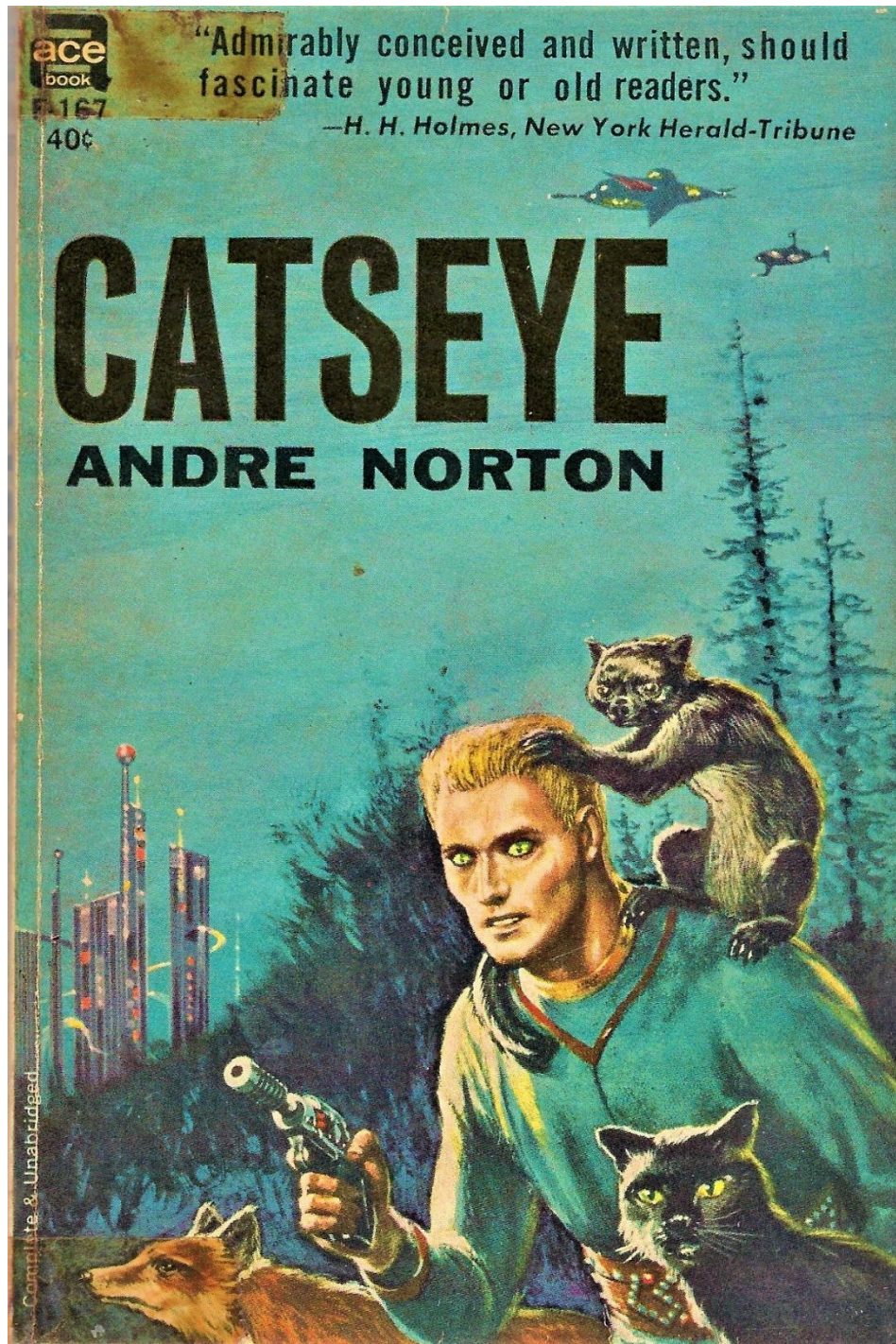


# BCSFAZINE

Clubzine of the British Columbia Science Fiction Association  
(Issue #544 – September, 2020)



(Issue #544 – September, 2020 – Vol.46 #9 WN544 – ISSN 1490-6406)

**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.

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To submit articles, art work, or letters of comment, contact God-Editor R. Graeme Cameron at: < [the.graeme.bcsfazine@gmail.com](mailto: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! Enjoy Drinking!”) 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 3:00 PM (PST) to 9:00 PM (PST). All SF Fen welcome.

Contact me at < [the.graeme.bcsfazine@gmail.com](mailto:the.graeme.bcsfazine@gmail.com) > and I’ll send you the link.

**SUBMISSION DEADLINE**

Midnight, September 31<sup>st</sup>. My simple layout design ensures it will get into the following month’s issue to be published no later than October 2<sup>nd</sup>. Guaranteed.

