driscoll – covers for Bundoran Press and cover for *On Spec Magazine* #110

Best Fan Writing and Publications

R. Graeme Cameron – weekly columns in *Amazing Stories* (online) Magazine

R. Graeme Cameron – *Polar Borealis Magazine*, Issues #9 to #12, publisher & editor

Jennifer Desmarais – *Travelling TARDIS*, JenEric Designs

Steve Fahnestalk – weekly columns in *Amazing Stories* (online) Magazine

Ron S. Friedman – *Will Voyager 1 leave the Milky Way?*, Quora

Christina Vasilevski – *Books and Tea*

Best Fan Organizational

KT Bryski and Jen R. Albert – ephemera reading series, Toronto

Brent Jans – Pure Speculation Science Fiction and Fantasy Festival, Edmonton

Derek Künsken and Marie Bilodeau – co-chairs, Can-Con, Ottawa

Randy McCharles – chair, When Words Collide, Calgary

Sandra Wickham – Creative Ink Festival, Burnaby, BC

Best Fan Related Work

Brandon Crilly and Evan May – Broadcasts from the Wasteland

Kari Maaren – Music on YouTube Channel

Derek Newman-Stille – Speculating Canada

Joshua Pantalleresco – Just Josting, podcast

Edward Willett – The Worldshapers, podcast

2020 Sunburst Awards Long List Announced

Adult Fiction:

- *André Alexis*, [Days by Moonlight](#) [Coach House Books]
- *L.X. Beckett*, [Gamechanger](#) [Tor Books]
- *Lisa de Nikolits*, [The Occult Persuasion and the Anarchist's Solution](#) [Inanna Publications]
- *Seyward Goodhand*, [Even That Wildest Hope](#) [Invisible Publishing]
- *Christian Guay-Poliquin*, translated by David Homel, [The Weight of Snow](#) [Talonbooks]
- *Scott R. Jones*, [Shout Kill Revel Repeat](#) [Trepidatio Publishing]
- *Helen Marshall*, [The Migration](#) [Random House Canada]
- *Karen McBride*, [Crow Winter](#) [HarperAvenue]
- *Silvia Moreno-Garcia*, [Gods of Jade and Shadow](#) [Del Rey]
- *Johanna Skibsrud*, [Island](#) [Hamish Hamilton]
- *Richard Van Camp*, [Moccasin Square Gardens](#) [Douglas & McIntyre]
- *Jo Walton*, [Lent](#) [Tor Books]

Young Adult Fiction:

- *Nafiza Azad*, [The Candle and the Flame](#) [Scholastic Inc.]
- *Sara Cassidy*, [Nevers](#) [Orca Book Publishers]
- *E. L. Chen*, [Summerwood/ Winterwood](#) [ChiZine Publications]
- *Rivka Galchen*, [Rat Rule 79](#) [Yonder]
- *Aviaq Johnston*, [Those Who Dwell Below](#) [Inhabit Media]
- *Jess Keating*, [Nikki Tesla and the Ferret-Proof Death Ray](#) [Scholastic Inc.]
- *Katherine Magyarody*, [The Changeling of Fenlen Forest](#) [Great Plains Publications]

- Cara Martin, [Shantallow](#) [DCB]
- Allison Mills, [The Ghost Collector](#) [Annick Press]
- Shane Peacock, [The Dark Missions of Edgar Brim: Demon](#) [Penguin Teen]
- Edward Willett, [Master of the World](#) [Daw]

Short Story:

- Leslie Brown, "Cleaning House in Ithaca" [[Tesseract Twenty-Two Alchemy and Artifacts](#), July 2019]
- K.T. Bryski, "[When the White Bird Sings](#)" [[Augur Magazine](#), Issue 2.2]
- Rebecca Campbell, "The Fourth Trimester is the Strangest" [[The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction](#), May/June 2019]
- Laura DeHaan, "[Roots and Shoots](#)" [[Augur Magazine](#), Issue 2.1]
- Amal El-Mohtar, "Florilegia" [[The Mythic Dream](#), Gallery/Saga Press]
- Chadwick Ginther, "Cheating the Devil at Solitaire" [[On Spec: The Canadian Magazine of the Fantastic](#), Issue 112, Dec 2019]
- Catherine George, "[Katabasis](#)" [[Augur Magazine](#), Issue 2.3]
- Maria Haskins, "[The Brightest Lights of Heaven](#)" [[Fireside Magazine](#), Issue 69, July 2019]
- Brent Hayward, "Lake of Dreams" [[Broken Sun, Broken Moon](#), ChiZine Publications]
- Kate Heartfield, "The Inland Beacon" [[Tesseract Twenty-Two Alchemy and Artifacts](#), July 2019]
- Thomas Anguti Johnston, "Revenge" [[Taaqtumi: An Anthology of Arctic Horror Stories](#), Inhabit Media]
- Catherine Kim, "[The Hundred Gardens](#)" [[Nat. Brut](#), Issue 12, Spring 2019]
- Catherine MacLeod, "The Stone Alphabet" [[Earth: Giants, Golems, and Gargoyles](#), Tyche Books]
- Richard Van Camp, "Wheetago War II: Summoners" [[Moccasin Square Gardens](#), Douglas & McIntyre]
- A.C. Wise, "[How the Trick is Done](#)" [[Uncanny Magazine](#), Issue 29, July/August 2019]

The Sunburst official Short list will be announced in July. Sunburst winners will be announced in September.

[Jurors for the 2020 Award](#) are: Peter Darbyshire, Kristyn Dunnion, Omar El Akkad, Michelle Butler Hallett, John Jantunen, Michael Johnstone, Ursula Pflug, and Sarah Tolmie.

[The Sunburst Award for Excellence in Canadian Literature of the Fantastic](#) is an annual award celebrating the best in Canadian fantastika published during the previous calendar year. Winners receive a medallion that incorporates the Sunburst

logo. Winners of both the Adult and Young Adult Sunburst Award also receive a cash prize of \$1,000, while winners of the Short Story Award receive a cash prize of \$500.

The Sunburst Award takes its name from the debut novel of the late [Phyllis Gotlieb](#), one of the first published authors of contemporary Canadian Speculative Fiction. Past winners of the Sunburst Award include Andromeda Romano-Lax, Rachel Hartman, Senaa Ahmad, David Demchuk, Cherie Dimaline, Cory Doctorow, Charles De Lint, Nalo Hopkinson and Thomas King.

For additional information about the Sunburst Award, the nominees, juries, as well as previous awards, eligibility, and the selection process, please visit the official website of the [Sunburst Award](#).

BOOKS TO BURDEN YOUR MIND

TO CONQUER CHAOS by John Brunner

(Previously published in Space Cadet #12, December 2008)

This is, perhaps, the third Sci-Fi pocket book I purchased for my very own library in 1964 (I was determined to buildup a shelf of at least 30 – in fact by 1970 I owned at least 300). An Ace publication, at 40 cents a bit steep for the day, but how could I resist such a striking cover? Futuristic ruins! Spear-chucking grey-uniformed men fleeing in terror! Gigantic alien monstrosity consisting of nothing but tentacles! What could be more perfect? My kind of novel!

By this time John Brunner had published at least 13 other novels with Ace, novels with titles like SLAVERS OF SPACE, THE SUPER BARBARIANS and THE ASTRONAUTS MUST NOT LAND! These are generally considered to be mere pot-boilers, but are in fact a lot of fun, quite genuinely entertaining. TO CONQUER CHAOS in particular left me with sense-of-wonder archetype imagery that has shaped my taste (?) in science fiction literature.

The front page blurb alone sent chills up my spine:

The things were always different and always terrifying. Some were big and vicious, some were middle-sized and vicious, and a few were even small and vicious, and there were never two alike.

They didn't belong on this Earth, not as far as anybody could tell. They were strictly horrors hatched somewhere out in the unmapped, taboo regions of the frightening Barrenland, and they came roaring out of it one by one to rend and tear and kill. It had always been that way, ever since the rebirth of civilization after the world-wide conflagration.

But now they stood in the way of further progress, and the time had come to find out what they were and stop them if it could be done. The story of the effort TO CONQUER CHAOS is an unforgettable novel of future times and forgotten worlds.

Like most such blurbs, this one is not entirely accurate. Sometimes the small monsters come in swarms of identical critters, but true enough each individual outbreak is always a new species. And it was a plague, not a ‘conflagration’, that brought down civilization. Small matter, it was the combination of the cover and the blurb that instantly convinced me to buy this book.

Brunner switches viewpoint between 3 central characters throughout the book, the better to reveal what is actually going on.

The first character is Jervis Yanderman, a kind of Master Sergeant in the service of Grand Duke Paul of Esberg, who has launched an unprecedentedly huge army of 2,000 men to reach the Barrenland and explore it. Seems the Grand Duke is a man of progress, quite enlightened for the era, all thanks to Granny Jassy, a foolish old woman who frequently has visions of things she doesn’t understand, but by careful questioning when she’s in a trance state the Duke has been able to devise plans for the construction of handguns and gas searchlights, and even the location of buried cities filled with rusting artifacts. This has made the Grand Duke a power to be reckoned with in a world of few towns and mostly small villages.

Even so, Jervis has his doubts:

Ever since they set out on the greatest expedition of all, to see whether the legendary Barrenland was real, Granny Jassy had been able to tell them of the terrain ahead, not as it was today, but as it might have been in the weird but consistent world of the old tales, when men lived in the gigantic cities of which the ruins had been discovered, when they flew through the air and even—No, that was imagination, surely! To fly in the air was vaguely conceivable; birds and insects did it. But to fly beyond the air, to other worlds, was ridiculous. And even that absurdity paled beside the ultimate: the story of walking to other worlds than this.

Even as a kid, when I first read the above I knew instantly that there was something in the Barrenland, some kind of transporter station, which allowed creatures from other worlds to “walk” (or slither!) to Earth. How cool is that? Obviously the wreckage on the cover depicted said station.

The second character, and probably the one the target audience is supposed to identify with, is Conrad, an awkward teenager living in a mental-scape of day-dreaming fantasy (more accurate than that of Granny Jassy) and consequently shunned by everyone in the town of Lagwich:

A prosperous town of many hundred inhabitants and a guard of sixty strong men ... have a strong palisade and a deep ditch with a bridge, and we live safe enough from any danger.

Every night the bully Waygan (always picking on Conrad) blows his magnificent thing horn (taken from a monster that slew six men before Waygan’s father killed it) to signal the closing of the palisade gate. It seems that the monsters come out of the Barrenland mostly at night.

However, the occasional daytime manifestation puts Conrad at risk, since his “profession” is making soap in vats out of sight of the town, where he daydreams to his heart’s content, but keeps his bow and quiver of arrows close at hand:

Consequently, when the red and black waving thing came in sight at the bend of the path which curved round the Barrenland he jumped to his feet in fright ... dived for the bow and arrow he kept propped against a handy rock, fitted an arrow clumsily to the string, and only then looked to see what had appeared.

The waving thing turns out to be a banner born by an advance scouting party led by Jervis Yanderman. Proudly, Conrad volunteers to lead Jervis and his men to the Elders of Lagwich, only to be thrust aside by Waygan at the town gate because he is not worthy. He goes home to his alcoholic father and further abuse. A very sad lad, is Conrad.

The third major character, and this is a very Heinleinian touch, is Nestamay, granddaughter of the stationkeeper, and far more intelligent and resourceful than the few boys available (the others would involve inbreeding) among the small staff of the not-quite-derelict station in the centre of the Barrenland. We meet her heading off for her nightly watch within the station, only to be held up by the lustful young cretin Jasper. Then the creature alarm sounds:

Once it would have been possible to head straight into the Station and reach the room—Grandfather always called it the “watch office”—where someone always waited during the night for the automatic alarm to indicate the arrival of a thing. Long ago, however, the direct passageways had become choked with vegetation, and some of them had caved in, while some of the others held poisonous thorns and grasping plant-tentacles. Nestamay had to use a roundabout route, up twisted stairways and along rickety catwalks, to arrive at her destination.

Aha! It isn’t only animals that come through, but spores and seeds which germinate and infest the vast crumbling dome of the Station with all manner of alien plants, some of which are very dangerous indeed. Still, most of the instruments in the “watch office” continue to function, and Nestamay is able to monitor the movement of the latest thing and activate the “electrofence” to drive it into the desert. But she feels no triumph:

Was there never to be an end to this existence? Would they never find the last hole through which things leaked from wherever they originated?

Grand Duke Paul is no fool. He immediately billets the bulk of his army in the village, demanding of the villagers merely a plentiful supply of food, beer, and women. The troops are happy. The villagers sport wide, forced grins. But there’s a fly in the ointment. Literally.

Seems a luckless scout is badly wounded by a *thing*. Worse, green “mold” spreads from his wound and consumes him. The body is burned, but alas, too late. A “fat, buzzing fly” had alighted on the open wound, then visited Grand Duke Paul’s head in passing (what has Paul been using for pomade?).

“Sir! There’s a patch of green among your hair!”

“Tell no one.”

The Grand Duke speeds things up a little, recalling his men from the village to the base camp, intending to lead them into the Barrenland while there is yet time to accrue glory. Instead he accrues ever increasing patches of mold.

They tried, at last, the desperate expedient of cauterization, burning away the skin with hot irons while the Duke sat in his chair, impassive except that his knuckles showed very white on his clenched fists. It was while the cauterization was actually proceeding that they discovered the mold on the whites of his eyes

The Duke dies. Jervis Yanderman tries to talk the army into carrying out the Grand Duke's last wish, to invade the Barrenland and destroy whatever it is that spawns things.

The troops ponder their choices. Barrenland? Or Village? Murdering, rampaging things? Or food, comfy flea-ridden beds, lots of beer, and hordes of almost-willing women? Oddly enough, they choose the latter, slaying the officers, burning their camp, and marching off to the "town" of Lagwich.

Even more oddly, the Lagwichians have had enough of drunken soldiers, and close the palisade gate. The grand army of Grand Duke Paul (recently deceased, now resembling 50 day old bread) settles down for a siege—which might take a while, as they lack siege equipment, or any kind of equipment, having burned their camp. Not thinking ahead much, the morons.

Conrad is taken aback, having planned to join the army, what with having been ridiculed out of town so to speak. Fortunately he finds Jervis alive and well, inadvertently reveals he sees visions of the past just like Granny Jassy, and gets volunteered to "guide" Jervis into the Barrenland. Within they discover such wonderful desert critters as:

As long as twenty men, the thing lay among boulders in the slanting afternoon sunlight. It had no discernible head or limbs – only a vast massing of bulbous bladders of many hues and all sizes from that of a man's head to that of a horse's belly. Between the bladders trailed ragged white membranes, dry and curling at the edges as if the sun was too much for them to withstand Now it heaved and bumped itself and tried to move onwards, and the source of the incredible noise was suddenly clear. A sharp boulder struck one of the distended bladders, ripped it, and the gas within came gushing out to the accompaniment of another deafening hoot, leaving behind more of the drying whitish membrane.

Growing more and more excited at the obvious tourism potential of the Barrenland, Jervis and Conrad press on. Meanwhile, back at the Station, lusty cretin Jasper has turned off the thing alarm to spite everyone for not allowing him to breed with Nestamay. The result?

It was the most monstrous to be spawned by the incomprehensible forces of the Station in living memory. Fully twenty feet tall, it was recognizable as animal only because it moved and roared; that apart, it was a confused tangle of long grasping tentacles set so thickly on its body it was impossible to see its underlying shape.

The station crew manages, with some losses, to drive the thing into the desert. Then, just as they begin finger-pointing and assigning blame, something unusual happens.

There were two explosions in the distance.

A pause.

Two more.

They whirled to stare in the direction from which the noise had come, the direction taken by the injured thing. They were just in time to see it stumble, if such a polypodal beast could stumble, on the lower slopes of the East Brokes. It halted, swayed, began to topple.

Two more explosions, and it fell writhing, and from beyond it, from among the random rocks, a figure rose into sight. And another. Nestamay felt the world begin to spin around her.

Two strangers. Two strangers! Two new human beings!

And what's left unsaid, two new men! Fresh input into the gene pool. No wonder Nestamay is excited.

Actually, the math is a bit more complicated, plus one not-quite man:

... she was pointing into the darkness of the dome. Something moved there, another monster? No, a human shape. A human shape beginning to scream as it emerged into the open ... his head and shoulders were completely covered with a glistening black jelly-like mass, at which his hands clawed hopelessly while his voice grew weak with shrieking

Jasper is lustful no more. Oh well, serves him right for shutting off the alarm. Seems he stumbled into one of the alien plant things which decided he'd make a splendid spore-spreading mechanism. I hate when that happens.

Brunner has only a few chapters left to crowd with exposition revealing—through discussion of Conrad's visions—that the Station is run by an electronic 'cortex' or quasi-organic nature, itself infected by the mind-deranging plague of 450 years earlier, and when fully charged by the solar panels it allows in whatever things have blundered into Stations elsewhere, but once drained of power through use of the electrofences it sinks into a subconscious state, a sane sub-conscious state, and being, by happenchance, a natural telepath, attempts to warn people by means of mental images what they need to worry about. A cry for help, in other words. Well, sure, that makes sense.

Anyway, turns out all Conrad needs to do is fight his way through the jungle rot inside the dome to throw a switch to reduce power, and everything will be OK. So he does.

Turns out the Station operates better on reduced power than it does on full power:

"Earth! Earth! We got through! We reached Earth again!"

And not one man only, but another, and another, and another pouring from the concealment of the alien plants, to stand in a shouting group and laugh and cry and

wave at the laughing, crying, waving Conrad and his companions on the platform above.

After four and a half centuries he, Conrad, had unwittingly opened the way, and the isolated children of Earth had found it possible to return.

Where, unless they had brought food with them, they promptly starved to death due to swamping the limited food production facilities of the Station, or wandered off into the desert to die of thirst and heat prostration, or made it out of the desert to be slaughtered by the villagers on the periphery as thing-devils in human form, as happened to Nestamay's father years earlier, his dried skin displayed as a banner in Lagwich. Apart from all those possibilities, a happy ending. Especially since Conrad probably got laid, finally.

At the time, TO CONQUER CHAOS had a huge impact on me. Not just by stirring my sense of wonder with visions of incredible monsters, but through conjuring up a painful yet nostalgic vision of civilization in decay, technologies lost, petty yet hopeful new beginnings, man struggling to arise again. Ultimately, a hopeful vision.

Now, over half a century later, I've read enough history and "witnessed" enough history to be far more cynical. I know man will always rise again, but rise or fall, pinnacle of achievement or blackest dark age, we are always ensnared in the age-old game of greed and power, and in a sense, it really doesn't matter what level of civilization we're at, we remain the same, always. This is a bad thing. But it can also be a good thing. Or at any rate, interesting, if you're lucky enough to enjoy the status of an objective observer not directly in the path of the latest threat.

I like revisiting the "sense-of-wonder" books and films of my childhood. Even though many deal with end-of-the-world scenarios, they strike me as more innocent and hopeful than what is currently going on in the world. But then, I'm a thoroughly twentieth century kind of guy. This twenty-first century is turning out worse than the last one, in my opinion. I hope I live long enough to be proven wrong.

MAGAZINES DRENCHED IN MAPLE SYRUP (Canadian Zines Worth Reading)

Speculative North Magazine #1

I reviewed this brand new Canadian SF Fiction zine for Amazing Stories on June 25th, 2020. Below is a sample of my review, covering just one of the stories.

It's Always Ice Time in the D.H.L. – by Greg Chamberlain

Premise:

All the hockey players in Heaven are distraught over the cancellation of the Stanley Cup season because of Covid 19. Likewise the hockey players in Hell. Leave it

to the Devil to suggest the two groups form their own league and play hockey the way it was meant to be played.

Review:

Think of all the old time greats who have departed the mortal coil. Imagine the dream teams assembled from their ranks. Location is no problem. Things have gotten so bad on Earth Hell has frozen over. The D.H.L. (Divine Hockey League? Damned Hockey League? Take your pick.) plays every game in Hell. Lord Stanley himself drops the first puck. The two Mary's keep score. And so on.

This is great fun, especially for Canadian hockey fans. In fact, it's quite wonderful. Practically a patriotic duty to read this story. Gregg is noted for his humorous tales but I think this may well be the best one he's ever written. I wouldn't be surprised if it is frequently anthologised in the years to come. A classic, classic Canadian fantasy. I don't even care for hockey all that much and yet I really love this story. It pushes all the right buttons for a hockey fan. To anyone who knows anything at all about the history of hockey this is a treat, a pleasure to read. I'm blown away. I really enjoyed this one.

See the full review here < [Speculative North review](#) >

Check out issue#1 here < [Speculative North issue 1](#) >

RANDOM MUSINGS

Virtual Unreality

By Robert J. Sawyer

I just sent this note to the organizers of yet-another science-fiction convention that's decided to be a virtual, instead of physical, event this year:

"While I understand the desire to not miss a year, my fear is that people might decide they *prefer* virtual conventions—no airline tickets, no hotel rooms, no overpriced hotel restaurants, none of the usual fear of physical misconduct by others. I'm all about playing the long game in everything I do, and I'm not sure that having convention after convention go virtual will actually be good in the long run for the traditional con scene. So, with admiration for your initiative and thanks for your invitation, I nonetheless am going to politely decline."

The cons that will *have* to survive as physical are the pop-culture and media ones for which the selling point is getting to buy celebrity photo ops: comic-cons, *Trek* cons, and so on, since the stars won't show up if there's no mechanism for them to make money. But I'd hate to see the traditional in-person literary con—a major part of my life for forty-five years now—fall by the wayside.

Forty-five years? Yup. I'll save you the math: that means I've been going since I was 15. Nobody gave me money to go, nor did I feel entitled to go. When the World Science Fiction Convention with my then-hero Isaac Asimov was in Toronto when I was 13, I didn't go because I couldn't afford it, and wasn't about to ask my parents for the money.

Instead, I saved and saved and finally made it to my first Worldcon seven years later, in Boston, driving down with my friend Ted Bleaney, and sharing a room with four other people, and it was one of the best trips of my life (and, as anyone who knows me knows I've been many fabulous places all over the globe).

Conventions are—literally, that's what the word means—people coming together. Not everyone gets to go to every con everywhere; hell, I'm reasonably well-to-do and I can write it off, but I still had chosen not to go to the New Zealand Worldcon this year because it would have cost more than I was willing to spend, a decision I made way before they decided to make it virtual.

Egalitarian access to education? You bet. Healthcare, clean water, opportunity, safety? Yup. Turning photo safaris in Kenya or trips to Las Vegas or dining in a fine restaurant or going to a Broadway show into plopping your ass down in front of a computer so that everyone can watch an ersatz version on their monitor instead? No, thank you. Virtual events might compliment the real thing in some circumstances, but they shouldn't be touted as an improvement over the real thing in most cases.

(And, not that it's anyone's business but mine and the recipients, but every year I buy convention memberships for Toronto's Ad Astra and other conventions—including from time to time even pricey attending WorldCon and World Fantasy Convention memberships—that I give away to people who couldn't otherwise afford to attend. If I have privilege, at least I use it as much as I can to help those who don't.)

I'm not saying there should *not* be virtual conferences—but they are a separate beast. For instance, I fully support what *Amazing Stories* magazine did with their AmazingCon. They didn't pretend to be this year's iteration of the long-established AmazingCon, as there is no such thing; rather, they created a virtual event from the ground up. I've got no problem with that. If someone wants to put on a virtual conference this year, great: call it MyVirtualCon 1—don't hijack the MyPhysicalCon brand and pretend you're putting on MyPhysicalCon 37.

And keep the price way down, would you? Without getting into SFWA politics, I did think, for instance, the SFWA Nebula Conference at US\$150 was way overpriced for a virtual event. It's like the university students who are (quite rightly in my view) complaining that their schools are charging them the same tuition for virtual classes, with no access to a physical library, or athletic facilities, or the hundreds of other things their tuition traditionally buys them in addition to some old fart droning on at the front of a room

What's happening now, though, with established cons is like being in the vinyl record business in 2017, 2018, and 2019, then saying, hey, this year only we're going to sell downloadable music, then hoping your customers will go back to buying vinyl in 2021. Good luck with that.

I can name many cons off the top of my head that if they lost 10% of their usual physical attendees would no longer be viable: they wouldn't sell enough room-nights to make the hotel's required room-block to provide the convention with function space for free or at a drastically reduced cost. Tempting people to not bother returning to physical cons is a mistake in my view.

Let's hope that a year from now, we're all back on the *physical* convention circuit, assuming such cons ever recover from the folly of these current online knockoffs.

Robert J. Sawyer's 24th novel *The Oppenheimer Alternative* is out now.

Check it out at < [Oppenheimer-Alternative](#) >

Read Mike Glycer's interview with Robert about his new novel

at < [File 770 The Oppenheimer Alternative](#) >

THOUGHTS ON SCIENCE AND MORALITY

(Originally posed as an online blog 29th September, 2010)

By Michael Bertrand

Just watched an interesting talk over at that powerhouse of intellectual awesomeness, TED, that I thought I would share with my readers because it is about two of my favorite subjects, science, and morality.

The speaker is Sam Harris, and his thesis, in a nutshell, is that science can answer ethical questions.

I agree, mostly, with his thesis, though I think he argues it somewhat elliptically, and I believe there to be exceptions to how applicable science can be towards morality. But these limits are not spiritual, religious, mystical, or poetic, they are philosophical and logical, and have to do with the underlying assumptions upon which all systems of ethics are based.

Science (logic, analysis, research) can give us useful and meaningful answers to moral questions *only* if we all agree on certain basic assumptions. The prime assumption of all ethics is that it matters what happens to people. There is no logical basis for this assumption. There is no cosmic rationale to prefer people living to people dying, to judge that thousands thriving is better than millions starving, that a hug is any different than a dagger to the eye. We judge these things the way we do because we are human beings and hence are concerned about what happens to human beings not just because we are, ourselves, human beings, but because, as

human beings, we are highly social animals with a very strong instinct called “compassion” that leads us to be concerned with what happens to other humans.

But strictly speaking, logic contains no reason to prefer a parade over a massacre. Logic and science can only derive factual answers, and Sam Harris touches on this in his talk, but then muddies the issue by getting onto an abstruse and unhelpful tangent about whether values are a form of fact.

My answer would be: yes they are, *but only if you make certain basic assumptions.*

Now, that said, I am pretty sure you could get nearly universal agreement on these assumptions. Most people base their ethics on some form of idea of what is best for people, what brings about the most happiness, what is wise and good for people to do.

But without recognizing the basic truth that science might well tell you what will lead to the most “human flourishing,” as Sam Harris rather awkwardly but charmingly puts it, but science cannot tell you why you should care about it in the first place, we will be stuck in these endless discussions about morality and science, with no agreement on the meanings of the terms and therefore no real chance to come to any sort of tenable consensus, or even a patch of common ground. People will be stuck jousting in the mist.