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## Cover Credit

**CATSEYE** – By unknown artist (Not stated).

## EDITORIAL: THE GOD-EDITOR SPEAKS!

I am very happy to have won an Aurora Award for my semi-professional magazine *Polar Borealis*. This is, quite simply, the highest award I can hope for in my science fictional life. Quite an honour.

Of course, I could write the greatest SF novel ever conceived and win the Sunburst Award, or a Nebula Award, or the Governor-General's Award, but I think it likely we can all agree that I'm never going to get around to doing that. Too busy, for one thing. Too lazy, for another. Not to mention a certain lack of the innovative brilliance required for the task.

Nope, it's all downhill from here, folks. No higher goal to strive for. Which is complete nonsense, of course. I am tremendously pleased and excited to have received my Aurora, but that's not why I publish *Polar Borealis*. It isn't a means to an end, a strategy developed merely to obtain a "trophy." I do it because I find publishing a SF&F magazine fantastically and exhilaratingly rewarding in itself, and mainly, because its loads of fun. I can't think of a better way to entertain myself. Winning an Aurora is icing-on-the-cake. Makes a good hobby even better.

Still, thoughts of fannish mortality do occur to me. I've been enthusiastically fannish since I first learned how to read. Science fiction comics, books, TV shows and movies have always been a major part of my situational awareness for most of my life. Easy for me to wallow in nostalgia. I've been around for quite a while. Long enough to witness trends and observe changes. But I tend to live in the moment and let change slide by without really thinking about it, let alone acknowledging it. But recently I was confronted by an epiphany of sorts which startled me.

I tend to think of the local fannish community as an ongoing phenomena more or less eternal in nature, or at least as eternal as I am (place your bets now). I was brought up short when I happened to glance at the concom list for Westercon 44/VCON 19 which took place in 1991.

There were 56 people, including myself, on that convention committee. 10 of them are now dead. Time marches on.

Of the 46 remaining, 28 I have completely lost track of and know nothing of their current whereabouts and activities.

That leaves 18. How many of them are currently active in BCSFA, WCSFA, or VCON?

Only 2, that I am aware of. Garth Spencer writes for *BCSFazine*, which I edit. Plus I stand ready to run writers workshops for VCON if called upon to do so.

The other 16 are part of what I call "Greater BCSFA," former members who, like me, remain nostalgic for the past and are still interested in what is going on, but no longer actively involved. I'm pretty sure most of them would enjoy attending VCON again, and probably like reading *BCSFazine*, but their days of participating in the stress and turmoil of planning major fannish events are over. They're not completely gaffiated, but the likelihood of their volunteering time and effort away from their



private, family-oriented, retired lives is slim. They may have been FIAWOL once, but now they're all FIJAGDH. Why not? They've earned their rest. It's up to the younger folk now.

I've heard the term "stakeholder" used. Its implication is that people who created the reputation of this or that club or convention have a responsibility to keep it going, to carry on in the name of the "cause." Not a bit of it. True, if you commit to a particular convention or serve on an executive for a year, you should see it through. That's only common courtesy to the others involved. (Unless, of course, some mundane disaster intervenes. Reality must be dealt with.) But if the joy of participation has soured and become a burden, or if you've evolved other interests, you have every right not to renew your commitment. Self and family come first, always.

I'm lucky. I really am. Now that I'm retired I no longer worry about losing my job. I'm free to concentrate on as much or as little fanac as pleases me. I write my columns for *Amazing Stories*. I edit and publish *Polar Borealis*. I write for and publish *BCSFazine*. I also contribute to *FAPA* and *EAPA*. Plus I get to read all manner of books and watch old movies. Who can ask for a better second childhood than this?

I have successfully transitioned to a life style where *everything* is icing-on-the-cake. Wish I had figured out how to do this fifty years ago. Life would have been a blast. Come to think of it, that's what it is now.

Cheers! *The Graeme*

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

< [the.graeme.bcsfazine@gmail.com](mailto:the.graeme.bcsfazine@gmail.com) >

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## 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.

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## WHAT THE GOD-EDITOR WOULD LIKE TO PUBLISH

Basically, contributions by fen like you! Thus far, there has been no great rush of willing contributors, though the ones who have offered their articles are great and wonderful in what they write. It's just that I am greedy and keep hoping for more.

-----

## VOID BREATHER BOMBAST

**Cosmic Billiards: We dodged another one** – On Sunday, August 16<sup>th</sup>, Asteroid 2020 QG, about ten to twenty feet in diameter, swooped within 1,830 miles of the earth while travelling past at 27,600 miles per hour. Would have made quite an impact had it struck. Not an extinction event, but somebody would have noticed, I'm sure. Think is, astronomers didn't spot it till 6 hours after it passed. Apparently it came from the direction of the sun. It happens to be the closest asteroid flyby on record. All, in all, good news, for it implies we won't spot the one that suddenly wipes us out. Good. It means we'll be perfectly happy and content till we're not. The months of worry over our impending doom as manifest in the movie *When Worlds Collide* may yet prove to be an exaggeration.