His other point seems to be about the limits of moral relativism, and that is certainly a timely subject. We are just now reaching the point in the evolution of humanity where we are ready to consider the rise of moral and cultural relativism in the last few centuries in a new light.

Relativism, in humans, tends to arise from our need to get along with one another. “Live and let live” is the basic motto of human cohabitation. I live my life as I please, you live life as you please, and we mind our own business and therefore can live together in the same society.

But clearly, this ideal is far from absolute. We consider it someone’s business whether they smoke or not, but not whether they savagely beat their children or not. As societies, as nations, we have formed consensus around a wide range of things which are simply not acceptable, from murder and rape to fraud and theft to how fast you can drive your car and where you can park it, and these laws do not brook disagreement. We do not consider it a matter of personal opinion whether it is wrong to steal someone’s car. We quite rightly consider that question closed, not open for debate or interpretation.

And as a species, we have taken this approach all the way up to the levels of our nation-states. Most countries have national laws with which nobody argues, a federal level of law enforcement, and an understanding, often unspoken, of what things are definitely wrong and should be punished.

But that is as far as we have taken this moral evolution, and it is in this new millennium that we are starting to truly wonder if that is enough.

As the barriers between nations crumble due to the communications revolution, global consciousness increases, and we begin to ask that all important question: Why

should one person live a short, brutal, painful, terrified life and another live a long, safe, rich, rewarding life simply because of where they were lucky enough to be born?

In this, we are simply extending the very conception of civilization to the global scale. Historically, human beings have formed larger and larger units, from wandering extended families to tribes to clans to settlements, villages, towns, cities, city-states, nations, empires, and so on.

And in each of these increases in scale, there came both the need for greater mutual tolerance (I worship B'aal, my neighbour worships Sol, so what?) and the need for a consensus on what is right and wrong regardless of individual moral beliefs.

So the rise of civilization has always been accompanied by both a rise in metropolitanism, in the form of tolerance of many differences, and the rise of the rule of law, which established and enforced rules concerning the limits of that tolerance.

And now we are beginning to wonder about the limits of that tolerance on a global scale. Surely there are things we consider unacceptable period, regardless of our notions of sovereignty or cultural relativism? After all, we expect the police to intervene to stop or punish certain acts regardless of our usual societal rule to live and let live. We do not shrug and say "If my neighbours choose to kill their children, who am I to say any different? They clearly just have a different set of ethics than I do."

No. We accept as basic that certain actions are absolutely unacceptable and not open to arguments. But on a global scale, there are no real police, courts, or jails. Nations have laws but as a globe, between nations, it is anarchy.

When we are so aware, as a species, of what is happening in the world around us, when the era of national secrecy is ending and we can no longer pretend not to know what is happening in our neighbour's house, we have to start wondering whether we have to simply accept that whatever happens there, no matter how horrible, is none of our business.

Of course, if we decide that it just might be our business, then we have to ask ourselves if it is possible for us to intervene. In modern society, we have the police, who are legally allowed to intervene and who are armed and trained for such intervention. They are, generally, more powerful than the citizenry, which is necessary in order for them to be able to enforce the law.

But how do you do that on a global scale? How do you have a police force when the citizens are nations? How do you even form a single legal state in the first place?

These are brutally tough questions. And the answers are not going to come overnight. We will be a long time sorting out the answers to these questions.

But we will figure it out, because we have already taken that all important first step: we have begun asking the right questions.

[In light of how the world has developed in the last ten years I am tempted to say the human race has stopped asking the right questions and become very creative in providing the wrong answers. However, the liberal in me hopes Michael will be proven correct in the long run – editorial comment by The Graeme.]

MESSED-UP MOVIE MOPES

FOUR FILMS BASED ON H.P. LOVECRAFT'S "THE COLOUR OUT OF SPACE"

In the story the narrator is a surveyor exploring a wild valley west of Arkham in New England which is doomed to be flooded once a new dam is complete. He comes across the blasted heath and evidence of past weirdness. He learns that events took place within living memory and finds the old codger Ammi willing to tell the tale. Turns out a meteorite with strange properties fell on the farm of Nahum Gardner. Somehow everything around it began to slowly change. First the plants, then the insects, animals, and finally people, to horrific effect. Ammi brings in the authorities who find nothing but death. They witness the meteorite and its power erupt back into the void from whence it came. The nightmare is over, or is it? On learning Ammi's theory that it was the water from the farm's well, next to where the meteorite fell, that poisoned the landscape, the narrator vows never to drink the water from the new reservoir, or for that matter, to visit New England again.

***Die! Monster Die!* (1965) – Characters:**

Nahum Whitley – Boris Karloff

Letitia Whitley – Freda Jackson

Susan Whitley – Suzan Farmer

Stephen Reinhart – Nick Adams.

Merwyn – Terence De Marney

Dr. Henderson – Patrick Magee

I saw this film on its first release in 1965. Believe I was fourteen at the time. Always remembered it with great fondness; I assume because of Karloff's performance. Recently I watched it again. Poor Nick Adams. He must have leaped at the chance to go to England and be the hero of an adaptation of H.P. Lovecraft's *Colour Out of Space*. His chance to really shine as the *Star* of a major Motion picture. Alas, he was sabotaged by scriptwriter Jerry Sohl. I'll explain.

Opens with a beautiful shot of an archaic Steam train pulling into Arkham, Cornwall, U.K. Steve leans out the window in his carriage door, glances about, stares down at the handle as if seeing a door handle for the first time, opens the door from the outside, jumps onto the empty platform with a single piece of luggage.

In the yard beside the station, a taxi driver. Dialogue goes like this:

Driver – *“Taxi?”*

Steve – *“That’s right.”*

Driver – *“American?”*

Steve – *“How’d you figure out?”*

Driver – *“It be your clothes. Don’t fit properly.”*

This is rather odd. Nick is wearing shiny black shoes, pressed grey trousers with a sharp crease, shirt and tie, business jacket, topped with a clean white raincoat. Looks rather natty, not ratty. Taxi Driver is a dishevelled mess. Appears he doesn’t like Americans.

Once Steve admits *“I’m going to the Whitley Place”* the driver says *“You’re not,”* hands the luggage back, and drives off. Steve looks a bit puzzled. He walks through the village, a very English sort of village consisting of brick houses with sloping slate roofs, plus plaster and beam homes with thatched roofs, both types with ivy-covered walls. Seems a pleasant place.

He walks up to a tweedy grocer and a pepper pot lady examining the food displayed outside the store, grabs an apple, takes a bite, and asks for directions to the Whitley house. The grocer grabs the apple out of his hand and flees indoors. The woman walks away.

Steamed, Steve follows her, sees her speak to three old gits outside a pub. He approaches them.

Steve – *“Hello, Any place around here I can rent an automobile?”*

First Git – *“Bicycle, maybe. Where you going?”*

Steve – *“Whitley Place.”*

First Git – *“You’re wasting your time.”*

Steve – *“How’d you figure that?”*

Second Git – *“He wants to go to the Whitley place.”*

Steve – *“Anything wrong with that?”*

Third Git – *“He wants to know if there is anything wrong.”*

Steve – *“Well, is there?”*

The conversation goes nowhere. By now all three Gits are laughing. Nick angrily laughs back at them, then walks away, looking peeved.

Steve approaches a chap standing in front of his bicycle rental shop.

Steve – *“I’d like to rent a bicycle for a few days.”*

Rental Bloke – *“Where would you be riding it?”*

Steve – *“I’d pay for it in advance.”*

Rental Bloke – *“I asked where you’d be going.”*

Steve – *“To the Whitley place. I’d need a bicycle to do that, wouldn’t I?”*

Rental Bloke – *“Yes.”*

Steve – *“Yes?”*

Rental Bloke – *“And more than that, you’ll not be using one of mine.”*

Steve gets very angry.

Steve – *“Why? You’ve got lots of bikes and I don’t see anyone waiting in line!”*

Rental Bloke – *“I’ve nothing for rent.”*

Steve – *“What will it cost me to get to the Whitley place?”*

Rental Bloke – *“More than anything you have to offer.”*

Steve – *“Why? What’s the matter with everybody in this town?”*

Rental Bloke – *“Nothing’s the matter ... here.”*

Steve – *“What’s that supposed to mean?”*

Rental Bloke – *“The only way you can get to the Whitley house from here is on your own two feet.”*

We learn three things from these opening scenes: the scriptwriter believes in repetitive padding to get the point across, Nick Adam’s lines of dialogue are mostly reactive and don’t advance the plot, and Nick plays Steve as a smoldering, resentful chap liable to burst out passionately and idiotically when his impatience explodes but, other than that, a dull cypher. Not much range. But then, consider the lines he’s stuck with.

For a couple of minutes we are treated to scenes of Steve striding manfully along country lanes. Typical English countryside, one assumes. Then he steps into a matte painting displaying a “blasted heath,” dead, blackened trees, and a large crater grey and empty. Not particularly realistic, but visually impressive. Steve picks off a branch and it crumbles to ash in his fingers. The viewer knows the weird scene is the product of an explosion, an impact, a meteor strike! What else could it be? Yet this comes as a revelation to Boris Karloff much later in the film. Mad scientists aren’t usually so dense.

Steve comes to an iron-gated fence with friendly signs like “Trespassers will be prosecuted,” finds a gap in the fence, nearly steps on to a bear trap lying on the surface in the gap, triggers it with his luggage, and hops on through. Not a man to heed warnings.

Approaching the Whitley place Steve catches brief glimpses of a woman dressed in mourning, her face covered in black veil, and given to uttering weird cries like a wounded animal. He stares at her with an expression indicating he’s thinking “Huh. Don’t see that every day,” and walks on past slime encrusted fountains and whatnot. Did I mention the fog? There’s a lot of fog.

The Whitley place is a large two-story mansion covered in ivy and maybe some mold. Door’s unlocked. Nobody answers his knock, so Steve pushes it open and enters a hallway. I was immediately reminded of Hammer productions. Assorted bric-a-brac everywhere, like grandfather clocks, candelabras, stuffed animal heads, portrait paintings, tapestries, and all in lavish colour which creates a rich visual texture. Must be hell to keep clean, but obviously very old money is occupying this mansion, a clear demonstration of status and power.

Steve glances for a couple of seconds into a sitting room where a fireplace is lit with a merry fire, then glances down to his right into the baleful eyes of a glowering Mr. Whitley sitting in a wheelchair right up against Steve’s knee. We learn two things. That Karloff’s character has an atomic-powered wheelchair that can move noiselessly about 100 miles and hour and that it can stop suddenly without ejecting Mr. Whitley against the far end of the hall, or so it seems.

One would expect the conversation to go something like this:

Whitley – *“I’m Nahum Whitley. Who are you and why are you here?”*

Steve – *“I’m Stephen Reinhart. Your wife invited me here to visit your daughter Susan.”*

Whitley – *“Damn. My wife Letitia never tells me anything. I hate that.”*

Short, simple, sets up the situation quickly, but no, Jerry the scriptwriter is having none of that. The conversation goes like this:

Steve – *“How yah do? I knocked but there was no answer so I took the liberty of entering.”*

Whitley – *“The signs clearly say to keep out. You must have seen them.”*

Steve – *“Yes, I saw them.”*

Whitley – *“Then by what right have you entered this house?”*

Steve – *“I’ve come to visit the Whitleys.”*

Whitley – *“Oh? I’m Nahum Whitley.”*

Steve – *“Well, actually, sir, it’s Susan I came to visit.”*

Whitley – *“My daughter is not receiving visitors. I must ask you to leave.”*

Steve – *“This the way you treat all your guests?”*

Whitley – *“Guests? Guests are invited! I don’t remember inviting you!”*

Steve – *“I have been invited ... by Mrs. Whitley.”*

Whitley – *“You are Stephen Reinhart?”*

Steve – *“Yeah, that’s right.”*

Whitley – *“Yes, my daughter did mention your name. She met you in university when she was in university in America.”*

Steve – *“That’s right. Susan and I were in the same science class.”*

Whitley – *“I’m afraid it would disturb Mrs. Whitley to see you. Again I must ask you to leave.”*

Steve – *“But it isn’t Mrs. Whitley I’ve come to see.”*

Whitley – *“Quite impossible.”*

Finding this a bit tedious are you? You’re in for a treat. Much worse is in store. To be fair, Karloff is having a heck of a good time milking every line so it is actually somewhat entertaining, but Nick is stuck in reactive mode and a mood of annoyance with no prospect of resolution. The conversation is mostly padding and as such typical of the majority of screen time. Not that that is necessarily a bad thing, if the conversation was interesting and advancing the plot, but that’s not what Jerry has in mind. The “guests” line in particular reminds me of Ed Wood Jr.’s style of scriptwriting as in the famous line from *Plan Nine from Outer Space*, *“Inspector clay is dead ... murdered ... and somebody’s responsible!”* True enough as far as it goes, but what an odd way of putting it.

AND NOW THE DISAPPOINTING BIT:

I had planned to describe the entire film in as much detail as above. But it’s July 2nd already and I don’t have time enough left to do that.

I’ll just say that this film is tremendously nostalgic for me. I quite enjoy the familiarity of the extensively padded dialogue. The scene where Mrs. Nahum is

spending endless amounts of time explaining nothing to Steve is priceless. Mainly because his dialogue is so purely reactive that he is reduced to interacting with his chair to lend drama to the situation.

The entire script is devoted to withholding information well-known to just about every character and blindingly obvious to all the rest of them if they'd only stop to think. I mean, Nahum has got the meteorite glowing and moaning in a well in his basement and has no idea it came down from the sky. Furthermore, the satanic paintings on the walls surrounding the well are just superstitious nonsense in his view. Seems his dad first found the stone and attributed supernatural powers to it, setting up a sort of cult before succumbing to madness. This is why Nahum's wife keeps berating him for fooling with black magic. To Nahum, his father was merely eccentric. True, his eyes gleam when he hefts the chains that his father used to hold demons, but only because he wants to use them to keep Steve from entering the greenhouse, and if they're strong enough to keep demons captive then surely they are strong enough to repel Steve.

Yes, Nahum is a mad scientist, but not a malignant one. His goal is to use the influence of the stone to grow larger than usual veggies in order to feed the world and end hunger forever. He seems a tad overfocused on his mission, ignoring the mutant monsters his experiment has produced, not to mention the horrible mutative diseases afflicting his wife and servants. That he, himself, might be in for a spot of ill health doesn't seem to occur to him. He needs to get out more, broaden his situational-awareness.

Nick Adams has a heck of a time as Steve, constantly creeping about trying to make sense of what's going on, when the answer is "not much." The result is he spends a good half the time aggressively creeping forward, arms dangling in a wrestler stance, apparently on the verge of momentous discoveries, except that when he gingerly opens a door to another room it generally tends to just lead to another room. Which is great, if you want to admire another set of prop furniture. Occasionally he finds a recently dissolved servant or an annoyed Karloff, but most of the time ... nothing.

Still, the scene where Nahum hears Steve rattling the lock to the greenhouse, and Steve races back to the mansion as fast as he can, as if the devil himself was after him, to hop into bed fully clothed and pretend he's been asleep all this time, is a lot of fun. It's a very odd "chase" indeed, what with Karloff slowly trundling along in his wheelchair in a feeble attempt to catch up. Steve could have sauntered back to his room and still beat Nahum by an hour or so. I think the director threw it in to convey a sense of action and drama to make up for the somnambulant nature of most of the rest of the film.

Actually, Suzan Farmer as Susan Whitley has the most difficult role. Steve isn't quite sure what's wrong, but he figures Susan is better off somewhere else, so frequently attempts to convince her to leave with him. The majority of her dialogue consists of saying "No" in various ways. Her only reason? She can't leave her father. She just can't. Servants die. Her mother tries to kill Steve. Her father tries to kill

Steve. She and Steve discover a nifty bunch of caged monsters. But she can't leave. That would be rude.

At least Nick Adams is faced with the challenge of looking alert and wary. Her job is to make denial and stupidity seem credible. Not much to work with.

So why do I like the film? Why do I recommend you watch it? The dungeon room with the high-pitched singing meteorite and satanic paintings is very cool. The monster mutants in the greenhouse, though briefly glimpsed, are tremendously nifty. Patrick Magee as a drunken Doctor who does nothing to advance the plot is a hoot. Terence De Marney as the servant Merwyn literally trying to hold himself together long enough to serve his Master and guests one last meal is a great Michael Ripper bit of scene stealing. But best of all is Karloff, utilizing every bit of acting talent and skill his eyebrows possess. It's Karloff having fun. He makes the film entertaining.

It is almost as amusing to watch Nick Adams in action, struggling to do his best with a script designed to weaken his on-screen presence. It's a valiant struggle, one in which he employs a detail-focused method-acting style to keep your attention, but really it's a lost cause. The script, and the directing, don't allow him any range, apart from a few petulant outbursts. As I mentioned before, the opportunity to do this film must have struck him as a wonderful chance to advance his career, but I think the resulting movie had the opposite effect, in effect stalling his career.

To put it another way, Karloff had all the best lines, and he took full advantage of them. In comparison, Nick Adam's character was written for a piece of cardboard purely decorative and reactive in nature. Poor Nick. He deserved better. Still, he tried. It's morbidly fascinating to watch him try.

In some ways this is a very odd interpretation of the story. I see no need for the subplot of exploiting the stone to grow terrific veggies. It would have made more sense for Nahum to attempt to carry on his father's cult, but even that seems a bit of an extravagance. I would have thought his focus as a scientist would have been on finding a cure for the "disease," if only for the sake of his wife. But he seems not to care. He's out to save the world, not his family.

Any yet, and yet, the gist of the original story is preserved, an exercise in horrific family decay brought about by a weird meteorite. Cursed with a script that is much less than it should have been, there is nevertheless a suitably creepy atmosphere, some occasionally effective action, a couple of really Lovecraftian scenes, and a tour de force performance by Karloff. Without him the film would be rather dull for the most part. With him, *Die! Monster, Die!* is well worth watching. Overall I quite like it.

Die Farbe (The Colour) (2010) – The remarkable thing about this German film is that it is the most faithful to the original story. Incident by incident the story is transferred to film. Only the framing device is different. Jonathan Davis, a recent graduate from Miskatonic University in Arkham, travels to an obscure farming community in Germany. Seems his father, a World War II veteran who, as an American army medic, had passed through the area shortly after the Germans surrendered, had gone back for reasons unknown to Jonathan, and mysteriously

disappeared. Jonathan follows after in search of him.

Turns out much of the valley is soon to be flooded because of a new dam. The local village is on high enough elevation not to be threatened. It's inhabitants claim never to have seen Jonathan's father. All except for one who recalls meeting him when he first visited. Cut to flashbacks where we see the man, still in German army uniform, returning home from the war only to see Jonathan's father, along with two other G.I.'s, inspecting his farm as potential housing for refugees. Jonathan's father forces the demobbed German soldier to take them to the abandoned farm further down the valley. At this point the story cuts back and forth between the villager and his reminiscences of what happened there before the war.

The framing device does two things: it builds suspense and sets the story at a point in German history which every German knows but prefers not to discuss, the trauma of the immediate post-war period, which brings the movie "home" to the German audience, makes it relevant and meaningful, and adds to the growing sense of dread. This probably passes right over the heads of North Americans and strikes them just as arbitrary as the switch to an English location in *Die! Monster, Die!* but is actually rather powerful and effective in its appeal to the German audience. Quite clever in fact.

Equally clever, in my opinion, is the fact the film is in black and white. It lends a "legitimate" documentary feel to the flashbacks and, oddly enough, helps stress the "unearthly" nature of the colour associated with the meteorite. This is because the direct manifestation of the colour, entity, or power, whatever it is, stands in stark contrast to everything else in the black and white scenes since the manifestation itself is colorized in various shades of pink and purple. This is quite striking. It works extremely well in its impact on the viewer. A triumph of technique.

Also, this is the subtlest and most nuanced of the four films. The growing madness of the afflicted farm family is treated realistically to the point of being clinical. Shock effects are brief and more suggestive than revelatory. Atmosphere and anticipatory horror are stressed over and above actual violence and gore to a remarkable degree, at least by modern standards. A wonderful throwback to an earlier era of filmmaking. The 1932 film *Vampyr* is first to spring to my mind when seeking a comparison. It's that atmospheric and evocative.

Many may reject this film because it is slow in establishing the mood of everything not-quite-right and seems focused on that task rather than thrusting slam bang action and thrills in the viewer's face at the frenetic pace so much in demand today. Too bad. This film not only replicates the events of Lovecraft's story, but his storytelling technique as well. Of the four films I believe this is the one Lovecraft would like best and would fully approve of. In general he despised the films of his day for their cheap, manipulative, emotional shortcuts, evidently viewing them as carnny sideshow attractions at best, and certainly not a decent art form like gothic horror literature. This film, which tells his story as he told it, would have pleased him. I'm certain of that.

At any rate, this film, of the four, is the best literal interpretation of Lovecraft's

story. Subtle and sophisticated, it's a gem. As a Lovecraft fan, I'm genuinely satisfied and happy with the care the filmmakers put into this project. I like it a lot.

Granted, Jonathan is a non-entity with not much to do other than listen. But that's okay, so is the narrator in the original story. It's the story that counts, not the characters. *The Colour Out of Space* be in essence a campfire tale, after all.

The Color Out of Space (2019) –

I really wanted to enjoy this movie starring Nicolas Cage, and I did, sort of. I'm somewhat conflicted. It's very American.

For example: Being the elderly gentleman he was all his life, even as a teenager, of course Lovecraft used the British spelling for "Colour" in the title. But this is an American film for an American audience, so of course the "correct" spelling is used.

For another, where the German film was subtle this version hits the viewer in the face with a sledgehammer, constantly. I am reminded of Orwell's famous line in his novel 1984 "Imagine a jackboot stamping on a human face forever." That's the kind of impact this film offers.

To be fair, it starts well, beginning with the black Hydrologist "Narrator" quoting the opening paragraph of the story. The introduction to the family is slow at first, giving us time to sense their frustration of living the "dream" of their eccentric father. I mean, who raises Alpacas for meat? A point plainly stated by the daughter. No subtly here. Still, there are quiet moments of dawning horror, such as the young boy Jack's attempts to communicate with his "friend" in the well.

And the story follows the same sequence, with unusual plants appearing, then an insect, next the cat, dog, and Alpacas, and eventually, the family. But what a difference in approach compared with the German film. In the former the first time the madness of the farmer's wife is revealed her behaviour is distracted and something of a slow-motion dance. Not till a closeup do we realize there is an unusually large wasp sitting atop her head, which promptly flies away as a neighbour approaches. Thus the change in the local lifeforms is subtly tied in with her increasing madness. Whereas in the American film a rather pretty but mutant flying Mantis crawls out of the well in front of a transfixed Jack, then buzzes off. Not so much subtle as a meaningless throwaway. Checking off a symptom of the meteorite's growing transformational abilities, but that's all.

Ultimately the American film jumps into high gear. This means a lot of screaming amid the gore. Very noisy where *Die Farbe* was quiet. Two scenes in particular annoyed me, involving special effects straight out of John Carpenters 1982 film *The Thing*. It wasn't the excess that bothered me, so much as the fact it was so derivative. And needless to say, the camera lingers lovingly on these horrors, which are merely suggested and left up to the viewer's imagination in the German film.

One critic suggested that Nicholas Cage channels Donald Trump throughout the movie. Certainly he is in a constant state of denial, forever insisting that everything is not only going to be okay, but actually *is* okay, despite abundant gory evidence to the

contrary. And rather than admit he's wrong, he throws abusive tantrums instead of trying to cope with events. So, yeah, very Trump-like. This renders his character unsympathetic, and somewhat unbelievable. Cage's performance may be off-putting to many, ruining the credibility of the plot.

On the other hand, the key to understanding his performance is to realize good old dad is already insane to begin with. Seems he had a hate/hate relationship with his deceased father. Now that he's inherited the property, he's determined to make a success of it as a farm to prove he's no-where near as stupid as his father believed. The fact that his wife is infinitely more successful as a financial advisor to her clients than he has been at anything he has ever attempted, and that she is slowly dying of cancer, is a conflicted source of immense stress for him. His solution right from the get go is to stress family; if everybody pulls together, life will be perfect and happy happy joy joy forever. Trouble is, his wife and kids hate the farm almost as much as he does. He's developed a monomaniacal obsession with making his farm work that transcends his love for family or anything else. In my opinion he's gone totally bonkers and is on the verge of an explosively berserker mental breakdown even before the film begins. The arrival of the meteorite is merely the final straw.

Certainly an interesting interpretation on the part of the filmmakers. Makes it more "relevant" to contemporary American audiences in that it mirrors the insanity and madness of what passes for normal nowadays. So, although I was repelled by Nicholas Cage's character and performance, it may well be that most viewers will thoroughly identify with his massive frustration and empathise with what he's going through and failing to cope with because it matches their own frustrations and pent-up anger. For all I know the average viewer may relate to his performance along the lines of "Hey! This film is about me!" Horrifying, if true.

I suspect future critics will consider this film redolent of its era. Nothing less than a societal artifact which to watch is to understand the fears and concerns of the contemporary audience. Maybe.

I also suspect that on seeing this film a second time I will have a more charitable view of it, now that I understand Cage's character in hindsight, and will receive a more holistic impression than the disjointed series of set-pieces I first took it to be. Especially since, the more I think about it, the more I realize how much of the original story is intact, if transformed, in this film version.

To young people who may not have read the original story or seen *The Thing*, this may well appear a stunning and powerful film playing on their worst fear, namely what good old dad is really like beneath the surface. It's going to stick in their memory. Further, to anyone who fears change, what else is *The Color Out of Space* but a metaphor for a changing world over which you have no control?

For these reasons I believe this film, no matter it's current reception, is destined to become a cult classic. It's all about family, after all. A real nightmare.

Annihilation (2018) – Many people will deny this is a version of Lovecraft's story. It's based on the *Southern Reach* trilogy of novels by Jeff Vandermeer, a Weird

Fantasy author who has won many awards. Evidently he cites numerous inspirations for these novels, but not Lovecraft's story. I'm told the three novels are very complex, quite philosophical, and incredibly sophisticated, such that some people complain everything has been dumbed down to make this movie. To which I say, so what?

Reduced to basics, the plot concerns a meteorite that comes down, a meteorite with weird properties that alters everything around it, including plants, insects, animals, people, and reality itself. That's the core of it. I don't care if Vandemeer claims otherwise. As far as his trilogy goes, he may be correct. But if you look at the movie by itself, it's a big budget version of the essence of *The Colour Out of Space*. Period.

Interestingly, some people complain the film doesn't make any sense. Probably the same people who were confused by Kubrick's 1968 film *2001, A Space Odyssey*. Not me. I saw it first run and understood it perfectly. Likewise *Annihilation*. When you are as steeped from an early age in science fiction tropes, memes and themes as I was (and am), grasping the meaning is child's play. Or to put it another way, bloody obvious. I find it amusing that some people are still arguing over the "true meaning" of *2001*. I would comment they're too literal-minded and too focused on details. Sends them wiggling out in all sorts of unnecessary intellectual directions. All they have to do is pay attention to the plot as it unfolds.