**Bits of Asteroid Cleared to Land in Australia** – Yep. Japan's Hyabusa2 Asteroid sample-return capsule has been given permission to land at the Woomera Prohibited Area on December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2020. Should be quite exciting. Samples were not only taken from the surface of the asteroid Ryugu, but you may recall Hyabusa2 blasted a crater on the surface so that it could take samples of sub-surface material as well.

This isn't the first sample return mission. The probe Hyabusa1 landed its sample material at the Woomera Test Range on June 13, 2010. The samples came from the asteroid Itokawa. They consisted of surface dust grains averaging the width of human hair in diameter. They turned out to be pitted by countless micro-meteorite impacts, the teeny tiny craters of which were full of even tinier dust grains. So, two discoveries: dust grains on the surface of asteroids act like sticky tape holding on to whatever micro-micro-micro stuff touches them, and asteroid surfaces are not frozen in time but are continuously blasted by gazillions of micro-meteorite impacts. Cool.

Hyabusa 2, having dropped off its capsule, will then be sent to explore either asteroid 2001 AV43 (going into orbit around it in 2029) or asteroid 1998 KY26 (going into orbit circa 2031). The first asteroid is a typical metal-rock combo solid piece, the second seems to be like Ryga, a loose pile of rubble. Both are small, about 100 feet in diameter, and both are rapid spinners, rotating once each 10 minutes. This has the scientists intrigued. Me, too.

**Studying the Weird Oceans of Uranus and Neptune** – Based on what we currently know about these two planets, scientists have created computer models of hypothetical oceans of water deep beneath the surface of these gas giants. For one thing, they believe Uranus may have a core of incredibly dense water ice. This would not generate much heat, so heat moving upward toward the surface would be negligible. Also, the oceans are liable to consist of superionic water, which is different from ordinary water, in that it is "denser, with several molecules dissociated into positive and negative ions, thus carrying an electrical charge." I have no idea what the implications of this are, but I'm sure there are more government research grants being applied for even as you read this. Simply put, Uranus and Neptune are weird. We just don't know *how* weird, yet.

**Solid Gold Asteroid?** – Well, not quite. 16 Psyche is said to be mostly nickel and iron but with a solid gold core claimed to be worth 10,000 Quadrillion dollars. Right. Bring it to Earth and the price of gold will drop to a penny a pound, I betcha. At any rate NASA is currently designing a probe to be launched by a SpaceX Falcon heavy lifter circa August 2022 and arrive at 16 Psyche in 2026. The probe will carry a magnetometer, a spectrometer, and a multispectral imager. It is not, I repeat *not*, a sample-return mission. Still, I bet those corporations starting up asteroid mining think-tanks are interested. Scientists think 16 Psyche is a left-over core of a large proto-planet. At 140 miles in diameter that's a lot of gold. Biggest nugget ever. Probably it'll wind up supplying material for electronics-manufacturing plants in orbit around Mars or some such. Supply should last for quite a while.

**Next Generation Lunar Lander Unveiled** – Or rather a full-scale engineering mock-up at the Johnson Space Centre in Houston. It's there to encourage feedback from astronauts and NASA engineers on what the final design should be. The descent stage can function as a separate spacecraft to autonomously land supplies on the Moon, thus ensuring a Lunar base can be quickly assembled. The ascent stage uses many of the same instruments and devices of the Orion capsule, so cost effective and easy to train on. The first manned landing Artemis mission is tentatively scheduled for 2024. That's not far off. Whoohoo! Can hardly wait!

**Clay Meteorite Smacks Puerto Rico** – Back in April 2019. Most debris hitting the Earth is composed of rock/metal chunks of protoplanets left over from the game of cosmic billiards where the gazillions of start-up planets were smashing the hell out of each other as our Solar System first formed. Not the Aguas Zarcas fragments. They're clay-like clumps of star dust present when our solar nebular was first contracting to form the Sun. They predate the planets and the asteroids. Technically, they are a rare type of meteorite called Carbonaceous Chondrites which are chock full of complex carbons. It's these guys who formed the building blocks of life on Earth. What's exciting is they haven't changed in their internal structure since before the Earth existed. Can't get more primordial than that! Wowzers!

**Ceres is One Weirdo Dwarf Planet** – For one thing, at 590 miles in diameter it's the biggest asteroid in the asteroid belt. It's also one of the darkest, being blacker than coal. Yet, in the centre of the 57 mile-wide crater Occator (formed only 20 million years ago) there are pits and mounds of what look like white ice scattered about (photographed by NASA probe Dawn which got within 22 miles of the surface back in 2018). Turns out it's salt! Left by briny water seeping up from an ocean about 25 miles below the surface. This means that Ceres joins a select group of moons and dwarf planets known to be geologically active with cryovolcanism (volcanoes oozing icy material), including Europa, Enceladus, Triton, and Pluto. The list of potential candidates for microbial-life habitats continues to expand. Possibly within a century people will wonder why their ancestors could ever have assumed life existed only on Earth. There may be life darn near everywhere. I blame those pesky and ubiquitous Carbonaceous Chondrites!