2001, A Space Odyssey in a nut shell: Aliens advance ape evolution to produce an intelligent species. A device left by the aliens on the Moon is triggered when the "super-apes" arrive having achieved a certain level of technology which, however, threatens their own existence. Device on the Moon leads humans to a Stargate which draws a sample human across the Universe to where he can be transformed into the next stage of human evolution and arrive back at earth just in the nick of time to prevent the human race from destroying itself. Good old benevolent aliens. Thoughtful and caring of them. Nice to have such friends.

Point is this rather standard, traditional science fiction plot was absolutely clear and self-evident to me as a teenager back in 1968. Granted, it was fluffed up with eye-candy and assorted metaphysical distractions as a form of misdirection by Kubrick, but Clarke's intent and plot is rock solid beneath the artistic puffery. Together they made a great and wonderful film, but in reality a rather simple, easy to understand one. B-movie material transformed by talent and money.

Annihilation is similar. I "get" it. The ending makes perfect sense to me. But I'm not going to spoil it. Want everyone to approach it fresh, because I view it as a masterpiece of science fiction filmmaking.

If you want to understand it don't make the mistake of paying too much attention to details. At one point one of the characters has an epiphany and proclaims that *the Shimmer*, i.e. *the Colour Out of Space*, is like a prism; it not only refracts light and radio waves, but DNA as well, which explains the constant mutating going on. You'll go nuts trying to figure out how this could possibly work. Pointless, because it doesn't matter. All that it is important to know and recognise is that the influence of the *colour* unleashed from the meteorite is growing and spreading. The prism

explanation is simply one character's attempt to conceptually grasp the process of change evident around her. It doesn't explain *why* things are as they are, it just confirms *what* is responsible. It represents a single *fact* which she can anchor herself to in the midst of the reality-kaleidoscope she is dealing with.

Another science fiction aspect is the nature of *the colour* itself. Is it an alien? A self-aware entity following a master plan? A conscious being near god-like in its power? Nope. The film makes it clear *the colour* is a process, a natural force like a chemical reaction. Immensely complex and fractal in its capabilities, to be sure, near infinite in its potential variety, but no more planned or designed than a rock or a tree. It is what it is, because that's the way it be. Just like the growth of crystals. Well organized, but inanimate.

To understand the film, it's also important to largely ignore all the scenes outside *the Shimmer* and just concentrate on the expedition within *the Shimmer*. Follow the logic revealed by their progress and you shall achieve comprehension, I guarantee it.

Visually the film is stunning. The mutants are in turns beautiful or monstrous. Some scenes reminded me of J.G. Ballard's *The Crystal World*. There is some graphic violence, but appropriate rather than arbitrary. This is not a slasher flic. Granted, in the latter sort of horror film it becomes a game for the audience to guess how the next victim will die. Indeed, in this film each character meets a unique fate, but as an expression of the random nature of the process unfolding around them. What happens to them reveals and explains more about *the Shimmer*. Each death serves a purpose. Not so much to advance the plot as to advance the viewer's understanding.

There have been previous expeditions into *the Shimmer*. The movie deals with the latest effort which happens to be an all-woman team of thoroughly competent scientists some of whom are military veterans. What a relief to watch a "monster" movie with not a single scene of a woman fleeing in high heels. Sure, they make mistakes, operate on false assumptions, experience dread and sometimes panic, but these are not the proverbial "helpless females." They are trained, experienced, situation analysts constantly adjusting and coping with fast-changing circumstances as best they can. The interplay with each other and the riotous environment is fascinating. Clichés are thrown out the window. These characters are real.

Truth to tell it is necessary that the characters are real in order to contrast and emphasize the dream-like and sometimes nightmarish reality of *the Shimmer*. This is why the film works so well. It's a wonderful film.

As I said, I consider it a masterpiece of science fiction film making. I like it best of the four, even though it is the least literal interpretation of the original story. It isn't fantasy at all, but pure science fiction, at least in my opinion.

How would I rate the four films, starting with the best, and taking entertainment value into consideration? In the following order:

- 1) – Annihilation.
- 2) – Die Farbe.

- 3) – Die, Monster Die.
- 4) – The Color out of Space.

No accounting for taste, I guess.

FILMS TO SEE BEFORE YOU DIE: A CHECKLIST FOR OBSESSIVE COMPLETISTS

There are hundreds and hundreds of genre films these days. Impossible to keep track. But what about the history of such? Finite numbers for any given period: some well-known, others obscure. There are many worth seeing, good, bad, and indifferent, yet all vital to a comprehensive understanding of how the genre evolved and developed. Some may be impossible to track down, others are shown frequently on TV, many can be ordered. Accessibility varies from year to year. Still, worth a try.

The idea is to check off the ones you have already seen, then devote the rest of your life to sourcing, watching, and checking off the remainder of the lists. After all, not as if you have anything else to do. Right?

PART ONE: GENRE FILMS 1895 TO 1906.

1895:

- *The Mechanical Butcher* – Live-pig-into-sausage machine.

1896:

- *The Haunted Castle* – A bat turns into Mephistopheles.

1897:

- *The Clown and the Automaton* – Clown vs. mechanical man.
- *The End of All Things* – Machine converts dogs & cats into sausages.
- *A Novice at X-Rays* – Skeleton walks out of X-Ray screen.
- *The Sausage Machine* – Machine converts dogs into hot dogs.
- *A Twentieth Century Surgeon* – Head transplants.
- *The X-Ray Fiend* – Courting couple shown as skeletons.

1898:

- *The Man in the Moon* – Moon Fairy visits dreaming Astronomer.

1899:

- *A Midnight Episode* – Giant bugs attack sleeping man.
- *The Philosopher's Stone* – Alchemist turns base metal into beautiful woman.
- *The X-Ray Mirror* – Girl sees self in mirror in ballet outfit, faints.

1900:

- *Coppelia, The Animated Doll* – Life-size doll of dancing girl.
- *A Jersey Skeeter* – Giant mosquito carries off farmer.

1901:

- *The Elixir of Life* – Old man transformed into young man.
- *The Flying Machine* – Cigar-shaped flying bicycle over Paris.
- *Fun in a Butcher Shop* – Small boy hands over puppy to turn into hot dogs.
- *The Marvellous Hair Restorer* – Bald man grows hair on head and tabletop.
- *An Over-Incubated Baby* – Baby incubator produces old man.

1902:

- *Happy Hooligan and his Airship* – Balloon-borne flying bicycle over New York.
- *A Trip to the Moon* – Astronomic Club expedition explores the Moon.

1903:

- *The Unclean World* – Man regrets turning microscope on his cheese sandwich.
- *A Wonderful Hair Restorer* – Barber grows hair on bald man and own hands.

1904:

- *An Adventurous Automobile Trip* – Impossible crossing of the Alps.
- *Whirling the Worlds* – A train travels through space to the Sun.

1905:

- *The Electric Hotel* – Press buttons to get mechanically shaved.
- *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* – Nautilus vs giant squid.

1906:

- *Around a Star* – Giant soap bubble carries astronomer to distant planet.
- *The Doll Maker's Daughter* – She pretends to be the doll her father made.
- *His Wonderful Airship* – Motorized balloon takes explorer into space.
- *How to Make Time Fly* – Girl speeds up clock which speeds up life.
- *The Modern Pirates* – Mysterious armoured car terrorizes countryside.
- *The Pill Maker's Mistake* – Too much energy for them as takes the pill.
- *The "?" Motorist* – Flying car flees police to the rings of Saturn.
- *Rescued in Mid-Air* – Wing-flapping airship rescues girl from steeple.

Sources:

Science Fiction: The Complete Film Sourcebook – Edited by Phil Hardy, 1984.

The Encyclopedia of Horror Movies – Edited by Phil Hardy, 1986.

An Illustrated History of the Horror Film – Carlos Clarens, 1967.

The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction – Edited by John Clute & Peter Nicholls, 1993

Science Fiction in the Cinema – by John Baxter, 1970.

THE LIGHT-HEARTED VITUPERATOR AND JOLLY REVILER:

A Hundred Years of Ray Harryhausen

By Stan G. Hyde

June 29th of this year was the 100th anniversary of the birth of Ray (Frederick) Harryhausen—who passed away in 2013 at the age of 93 on May 7th, 2013.

In the annals of world film, he occupies a pretty unusual place.

According to Wikipedia (that well-known and completely trustworthy (?) source) filmmakers who feel they were inspired by him include Steven Spielberg, Peter Jackson, Joe Dante, Tim Burton, Nick Park, James Cameron, Guillermo del Toro, J.J. Abrams, and Wes Anderson—and many more.

Harryhausen's work is regarded almost as a Director or Artists' oeuvre might be regarded. It is not often the case that someone other than a Director is seen as a film Auteur (that is the author of the work—as in “auteur theory” originally described by Andre Bazin and later defined by American critic Andrew Sarris—the person wielding the camera like a pen and creating unique and personal works.)

How unusual that a special effects artist should be, in fact, the artist of note in the creation of a series of films.

(This didn't even always occur to the people working on the films. There is the story of one Director who wanted to get rid of the troublesome special effects guy, only to be told by the production staff that he was there to follow the directions from the special effects guy.)

There have been a few others who approached this status; Willis H. O'Brien who did the stop-motion in *The Lost World* (1925) and *King Kong* (1933) probably would be remembered this way if more of the many ideas he conceived for the screen actually had made it through development hell.

George Pal was regarded as the driving force behind his films, but he had given up special effects and animation (the ‘Puppetoons’) early on to become a Producer, and in his era—before the advent of auteur theory—the producer was regarded as the generative force behind ideas if not really an “auteur.”

Finally, stop-motion animator Karel Zeman whose love of Jules Verne and prehistoric beasts, drives many of his gorgeous animated films, but Zeman actually was the Director of those films so he falls much more solidly in the auteur circle as defined by Sarris et al.

No, Ray Harryhausen probably stands alone as a Auteur Special Effects Director—primarily a stop motion animator—and as the genius behind his film.

And it is of him I sing.

It helps, as it does with many authors and filmmakers, if you discover Harryhausen when you're young. Sometime in 1963 I was dropped off at the Park theatre in Winnipeg to see a double-bill of Disney's *The Sword in the Stone* and Harryhausen's *Jason and the Argonauts*. When the metal giant Talos strode the beaches of the Isle of Bronze, and an army of skeletons conjured from the teeth of a seven headed Hydra threatened Jason, (‘the children of the Hydra's teeth’) the Disney movie was effectively blown out of the water.

Harryhausen's whole oeuvre is short enough that I can list it here (I'm leaving out *Mighty Joe Young*, on which he worked with mentor Willis O'Brien, and his short fairy

tale films—which were frequently shown in elementary schools at one time for the edification of the students and to provide a well needed respite for the busy teacher.)

THE BEAST FROM 20,000 FATHOMS 1953
IT CAME FROM BENEATH THE SEA 1955
EARTH VS THE FLYING SAUCERS 1956
20 MILLION MILES TO EARTH 1957
THE 7TH VOYAGE OF SINBAD 1958
THE 3 WORLDS OF GULLIVER 1960
MYSTERIOUS ISLAND 1961
JASON AND THE ARGONAUTS 1963
FIRST MEN IN THE MOON 1964
ONE MILLION YEARS B.C. 1966
THE VALLEY OF GWANGI 1969
THE GOLDEN VOYAGE OF SINBAD 1973
SINBAD AND THE EYE OF THE TIGER 1977
CLASH OF THE TITANS 1981

Essentially those fourteen films from the 50's and 60's, along with work by George Pal working in the same period, pretty much laid the groundwork for science fiction and fantasy films in which complex visuals were attempted. They, along with Eiji Tsuburaya in Japan, attempted complex visuals with practical—sometimes called analog—effects that would prove an inspiration for the digital sfx world—particularly from *Jurassic Park* (1993) and onwards.

I recommend the Wikipedia entry on Ray if you're unfamiliar with Harryhausen's work, but I won't reproduce much more of it here since you can simply read it if you wish.

I do think that Ray's work was a major influence on George Lucas (there's a bronze statue of Ray with one of his trademark animated skeletons on his hand) in the Lucasfilm's office, and the idea of not cheating the visuals and actually showing you what was going on—which was so effective in *Star Wars* (1977)—was an influence on generations of special effects artists who were inspired by the stop-motion work.

The first 4 movies in the Harryhausen oeuvre are pretty much the kind of SF genre movies made during the 1950s but with *The 7th Voyage of Sinbad* in 1958 things changed. A sleeper hit that year, the work was in colour and was the first to hearken back to legendary stories, based in what Harryhausen always considered a more romantic time. Though there were a few dinosaur epics and science fiction films to come—they were all placed in earlier times and not the modern world, from *One Million Years B.C.*, to the Victorian conquest of the moon in *First Men in the Moon*, to cowboys roping dinosaurs in *The Valley of Gwangi*, and the continuation of Captain Nemo's story in *The Mysterious Island*.

I think it's this period, from *The 7th Voyage of Sinbad* in 1958 to *One Million Years B.C.* in 1966 that feature the best work. Ironically, I think this is because those films all had strong directors who worked with Harryhausen but nevertheless also worked with actors and knew their way around setting up a shot and mise-en-scene.

Starting with *The Valley of Gwangi* in 1969, the films feature a lot of moments that we've seen before (the Ymir fought an elephant in 1957's *20 Million Miles to Earth*, so why not have an allosaurus fight an elephant in *The Valley of Gwangi*?).