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ART PORTFOLIO: WILLIAM ROTSLER



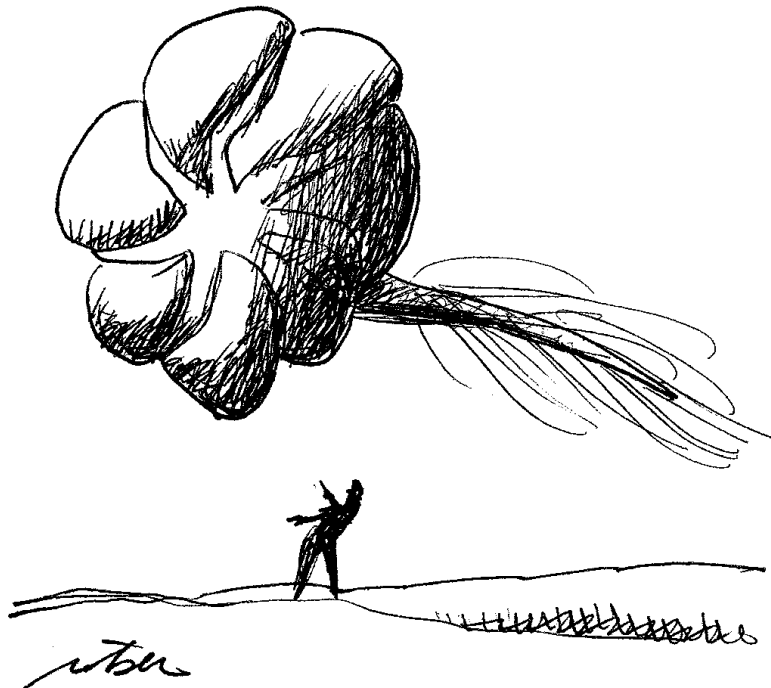


WOW! LOOK!  
A LOC WITH  
NO TYIDS!



What  
will they  
think of  
next?

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WHAT'S  
THAT?  
THE SCRATCH  
OF A LOC PEN?





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TAKE THAT  
BACK.!



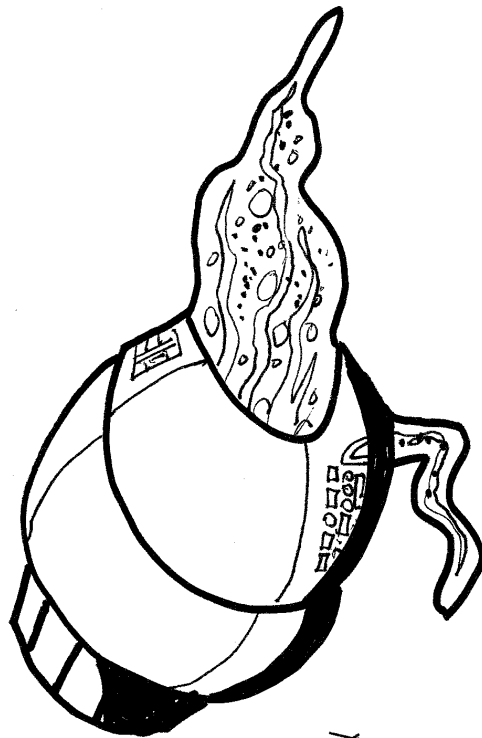
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THERE IS NO  
LOC IN THE  
KNOWN UNIVERSE,  
LIKE THIS ONE!

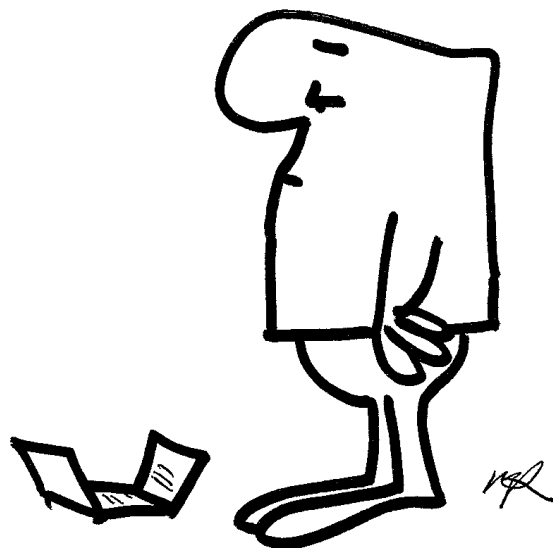


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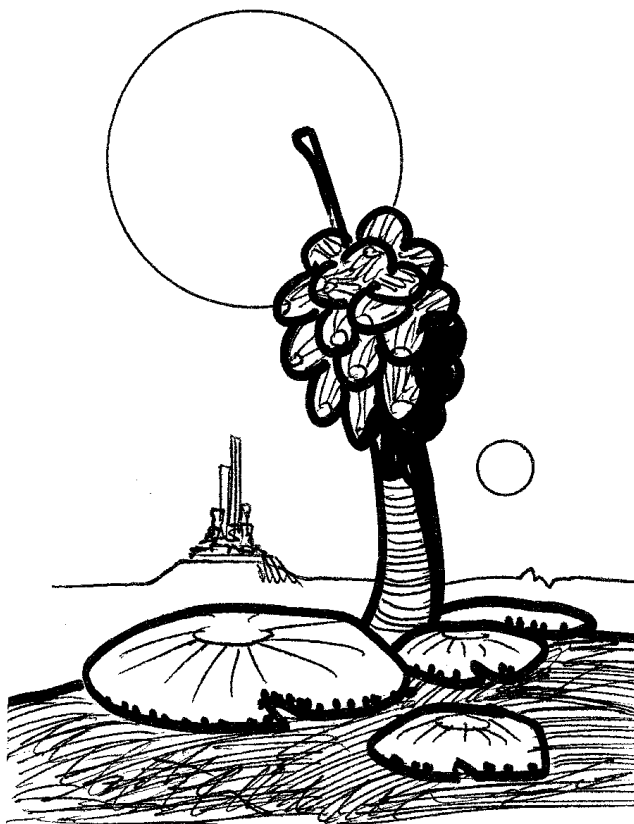


*W. B. B.*

DARE I TOUCH  
IT?

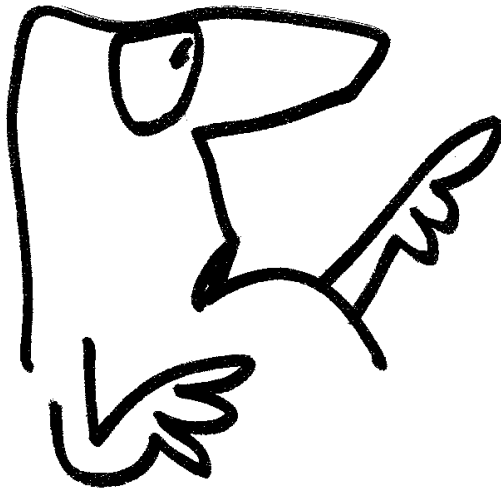


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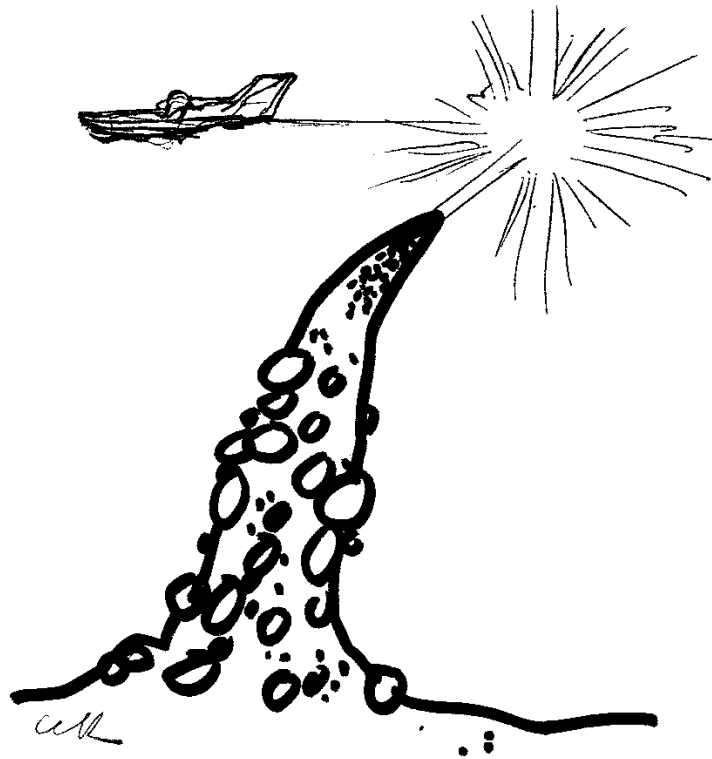