The films of the 1970s had smaller budgets, but they were also not as groundbreaking, repeating a formula of set-pieces in each film. Even Harryhausen's last film, *Clash of the Titans*, that featured a big-budget and actors like Laurence Olivier and Maggie Smith (her husband wrote the script) seems oddly episodic with the film stumbling from one effect sequence to the next.

But as they say, "the golden age of science fiction is 12," so younger fans who cut their teeth on those films probably don't feel that they're as derivative as I do.

Of course, the one person who probably rivals his fame as a special effects genius is Eiji Tsuburaya who is usually called the 'god of special effects' in Japan. From *Godzilla* to space battle epics like *Battle in Outer Space* to weird transformation films like *The H-Man*, it's clear that the Lucas/Spielberg generation had seen and been influenced by his effects work too—which was practical for the most part and employed models and miniature landscapes, as well as what came to be known as "suitmation."

Harryhausen was down on "suitmation" and often talked about how the Cyclops legs in *The Seventh Voyage of Sinbad* were designed so that viewers knew it could not be a man in a suit, but much of this was promotion for his own brand "Dynamation" which was really just a name for stop-motion, although it was reimagined to be quicker and cheaper by using rear-projection screens and film images instead of glass matte paintings on the animation stage.

(Of course, Harryhausen was friends with Forry Ackerman and so it was not uncommon when I was growing up to see the party line of "it's just a man in a suit" being used as a put-down. I grew up kind of thinking this; however, it later occurred to me that many if not most of the "iconic" science fiction monsters are actually practical work with suits—from the days of *The Creature From the Black Lagoon* and *Godzilla*, to modern icons like the *Predator* and the *Alien*. The idea, far from being a serious observation about film art, was really just plugging "dynamation.")

Anyway, I got to meet Ray Harryhausen once, when he was a guest at the Vancouver film school.

The materials he'd brought with him were on videotape—PAL standard as he lived and worked in Britain much of the time—and so it became clear that they needed another videotape machine, and there was a long wait while someone went to grab the right kind of video player from the school.

Ray very generously took pictures with folks and signed autographs. I knew not to mention *Godzilla* ... so we talked about his films, and when he enquired about my name he said, "You don't look much like Stanley!"

This is a reference to his screen favourites, Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy.

The best moment occurred when my friend Scott Farquhar, an animator himself for Mainframe that was doing *ReBoot* at the time, decided to pitch to Ray.

“I think any animator alive would want to work with you. I think you should start a series of ‘Ray Harryhausen Presents’ films and re-make some of the classics, starting with Ray Harryhausen’s *King Kong*.”

Ray explained that he had almost done that once, for Hammer films in England, but it had fallen through and he didn’t think that he would be involved in that at this point.

“Okay, okay,” says Scott, “ but what about ... Do you know a film called *Jack the Giant Killer*?”

Ray’s expression immediately went cold.

Jack the Giant Killer (1962) was a fantasy adventure movie that created by producer Edward Small. The film stole the hero from Seventh Voyage of Sinbad, actor Kerwin Mathews, the villain, actor Torin Thatcher, as well as the Director of the previous film—Nathan Juran. Producer Small had also worked on the production staff of Sinbad. The film used stop-motion animation for many characters—created by Jim Danforth and others.

(It was later re-edited and re-released as a musical by producer [Edward Small](#). The reason for this change was on the grounds that Columbia Pictures, which released [The 7th Voyage of Sinbad](#), threatened to sue Small so he changed it to a musical to avoid a legal battle. The original print without the music got released 30 years later with no protest from Columbia Pictures, while United Artists continues to own the rights to the musical version of the film. Thanks Wikipedia!)

Anyway, Scott sees Ray’s expression go cold and quickly says, “No. No. Hear me out.

“The animation in that film isn’t really very good. So you buy the rights, strip out all the stop-motion animation, and then do new animation and release it again as *Ray Harryhausen’s Jack The Giant Killer!*”

I was watching Ray’s eyes go from cold, to doubtful, to amused, to downright twinkling.

He put a hand on Scott’s shoulder and said, “You are a very devious young man!”

So, on the occasion of Ray’s 100th Anniversary, I’d like to recommend that you re-visit a Harryhausen film because it’s always a good time to re-visit your childhood and that good old sense-of-wonder. (Even better if you’ve never seen any of his films—you have a treat in store.)

To me the absolute stand-outs are *Jason and the Argonauts*, *The First Men in the Moon*, and to a lesser degree, *Mysterious Island*. But a good dino trilogy is *The Beast From 20,000 Fathoms*, *One Million Years B.C.* and *The Valley of Gwangi*. And there’s always the Sinbad trilogy!

Enjoy!

Me, I’m going back to painting a model of a Pteranodon carrying off a Mexican boy—Lope—from *The Valley of Gwangi*.

Happy 100 and may there be 100 more years of enjoyment! Thanks Mr. Harryhausen.

IT IS WHAT IT IS (Mansplaining the State of Fandom)

By Garth Spencer

As the fannish novel *Fallen Angels* puts it, “we fight gravity with levity”. In fact, the essence of fannishness may be the refusal to treat reality seriously. In this spirit, I have started a number of absurd Facebook pages and groups. It seemed like the fannish thing to do.

For your delectation, I present the following contributions to promote fannish humour:

* ***Abducted Aliens Anonymous*** – description: “Do you, or does someone you know, constantly feel baffled by the things people say and do? Do you, or they, fail to understand the rebuffs of alleged family, of employers, of people you want to date? Do statutory holidays and tedious clothing items and turns of speech fail to make sense? In short, do you feel like an alien on Earth, cruelly abducted from your world and people? Alien Abductees Anonymous is a mutual aid association founded in 2015 for those who want to get to the bottom of all this, find out how to cope with a people who are still evolving intelligence, and if possible, get the hell back where we belong. If you just know anyone who needs this group, let them know that YOU ARE NOT ALONE!”

**(Note: this is one of my few Facebook groups on this list which actually took off and attracted more than five members.)*

B.A.R.N.E.Y. – description: “A successor to the long-running Vancouver gathering of fans of speculative fiction, fantasy, and too many other things to mention now gets a mention on Facebook! We used to say “Friday nights are the time to Forget Reality, and Enjoy Drinking!” What do you think the acronym B.A.R.N.E.Y. should stand for? Some of us will be at VCON. FRED, in its modern incarnation, will be held on the Friday night of the convention. BARNEY ... well, watch this space for more news! We shall return!”

Cambie Kindred, Heathen Geeks, or Steampunk Viking Klingons – description: “I created this group to be a meeting place for any heathens and Asatru and worshippers of Germanic gods who live in the City of Vancouver.” Also, for any Klingons who want to produce Gilbert and Sullivan operettas in the original Klingon.

Canadian Fan History – description: “This is a place for telling stories. This is a place for collecting evidence. This is a place for completing chronicles of lost love and heroic adventure, or conrunning memories that wake you up at 3:00 am screaming. There is no place quite like this place, anywhere near this place, so this must be the place. We welcome your contributions to this place.” Also, for helping to complete and correct Canadian fan history. Honest, I’ve got manuscripts. You can even see drafts on fanac.org.

Committee for Anglic Language Studies – description: “Studies and learning materials for the spoken and written language that is supplanting Standard English”. (formerly, the Society for the Perpetuation of Classical English.) I should have acknowledged there are several Anglic languages developing in different countries, and regions in countries, and occupational groups ...

Committee for the Collection of Meaningless Language – description: “Resolved: Standard English is a dying language; deceptively similar languages are replacing English, which are mutually unintelligible, and which almost but do not quite entirely fail to accomplish the purpose of communication. Discuss.” Maybe I should have given examples of psychobabble, litcrit, upper-management buzzwords and political discourse.

Digital Life is Too Damned Complicated – description: “Resolved: There is such a thing as overcomplication, and that describes our digital technology. Discuss.” I suspect most of you will find the sentiment of this group familiar.

How to Human – For those of us who need and want a textbook on how to live a contemporary life, emulate contemporary human behaviour, and do things like “success” or at least passing for human. (I have changed the title of this group a lot, but this is the title now, as suggested by Michael “Fruvous” Bertrand.) Ultimately I want to write up the stuff that could have been passed on to me before I graduated from high school. Or maybe I should have just given links to Snopes.com, Cracked.com, and Lifehack.

Description: “This group is a place to compile things everybody needs but not everybody knows. Despite popular belief, there is no common sense. People do not naturally work out that things fall down, ungrounded circuits will give you electric shocks, vaccinations are actually good for your health, or running into traffic is likely to get you broken bones. We now live in times when a lot of life's hazards, vital skills, and common reference points have to be spelled out. This group is a place to compile things everybody needs but not everybody knows.”

Liberal Secular Rational Humanist Cult – description: “Humour and semi-serious proposals by, for and about religious behaviour”. Maybe I should have written my own

religious text and liturgy, based on half the things people in Western industrialized republics already take for granted. I mean, I have a Universal Life Church ordination, after all. Or maybe we can persuade the Unitarians to start founding non-denominational monasteries. What say?

Mad Science Forum – description: "If we're science fiction fans, we may from time to time enjoy playing with science and technology. Building our own fusion reactors, designing spaceships you can build in your own garage, achieving the first self-repairing, self-reproducing robot army, recruiting minions to hack the world banking system and expose the world-wide Belgian mind control plot, or just experimenting with quantum genetic manipulation and creating the all-purpose vegetable. Innocent Sunday entertainment."

Please Don't Make Canada Guardian of the U.S. – description: "We can see the writing on the wall. Somebody is going to declare the U.S. unfit to manage its own affairs, and appoint a guardian. PLEASE, PLEASE leave Canada out of it! We're not up for it!!"

* **Society for the Perpetuation of Fannish Fandom** – description: "What are fun, creative, original activities or running gags or group stories for SF types you engage in? shall we invent new energy sources or space vehicles or northern communities or manufacturing industries? How about insidious mind-expanding games we can market? Are new kinds of art forms on your mind? Is there now a word that rhymes with orange?"

**(Note: this is the other one of my few Facebook groups on this list which actually took off and attracted more than five members.)*

The Anarcho-Surrealist Party – a splinter party of the Second Reformed Anarcho-Surrealist Party (below). At various times the ASP has proposed the invention of an intentional patois, unique to Vancouver, incorporating English, Cantonese and Punjabi vocabulary (in that order); or establishing a new, voluntary ethnic group, which people can join when they're sick and tired of the tribe they were born into; or petitioning for the United Nations to adopt Welsh or Chinook Jargon as a world language; or reviving the ancient custom of Jubilee and declaring all debts null and void, on a regular basis; or instituting professional associations and standards for parents, and for occult practitioners.

Description: "*An anarchist world...a surrealist world: they are the same.*" André Breton

"Surrealism as both an artistic and political movement aims at the liberation of the human being from the constraints of capitalism, the state, and the cultural forces that

limit the reign of the imagination. The movement developed in France in the wake of World War I with André Breton (1896–1966) as its main theorist and poet. Originally it was tied closely to the Communist Party. Later, Breton, a close friend of Leon Trotsky, broke with the Communist Party and embraced anarchism, even writing in the publication of the French Anarchist Federation. By the end of World War II the surrealist group led by Breton had decided to explicitly embrace anarchism. In 1952 Breton wrote ‘It was in the black mirror of anarchism that surrealism first recognised itself.’”

The Autistic Separatist Party – description: this page has no description. This page needs no description. Its nature and purpose is self-evident. Maybe we could club up to buy an island. Notify Bill Gates.

The Garth Spencer Society – description: “The object of the Garth Spencer Society is to help the several Garth Spencers now online to avoid confusion with each other. Suggestions and advice are welcome.” Probationary memberships are available to other Garths, such as Garth Brooks, Garth Nix, Garth Drabinsky, and Garth Renn on my Facebook page.

The Julian Assange Fan Club – description: this page, I think, is also self-evident.

The Royal Swiss Navy – My oldest and still most cherished fantasy club that doesn’t quite exist, the RSN was first invented in 1996 to persuade the Vancouver CommunityNet to host my amateur website. For a while, my personalzine was titled *The Royal Swiss Navy Gazette*. For a while I used to get a couple of applications a year from naïve Africans who wanted to enlist. One British military unit thought the RSN was a great gag and wanted to conduct military exercises with us. The RSN has no official relationship with Karl Johanson’s Cat Barf Squadron and its Rubber Chicken Tactical Training course, but we could talk about it. Some of my friends still have RSN badges and T-shirts, with a logo designed by Joe Devoy of Vancouver fandom. Description: “The things you need to know about us: 1) We are not, in fact, royal. 2) We do not, in fact, have any affiliation with Switzerland. 3) We do float, but with difficulty, and currently own no boats.”

The Second Reformed Anarcho-Surrealist Party with a Hot Tub in the Backyard Society Inc. – description: “Any funny activities involving aerostat balloons, hot tubs, guerilla street theatre, or all three.”

The Sensible Party – description: this, also, needs no explanation. Probably a non-starter in this generation.

World Government of Spuzzum – description: “The World Government of Spuzzum was declared arbitrarily on April 1, 2015 by a bunch of disgruntled Canadians in a bar in Spuzzum, who thought their declaration of a world republic had as much

legitimacy as any other state in what we laughingly call the civilized world. Spuzzum is a surpassingly insignificant point on a Canadian highway which is impossible to find if you express any interest in it. The incumbent Chairman Pro Tem is Mr. Charlie Horse.”

JUNE 8 – F.R.E.D. SF FEN CONFAB ZOOM CHAT

By Joy Devoy and Felicity Walker

This Zoom meeting had 20 participants and lasted five hours. A great deal of conversation took place but was not recorded. However, a simultaneous conversation took place in the text chat “room,” and Joe Devoy figured out how to download that. Felicity walker then added commentary to place quoted lines in context. The Graeme then edited for the sake of brevity. This will give you some idea what the actual conversations are like in our weekly fannish Zoom meetings.