# THE UNDEAD LOC!



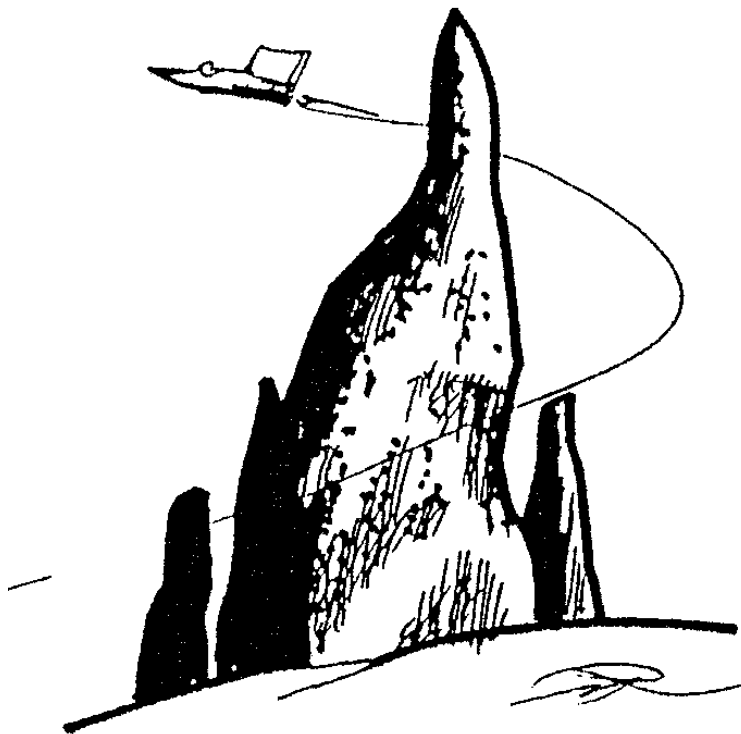
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I AGREE WITH YOUR  
RIGHT TO SAY THAT -



LOOK! A LOC  
WITH NO TWO  
WORDS ALIKE!



## William Rotsler Biography

Bill (1926-1997) was a noted porno film maker (no relevance here) and a novelist. He co-wrote *Shiva Descending* with Gregory Benford and also 5 Tom Swift Jr. books with Sharman DiVino under the joint name Victor Appleton, among other works. Most importantly from the fannish point of view, he was a veritable cornucopia of illos for any faned seeking his art. Just as you weren't a legit fanzine faned unless you published locs by Harry Warner Jr., you couldn't consider your zine "arrived" till you were able to publish Bill's off-the-cuff illos. He would send some to anyone who asked.

Bill's art was deceptively simple. Particularly his gags aimed at faneds. They seemed mere doodles. Yet his alien portraits, and his sketches of alien landscapes were far more evocative and emotive than such lack of detail had any right to be. They often seem like rough-sketch story-board art for proposed SF films. Certainly stirred my imagination and sense of wonder.

Several times Rotsler sent me envelopes stuffed with tiny slips of paper covered in his "doodles." I was proud to use them in *Space Cadet* and *WCSFAzine* and elsewhere. Some insist his art was never really art. I disagree. Every piece conveys the emotion of an off-worldly scene. No surprise to me that he won the Hugo for Best Fan Artist four times, in 1975, 1979, 1996, and 1997. Yes, it's a popularity contest. He was very popular. Deservedly so. I trust the pieces I selected indicate why.

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## LITERARY SHENANIGANS

### Hugos vs Vogels

The Vogels (named after Sir Julius Vogel) are annual fan-voted awards for excellence in the SF&F and Horror genres both professional and fannish in New Zealand, normally voted on by members of the *SFFANZ*, the *Science Fiction and Fantasy Association of New Zealand Inc.*, but this year including full members of the Worldcon, ConZealand, which was held online from July, 29 to August 2, 2020.

But, as Casey Lucas—one of the Vogel Winners—commented in a blog, "... *where was the New Zealand representation at the Hugo Awards ceremony? The New Zealand presenters? What of the karakia, the acknowledgement of mana whenua? Aside from a few jokes, a ramble about our gorgeous country, an admittedly brilliant segment on the artists who crafted the physical Hugo trophies, and a stuffed kiwi on a desk, there was no New Zealand content.*"

Granted, the Vogel Awards were broadcast, but, according to Casey, on Thursday opposite the Guest of Honour Keynote speeches, and thus seen by few. Worse, it was "tacked on" the end of the Retro Hugos which saw the viewer count dropping, in her opinion due to the tributes to "dead racists" Campbell and Lovecraft. She wrote: "*It was the equivalent of watching the crowd at your ceremony get up and walk out the*

*door just as you're about to take the podium."*

Furthermore, it turned out the free voters package of nominated works was never sent to the thousands of paid attendees so they never got a chance to read the works they were entitled to vote on.

It can be said the Worldcon organizers tried their best (?), but it is easy to see why many of the nominees, excited at getting to "share the stage" at the most important (?) world event in the genre, felt excluded as a minor piece of programming that wound up being shoehorned in any-old-which-way as a sop to the locals but "obviously" of no interest to the attendees. That may not have been the intent, but this was the impression left in the minds of many of the people most affected.

In her essay Casey put great emphasis on the joy of anticipation among her peers being transformed into a powerful sense of being let down almost to the point of feeling betrayed. I am tempted to speculate on what the powers-that-be in the Worldcon community might have to say about that, but since I have but a smattering of acquaintance with a tiny sampling of the SMOFs involved, anything I have to say would simply be reminiscent of online trolls nattering away on subjects they know nothing about (my natural tendency, admittedly), so I won't say anything.

Instead I've decided to print the complete list of the Vogel nominees and winners

You can read Casey Lucas' essay here: [A Vogel winner's opinion](#)

## **The Sir Julius Vogel Awards**

### **Professional Award Nominees**

#### **Best Novel**

- ***The Dawnhounds* – by Sascha Stronach, Little Hook Press**
- *The Blacksmith* – by Barbara Howe, IFWG Australia
- *Into the Ashes* – by Lee Murray, Severed Press
- *The Prince of Secrets* – by A.J. Lancaster, Camberion Press
- *Solar Federation* – by S.E. Mulholland, self-published

#### **Best Youth Novel**

- ***The Clockhill and the Thief* – by Gareth Ward, Walker Books Australia**
- *Tyrelia* – by S.R. Manssen, Manssen Publishing
- *Ringlet and the Day the Oceans Stopped* – by Felicity Williams, The Cuba Press
- *Dragon Rift: Riders of Fire book 3* – by Eileen Mueller, Phantom Feather Press
- *Light in my Blood* – by Jean Gilbert and William Dresden, Rogue House Publishing

#### **Best Novella / Novelette**

- ***From a Shadow Grave* – by Andi C. Buchanan, Paper Road Press**
- *We All Fall* – by Helen Vivinne Fletcher, HVF Publishing

- *Ventiforms* – by Sean Monaghan, *Asimov's Science Fiction* (Jan/Feb 2019)
- *Would She Be Gone* – by Melanie Harding-Shaw, self-published
- *Hunger's Truth* – by A.J. Fitzwater, *Gigantosaurus*, April 1, 2019

### **Best Short Story**

- ***A Shriek Across the Sky* – by Casey Lucas, *Sponge Magazine***
- *Losing Face* – by Lee Murray, in *Tales of the Lost Volume 1* edited by Eugene Johnson and Steve Dillon
- *Work and Income Gothic* – by Jack Remiel Cottrell, *Flash Frontier*, December 2019
- *The Fisher* – by Melanie Harding-Shaw, *Newsroom*, October 5, 2019
- *Chasing Oumuamua* – by Sean Monaghan, *Asimov's Science Fiction* (May/Jun 2019)
- *Proof of Concept* – by James Rowland, *NewMyths.com* Issue #49, December 2019

### **Best Collected Work**

- ***Year's Best Aotearoa New Zealand Science Fiction & Fantasy: Volume 1* – edited by Marie Hodgkinson, *Paper Road Press***
- *Into the Mire* – by Casey Lucas, self-published
- *Dark Winds over Wellington – Chilling Tales of the Weird & the Strange* – by Tabatha Wood, *Wild Woods Books*
- *Beyond the City Limits: Fantasy and Science Fiction Anthology* – edited by Kura Carpenter, *Wicked Unicorn Press*
- *Flash Frontier: Speculative Fiction Issue* – edited by A.J. Fitzwater and Tim Jones, *Flash Frontier*

### **Best Professional Artwork**

- **Cover for *Dragon Pearl* – created by Vivienne To**
- Cover for *The Dawnhounds* – created by Pepper Curry
- Cover for *From a Shadow Grave* – created by Emma Weakley
- Illustrations for *Tio Tiamu / Smelly Giant* – created by Laya Rose

### **Best Professional Production/Publication**

- ***Swords: The Webcomic* – by Matthew Willis**
- *Haunt.d* – by Kezia Tubbs

### **Best Dramatic Presentation**

- *Doctor Who: The Elysian Blade* – by David Bishop, BBC Audio



## **FAN AWARD NOMINEES**

### **Best Fan Artwork**

- ***Deet* – by Laya Rose**
- *Wandering Wild* – by Michelle Kan
- *Aliens vs Geysers* – by Kat Oliver
- *Wilder Girls* – Laya Rose

### **Best Fan Production/ Publication**

- ***Plant Life* – by Laya Rose**
- *Geysercon Program Book* – produced by Grace Bridges
- *Phoenixine* – produced by Lynelle and John Howell
- *Consequence LARP* – written by Callum Upton, Toby Stewart and Sarah Daymond

### **Best Fan Writing**

- ***SITREP* – by Alex Lindsay, A monthly column in Phoenixine**
- *Welcome to the Con* – by Grace Bridges, Geysercon Program Book

## **SPECIAL AWARD NOMINEES**

### **Best New Talent**

- ***Sascha Stronach***
- *Denika Mead*
- *Stephen Mulholland*
- *A.J. Lancaster*
- *Melanie Harding-Shaw*

### **Services to Fandom**

*Grace Bridges* – Chair of GeyserCon

### **Services to Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Horror**

*Melanie Harding-Shaw* – Wellington Writers Group.