Attending participants included: Lloyd Penney, Moss Whelan, Andrew C. Murdoch, Barbara Scutt, Julie McGalliard, Paul Carpentier, R. Graeme Cameron, Steve Fahnstalk, Craig Russell, Michael Bertrand, Felicity Walker, Julian Castle, Joe Devoy, John Mansfield, Chris Sturges, Steve Forty, Stan G. Hyde, Michael Dean Jackson, Lance Munro, Stewart Smyth, and possibly a few others I forgot to record their names.

Context: (Someone asked whether anyone present had done any acting.)

FELICITY WALKER – Not professionally, but I’ve been in some sketch comedy and fan films, sometimes in connection with Michael Bertrand.

CRAIG RUSSELL – Cool.

FELICITY – In 2009 we showed one of the Mobeus Society films at VCON. That was the year it was at the downtown Vancouver Marriott. And at another VCON in Richmond we showed Michael Bertrand’s “Fancy Pants Club” sketch compilation.

Context: (The Mobeus Society was a microbudget filmmaking group founded by local fan Jade Honewill. After it folded, local fan Michael “Fruvous” Bertrand started the Fancy Pants Club sketch comedy group to make more videos.)

ANDREW MURDOCH – I remember Don DeBrandt’s play done at VCON one year. That was brilliant.

FELICITY – Dysthymic depressives, agoraphobes, the socially anxious, and germophobes: doing the same thing we do normally, but now we’re heroes for doing it!

Context: (Thanks to COVID, we have to stay home, socially distance in public, and wash our hands constantly. This comes naturally for some of us.)

ANDREW – Introverts of the world, unite! Separately! Save the world!

Context: (Graeme said that Oskar Werner's career peaked at *Ship of Fools* (1965). Graeme also discussed Werner being difficult to work with, telling the other actors on *Fahrenheit 451* (1966) how to act, and cutting his own hair badly to make things harder for the director (François Truffaut). Felicity and Joe had just recently seen Werner play the villain in the *Playback* episode of Columbo.)

FELICITY – There was a Saturday Night Live sketch to that effect once. When Jerry Lewis hosted.

Context: (Someone speculated whether Jerry Lewis is a genius in France because the man who dubs him into French is a better actor.)

FELICITY – He meets his French dub actor and the guy is doing his voice very serious and dramatically. Tim Kazurinsky is “French Jerry Lewis voice.”

MICHAEL BERTRAND – I really feel like I get the “genius in France” thing now.

Context: (Graeme described the never-released serious film Lewis directed and starred in, about a clown in a concentration camp in the Holocaust.)

FELICITY – SCTV referenced *The Clown Who Cried* (1972) with their fictional unfunny comedian Bobby Bittman writing, directing, and starring in his own movie as a clown who somehow becomes President. He also plugged his book, *The Complete Filmmaker*, presumably a reference to the book *The Total Film-Maker* by Jerry Lewis (1971).

FELICITY – I was hoping to do capsule reviews of the first four Puppet Master movies for Graeme's BCSFAzine but I got 75% of the way through the first movie and got bored!

Context: (The Puppet Master horror film franchise created by Charles Band of Full Moon Features began with Puppet Master (1989). I recently purchased the first four films on VHS from another fan. The puppets themselves are creative and likeable, pretty good for low-budget, practical effects, but the plot is slow and padded)

R. GRAEME CAMERON – Too bad. You could write a biting review that would amuse.

ANDREW – Sarcastic reviews are often the best.

FELICITY – If I decide to plunge ahead, I will definitely include my opinion of the glacial pacing.

ANDREW – Graeme's reviews of the Gor films had me rolling.

FELICITY – Weren't you just standing behind Stew? You and Stew can point your devices at each other and get an infinity mirror going!

Context: (Someone was standing behind Stewart Smyth in his window, then appeared in a separate window, seemingly from two separate computers in the same room.)

FELICITY – What was the one movie you walked out of? The one movie I rented but never finished was *8 Heads in a Duffel Bag* (1997). My dad and I watched *Like Water for Chocolate* (1992) on fast-forward once we realised it was all in subtitles.

ANDREW – The only reason I didn't walk out of *Highlander 2* was because I got in for free. I still paid too much.

FELICITY – It's been long enough that I could feel nostalgic for *Highlander 2* (1992) and appreciate its good aspects, but the soundtrack is annoying. Michael Ironside is great in it.

ANDREW – The only memorable part of that movie was Sean Connery reacting to the overly realistic airline safety video. If that had been in a better movie, people would have been talking about and imitating it still today.

FELICITY – I saw *Highlander 2* before I saw *Highlander* (1986), and that was a huge advantage. I had no idea how bad a job it did of connecting to the first movie, until I saw the first movie later and was retroactively mad.

JOE DEVOY – The Highlander movies should be forced to fight each other to the death.

FELICITY – So it's like the problem with Terminator 3 (2003). Apparently Skynet cannot be prevented so we've all been wasting our time.

ANDREW – A universe actively predisposed against temporal paradoxes sucks.

MICHAEL – I totally agree. Fuck you, T3!

FELICITY – Webcams used to be so magical! They were windows onto the world.

Context: (Someone pointed out that back in the 1990s, webcams were a big deal.)

FELICITY – My favourite was one that a restaurant in Japan had set up on its counter. You could watch people eating teriyaki halfway around the world! And because I was always up at 3 AM that was when there were people there.

ANDREW – My home municipality on the island had one pointed out to Cadboro Bay to try and find the local sea monster.

FELICITY – Ogopogo rules! IMO, in the Shadowrun universe, Ogopogo exists and is one of the great dragons that went into hibernation during the Fifth World.

GRAEME – Ogopogo is a lake monster. I think the Cadboro Bay monster is called Cadborosaurus, or "Caddy" for short. I seem to recall a concrete sculpture of it near the beach.

FELICITY – Michael Dean Jackson! I remember your short film where you put a Big Mac into a blender at McDonalds. We had to learn to differentiate in the UBC SFS to avoid confusion with the other Mike Jackson.

Context: (There are two local fans named Michael Jackson. To avoid confusion, one was "Michael Dean Jackson" or just "Michael Dean" (artist and illustrator) while the other was "Mike Jackson" (artist, illustrator, and filmmaker), which also avoided confusion with the famous musician.)

MICHAEL – So you're saying this guy didn't do *Thriller*?

JOE – The *other* other Mike Jackson,

Context: (Someone mentioned the two times William Shatner guest-starred as a villain in *Columbo*.)

FELICITY – Yes! Coincidentally, in both, he used then-new technology to create his false alibi. His first appearance in the 1970s episode *Fade in to Murder*, where he uses a VCR to fake his innocence, and then when he came back in the 1990s, he used a cell phone and an answering machine to generate the illusion.

GRAEME – Shatner was great, maybe his best performance ever, when he played a charismatic racist organiser trying to incite a Southern town to violence in the 1962 Roger Corman film *The Intruder*. Sometimes available retitled as *I hate your Guts*. He gave a fantastic performance. Nowhere near as good, but certainly interesting, an Esperanto-language horror film he also starred in. Can't remember the title. Think it was shown on TCM.

FELICITY – I remember that one! *Incubus*. It was dull.

MICHAEL – If I were famous I would do what Quentin Tarantino did and introduce the public to obscure movies that I like.

FELICITY – You have to be careful with that, because people watched those things that Quentin Tarantino recommended and were disappointed, and the term “Quentin Tarantino Presents” came to mean nothing.

Context: (At the height of his fame, in the 1990s, Tarantino redistributed obscure B-movies he liked under the banner “Quentin Tarantino Presents,” and people expecting to see films equal to the quality and budget of a Tarantino film were disappointed. This diluted his brand.)

GRAEME – Another fun film, this one locally made, is *The Beast of Burquitlam* from 1982. Fun musical about a cannibal butcher, a proposed “World of Tomorrow,” and an alien invasion. Uneven, but often very funny.

Context: (Burquitlam is where the B.C. Lower Mainland Region cities of Burnaby and Coquitlam merge.)

FELICITY – I have it on VHS! Under its alternate title *The Big Meat Eater*. I love it.

GRAEME – The independent filmmakers who produced it recently released a Blu-ray version under that title. That's where I got my copy. I like the mad butcher's slogan “Pleased to meet you, meat to please you.” Great little film.

Context: (In the verbal conversation Paul Carpentier described the various VikingCons he helped organize. That triggered the following “chat” conversation.)

GRAEME – I met Robert Forward at a VikingCon. He claimed he knew how to design a spacecraft that would get to Mars in less than a week.

FELICITY – Once it hits Mars it's bound to stop.

JOE – Spaceforce!

FELICITY – Just the trip to Mars itself is dangerous. Cosmic radiation will kill some of the brain cells of the astronauts. They will be slightly dumber when they

arrive. Living in space is difficult too. The human body was not designed for microgravity.

JOE – Need more cosmic ray shielding!

FELICITY – Definitely! I guess that adds to the weight of the vehicle.

JOE – But its worth it!

NOTE: Felicity didn't participate in the verbal conversation and conducted the entire meeting in chat mode. Most of the participants concentrated on listening and talking and ignored the chat texting. Consequently, the above quotes, derived from the chat messaging, are skewed toward a minority of topics and participants. Nevertheless the above quotes capture some of the flavour of the Zoom meeting overall.

UPCOMING CONVENTIONS TO PRETEND TO ENJOY

Note: AGoH = Author Guest of Honour, ArtGoH = Artist Guest of Honour, ComGoH = Comics Guest of Honour, FanGoH = Fan Guest of Honour, GamGoH = Gaming Guest of Honour, MedGoH = Media Guest of Honour, SciGoH = Science Guest of Honour, and Toastmaster = Toastmaster.

78th World Science Fiction Convention

CONZEALAND – (29th July to 2nd August, 2020) – Wellington, New Zealand

BEFORE:

George R.R. Martin is the Toastmaster, for Ghu's sake! Wowzers! *Mercedes Lackey & Larry Dixon* are the AGoHs. *Greg Broadmore* is ArtGoH. *Rose Mitchell* is FanGoH. Basic Adult membership rate currently (as of March 2nd) \$450 NZD = roughly \$375 CAD. Con takes place at the TSB Bank Arena and Auditorium (Shed 6), the Michael Fowler Center, and the Intercontinental Hotel), plus nearby overflow hotels and myriad Wellington bars and pubs. Expecting about 2,000 attendees.

NOW:

Basic Adult (now Virtual) membership has been reduced to \$300 NZD = roughly \$265 CAD. See below to find out all the nifty details of what this will get you.

For details: < <https://conzealand.nz/> >

Other Conventions

I ran out of time to finish this issue. Most Cons been cancelled anyway because of the pandemic. I will attempt to catch up with pertinent info next issue.

OOK! OOK! SLOBBER! DROOL! (Letters of Comment)

Note: Annoying comments by God-Editor [*are in brackets*] immediately after introduction of topic in question. This, a feeble attempt to create the illusion of a conversation in a fanzine lounge or a hospitality suite in the interests of conviviality. But mainly, to avoid tiresome necessity (if editorial comments are at the end of each LoC) to start each paragraph with “[*Re: your comment...*]” which would be a terrible waste of space (unlike this brilliant introductory note which is, of course, a triumph of its kind.)

From: **Steve Green** – (June 6th, 2020)

Hi Graeme,

I enjoyed seeing Denny Marshall’s portfolio in June’s *BCSFazine*. If you make such galleries a regular feature—which it appears you intend, seeing as you spotlighted Taral’s artwork in #540—might I suggest you follow the example of those Martin Tudor and I ran in *Critical Wave*, and include some biographical information on the artist, as well as their contact details? That way, readers can approach them for commissions and other fanzine editors attempt to cadge free contributions.

[You’ll note I’m now doing just that. I had been content to let the art speak for itself, in homage to the artist, but I agree a trifle more info than just the name is required. Am running the info after the portfolio “display”, though. That way the art speaks first. Then comes the info for the curious.]

Robert J Sawyer’s musings on the puzzle of Jim Kirk’s middle initial were also fun. Sadly, the people currently in charge of the *Trek* franchise have barely any knowledge of, or interest in, the canon of that universe, which is why—after being a fan for nearly 51 years—I’m giving their dismal fanfic a wide berth.

Fans of “furry” cosplay are being cultivated by the Alt-Right? Has anyone considered they’re simply in the cross-hairs of “good ol’ boys” eager to hang their costumes up as hunting souvenirs?

Warmest regards, Steve Green

From: **Garth Spencer** – (June 28th, 2020)

Dear Graeme,

Congratulations on your Aurora Award nominations!

It is interesting to note the omission of a “semiprozine” award category, and the fact that *Polar Borealis*, under the Aurora rules, has to be called a fanzine. Like all the other omissions previously discovered under the Aurora Awards, this could be rectified, after a lot of argument. But ... after all our previous experiences with the Auroras, I have to wonder how many categories there are, and how many fans are aware of, and voting for the awards? It may be a higher priority to raise the profile of the Aurora Awards in the first place.

[Always a priority to raise the profile. As for making room for “semi-professional” zines, not needed. The professional zines include those with lower rates. After all, the majority of prozines in Canada don’t offer SFWA rates. So any magazine paying its customers anything at all counts. Where Polar Borealis slips through the cracks is the fact I don’t charge anything for the zine. I believe there are one or two other zines in the same situation. Not enough to warrant a separate category, especially as they meet the requirements of a fan publication.]

It all boils down to two types of zines: those that charge money to read and those that don’t. Two categories already exist to cover them. It is merely an odd artifact of reality that Polar Borealis counts as professional because I pay my contributors, so they are eligible for professional awards, but the zine itself, since I don’t harvest any income, falls under a fannish category.

The oddity could be resolved if I start charging money and make Polar Borealis thoroughly professional, but that would open too many cans of worms I am not willing to deal with. PB will continue to be the oddity it is, and I am rather perversely proud of that.]

Out of your various items of science and space news, I was most interested by the paragraphs about the Centauri system, and the exoplanet Proxima B. So, you say Proxima B is approximately Earth-sized, and orbits in the habitable zone around its luminary? But the luminary emits 400 times the flux of X-rays that Earth receives? I have to wonder how strong a magnetic field Proxima B generates, then. Our planet’s magnetic field, and arguably the way that Jupiter tends to shield us from large meteor and asteroid strikes, are two major reasons Earth continues to support life.

Not that we will get to see any life on Proxima B, of course, unless there is some way to reach other planets that amounts to interstellar teleportation. The real reason to study exoplanets is to better understand our Earth’s formation, and probable future. At some point this will have the practical effect of directing our efforts to maintain this habitat.

Your remarks on a discrepancy in one of the *Star Trek* pilots brings to my mind a discrepancy underlying *Star Trek*, and indeed many “franchise” screen versions of science fiction. Is media science fiction really about imagination? Or reasoned speculation?

Not by my standards, but then, my standards were shaped by reading stories which generally relied on a whole different story universe conceived for each and every story. Compared to that, all the reasoned speculation about media-franchise story universes amounts to retconning. Rationalization, that is. Just my opinion, of course.

In fact, there was a critique of *Star Trek* in a British fanzine, about twenty years ago, that hauled this question into the spotlight. Compared to most science fiction before the series (the writer argued), *Star Trek* didn't offer the shock of the new: it offered the familiar. It comforts. It doesn't challenge your assumptions. Even the aliens are human, and the alien cultures are parodies of human cultures, at best. Even time-travel and alternate-timeline stories and transcendent-being stories fit our preconceptions. You may say much the same thing about other media franchises. Of course this is simply an opinion, and I don't expect people to agree with it. It would be nice to see your readers weigh it in their minds, and roll it around, and see how it fits or doesn't fit their observations. Just for a change.

[Media is all about entertainment. Sometimes imagination enters into it, especially when it comes to creating eye-candy, but intelligent reasoned speculation is kept to a minimum so as not to conflict with the action adventure aspects.

And yes, most media entertainment (and literature) is all about the familiar. There's a simple, logical reason for this. People find something they like, they want more of the same. Sherlock Holmes fan aren't noticeably keen on innovation or originality as that is perceived as going against canon. Likewise Star Trek Fan, or Star Wars fan. Or any favourite SF author you care to name.

I like the early P.K. Dick. When he started to evolve by going all metaphysical I felt he was betraying himself (and me!) so I gave up on him, or at least his last few novels. Likewise Heinlein, who went from stirring my sense of wonder into painful self-parody, or so it seemed to me. When I glom onto something I like, I hate to see it change. I suspect most fan are like that. Anything new and innovative represents the threat of change in that it is something they haven't seen before. They might like it, but instinctively resent it because they know it is different, so are reluctant to try it. Whereas a variation of what they already know they love and cherish will attract their attention and purchase power immediately.

To sum up, Hollywood, and to some extent mainstream book publishers, avoid change, originality, and innovation because the bean counters know the financial risks are enormous compared to going with a proven formula. Throw in philosophical or abstract writing and it's the kiss of death. Unless, as sometimes happens, the studio or publisher are looking for a critic-pleasing loss-leader to enhance their prestige in order to improve the brand, so to speak. But franchises and repetitive series are the bread and butter. Such is my opinion.]

Mind you, I still want to see a Canadian feature film with Haida Vikings coming to raid Victoria in balloon-suspended longships, brandishing futuristic broadswords and shouting insults in Yiddish, so what do I know?

If *Mars Needs Women* were remade today—set in, oh, Winnipeg or Toronto - wouldn't the Martians mail-order-bride enterprise get tied up in bureaucratic red tape, and arguments over provincial and federal jurisdictions? The entire hero's journey could be an epic saga about trying to acquire and submit properly completed vaccination and emigration forms.

[You could be on to something here. It could be that humans, more than any other sentient species, has evolved Kafkaesque bureaucracy to such a fearsome degree that nobody else is willing to tangle with us.]

The point at which nobody really believes any evidence, merely on the grounds of who produces it—or the point at which nobody knows whether to believe their own eyes, no matter how realistic the photos—is not the end of reality, but the end of credibility.

The point at which we had to confront neo-Nazi furies in fandom was the point at which I ceased to believe in reality. They simply don't make up reality today the way they used to. Whoever "they" are.

Re: Lloyd Penney on the Zoom app: I have found myself using it, as you know. I think it has all the advantages and disadvantages of having a committee or group conversation face-to-face, except for eliminating COVID-19 exposure. At least I can sometimes make a point and get a response right away while using Zoom, although sometimes it is difficult to deal with a half-second time lag in images and sound transmission.

It is heartening to know that VCON will rise again, although I have to admit to myself that the days of room parties, hot tub parties, and romantic assignations is dead and gone. I wonder what future VCONs will bring to us?

Yours Truly, Garth Spencer

From: **Lloyd Penny** – (June 28th, 2020)

Dear Graeme:

Thank you for *BCSFazine* 541, and thank you for the nudge to get moving with this letter! I find myself getting busier in this pandemic, with more to do, and the confidence to take on more. I am currently having a look at some novellas from Paula Johansen, and I am still looking for some full-time work. Down to work...

It is good to see that there is still someone from our age group that can still get on the Aurora ballot. More and more, I do not recognize the names on the ballot, which makes me an unqualified nominator. My own training is in journalism, which has taken a beating because of the misuse of technology. I do not trust any American news sources because of ownership with an agenda. Perhaps PBS News may be the only exception.

Garth's article on hoaxes ... I am somewhat gobsmacked that we are still discussing Myles' House in '89, and that is 31 years past. Fannish memory is selective, and sometimes, very sticky. I was to be the Pro GoH, and I paid good money for it, I'll have you know ... ☺ This goes back to the times when fandom was fun and silly, and worked hard for a few laughs. I hate the idea of thinking that it's mostly gone.

[Well, OUR fandom is mostly gone, along with virtually everything else we used to take for granted. Hard to say what the new generations are up to. I know fen who frantically keep up with the latest trends and tech, but I'm too tired to bother. Instead I carry on somewhat the way I used to, such as producing essentially the same type of club newsletter I published 25 years ago. My razzle dazzle tech goal is merely to make it legible and simple to throw together. I want people to value its contents, not its appearance. And my target audience is my surviving peers, if only because I believe their interests and sensibilities are similar to mine.

I don't know what will come after our generation is gone. I just know fandom will be different. I'd like to think it will suit the needs and interests of its proponents as much as our version of fandom entertained and amused us. Not my call though. So I'm not worried about it. We had fun. To some degree we are still having fun. Hopefully the generations beyond ours will also have fun. If not, oh well. Nothing we can do about it, other than set an example which may or may not be risible to future fen. We don't get to determine how we will be remembered. But then, nobody does.]

I quite enjoyed AmazingCon earlier this month, although the virtual con will never replace the real in-person con, IMHO. Perhaps talk to you tomorrow night; finally did get the webcam we were waiting for. As time continues on, personal goals have largely faded, and partially dismissed as unreachable, and not nearly as pertinent as they used to be. Current goals are added as whim brings them to mind, and I shall see what I can do. If I don't get it done, or fail miserably, or have others place unsurmountable obstacles in my way because of my age or other factor, that's fine; other goals may arrive to keep my attention. I am doing my best with what I want to do, and let's see if I succeed.

My previous letter ... the learning about Zoom continues. I doubt I will ever set up a Zoom gathering myself, but it is good to be a little more knowledgeable. With the new webcam, perhaps I can participate a bit more. Our Third Monday pubnight, and the Toronto Steampunk Society, both have upcoming Zoom gatherings.

I had hoped for more, but I am gearing up right now to increase my job-hunting, and try to find something. I am also working on upgrading my voicework resume online so that I might have some cash coming in with that. Too old to get proper work, and too young to properly retire. I am stuck in the middle.

Take care, and as said, perhaps see you tomorrow night on the Confab.

Yours, Lloyd Penney.

From: **Felicity Walker** – (July 2nd, 2020)

Comments on *BCSFAzine* #541.

Cover: If it weren't for the lack of eyes, those Martians with the tentacles on their backs and the table legs would be too cute to shoot at!

Editorial: The God-Editor Speaks: In Howard Chaykin's 1983 comic book series *American Flagg!*, set in the then-far-future year of 2033, computer animation has advanced to the point that live actors are no longer needed once there's enough footage of them to draw from. The technology is called "tromplography," and it starts the plot in motion by putting Reuben Flagg, a TV cop show actor, out of work, forcing him to try real police work.

In Chaykin's 1996 series *Cyberella*, corporations use virtual reality escapism to control the masses. The average person lives in a coffin apartment which uses VR to make it seem like a spacious house, and plays VR video games for emotional fulfilment. But the rest of the time they may also be living in a virtual reality without knowing it. [This was before *The Matrix* (1999).] It's a bleak cyberpunk dystopia, but at least the people think they're happy, that is until the corporation intentionally opens a wormhole to Hell. (At that point I stopped reading the series, as it turned away from telling the super-interesting story combining political conspiracies, giant corporations, entertainment media, mega-cities, alien technology from the Roswell crash, and Disney animatronics, and became just about the heroine fighting demons. Those first few issues had an impressive amount of heavy ideas, though!)

Void Breather Bombast: "Twenty Tons of Space Debris Hits Earth": I had a penpal in Côte D'Ivoire in 1989! He asked me to send him audiotapes of North American rap music, which they couldn't get over there. I haven't heard from him since then. I hope he's OK!

"Space Force Flag Unveiled by Trump": Hey, if Donald Trump can say that Barack Obama and Hilary Clinton founded ISIS, you can say that he's a follower of ISIS. Fair's fair. :-)

"Space Shuttle Launches": I miss the Space Shuttle. Despite its flaws and the haters, I thought it looked cool.

Denny E. Marshall Art Portfolio: I especially like the creature in the first piece and the stippling in the last piece, which makes me nostalgic!

Books to Burden Your Mind: *The Red Planet* by Russ Winterbotham: I'd heard of LIDAR before—it's definitely a real thing, not made up by Winterbotham—but hadn't really thought about what it was. Coincidentally, I've been rewatching the 1988 *War of the Worlds* TV series, and there's an episode in which the aliens need to build hand-held laser weapons but first have to acquire enough rubies to use as lenses. I wonder why it's always rubies? Why not other colours of gemstone? Something about its place at the end of the visible light spectrum? Are they developing photographs in the optical cavity? Is it a conspiracy by the DeBeers Group?

Chibougamau radar: in high school someone told me about a scientist at a base at one of the poles standing next to a microwave transmitter to keep warm, only to be cooked by it. After Googling it just now, I see from Snopes that this is a variation of an old urban legend.

The Martians speaking in parroted phrases sounds like it could have inspired the Predator in *Predator* (1987).

Random Musings: Bill the Cat, Meet Bill the Shat by Robert J. Sawyer: I like the Peter David explanation for Captain Kirk's middle initial. Coincidentally, I've been watching a lot of Columbo lately and I somehow knew before learning about it that if his first name were ever revealed, it would be "Frank." I eventually realised, however, that this wasn't a psychic phenomenon, but probably a half-remembering of the name of bodybuilder/actor Franco Columbu [*The Terminator* (1984)].

There's a short CTV News interview with Robert Sawyer about *The Oppenheimer Alternative* at [Sawyer CTV Interview](#)

Tonight's Movie: Robin Hood by Michael Bertrand: A lot of bad things happened to me in the 1980s too. Also in the 1970s. It was my childhood, and I had an unhappy childhood. I still have nostalgia for the 1980s, though. It was the peak of popular culture. (It's a scientific fact.)

Messed-Up Movie Mopes: Enjoyable! Love your dry sense of humour, e.g. "She sees four guys in wetsuits standing atop a flying saucer. Her suspicions deepen, approaching conviction."

The Light-Hearted Vituperator and Jolly Reviler: Growing Up in Fandom by Stan G. Hyde: That was an awesome story about meeting Akira "Mr. Handsome" Takarada.

Ook! Ook! Slobber! Drool! (Letters of Comment: Taral Wayne: There were three seasons of the animated Tick series (1994–1996) and he's right, a few episodes were omitted from the DVDs. At least we have the copies from YouTube that someone digitised from their recording of the show on Teletoon in the early 2000s.

Afterwords: I'm enjoying the Monday Zoom sessions and I look forward to new VCONs.

AFTERWORDS

This is a day late. In part because I also had an end of month deadline for my latest issue of *Polar Borealis Magazine* (#15) and my latest contribution to E-APA, but I got them done on time. Had to skip doing my weekly Amazing Stories (online) Magazine column (which was due today), though. And then there was last Monday's SF Fen Confab Zoom meeting which lasted 14 hours. Man! I'm tired. Pretty heavy creative workload for a 68 year-old.

But it's my own fault. I did volunteer, after all. I do all this for fun. Is there such a thing as having too much fun? Feels like I'm close to finding out. Time for a nap.

It would perk me up if I won an Aurora award. Good for motivation and such. Don't forget to vote! Go to: < [Aurora Award Voting](#) >