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## **THE SUNBURST AWARD SOCIETY ANNOUNCES THE WINNERS OF THE 2020 SUNBURST AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE IN CANADIAN LITERATURE OF THE FANTASTIC**

Toronto, ON, August 31, 2020:

The Sunburst Award Committee is pleased to announce the winners of the 2020 Sunburst Award for Excellence in Canadian Literature of the Fantastic in Adult, Young Adult, and Short Story categories.

## **ADULT NOVEL**

The winner of the 2020 Sunburst Award for Adult Fiction is [Gods of Jade and Shadow](#), by Silvia Moreno-Garcia (Del Rey).

### **The Sunburst Jury commented:**

*Gods of Jade and Shadow by Silvia Moreno-Garcia is an exquisite genre blender with a painfully human story at its heart. Gods of Jade and Shadow masterfully mixes together fairy tales, romance, historical fantasy, a coming-of-age feminist story, and a lavishly detailed odyssey through Mexican history and mythology. It is truly a tale of the fantastic, defying categorization while celebrating the magic of imagination itself.*

“Mexican by birth, Canadian by inclination”, Silvia Moreno-Garcia is no stranger to the Sunburst family. Her debut novel, *Signal to Noise*, won a Copper Cylinder Award. Her short story collection, *This Strange Way of Dying* was a finalist for the Sunburst. She has edited several anthologies, including the World Fantasy Award winner *Cthulhu’s Daughters* (published in Canada as *She Walks in Shadows*). Silvia is a publisher of Innsmouth Free Press, as well as being a columnist for the Washington Post. She holds an MA in Science and Technology Studies from the University of British Columbia. *Gods of Jade and Shadow* was the 2020 American Library Association Reading List winner in the Fantasy category.

### **The other shortlisted works for the 2020 Adult Award were:**

- Scott R. Jones, [Shout Kill Revel Repeat](#) [Trepidatio Publishing]
- Helen Marshall, [The Migration](#) [Random House Canada]
- Karen McBride, [Crow Winter](#) [HarperAvenue]
- Richard Van Camp, [Moccasin Square Gardens](#) [Douglas & McIntyre]

## **YOUNG ADULT AWARD**

The 2020 winner of the Sunburst Award for Young Adult Fiction is [The Ghost Collector](#) by Allison Mills [Annick Press]

### **The Sunburst Jury commented:**

*Allison Mills' The Ghost Collector is both delightful and haunting. A delicious blend of the supernatural and the very real. Mills has great respect for her audience. Taking great care to keep the narrative moving while never simplifying the novel's ideas and themes of loss. The result is a nuanced study in empathy for both the characters and the readers.*

As the daughter of a teacher-librarian, Allison Mills grew up surrounded by books, and discovered an early passion for fantasy tales, which grew into a life-long fascination with ghosts. As someone who is Ililiw-Cree and settler Canadian, she sympathizes with those who like to straddle boundary spaces. And this fascination with the ghost world inspired her first novel, *The Ghost Collector*. Allison is an avid student, achieving three Masters degrees, including an MFA in Creative Writing. She works as an academic librarian and archivist.

**The other shortlisted works for the 2019 Young Adult Award were:**

- Nafiza Azad , [The Candle and the Flame](#) [Scholastic Inc.]
- Sara Cassidy, [Nevers](#) [Orca Book Publishers]
- Aviaq Johnston, [Those Who Dwell Below](#) [Inhabit Media]
- Jess Keating, [Nikki Tesla and the Ferret-Proof Death Ray](#) [Scholastic Inc.]

**SHORT STORY AWARD**

The winner of the 2020 Sunburst Award for Short Story is "The Fourth Trimester is the Strangest" by Rebecca Campbell [[The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction](#), May/June 2019]

**The Sunburst Jury commented:**

*With a brilliant eye for detail and a masterful sense of control, Rebecca Campbell has crafted an unforgettable and quietly terrifying story, one that combines domestic horror—in this case the disorientation of postpartum depression—with the supernatural in a seamless and thoughtful fashion. It is at once plausible and terrifying. The fragmentation of the central character's personality is believably and sympathetically drawn. As in all the best stories about mental disintegration, we are left wondering where the truth in fact lies.*

Rebecca Campbell's work has been in Canadian literary magazines such as *Grain* and *Prairie Fire*. She is also published in *Beneath Ceaseless Skies*, *Interdictions Online* and *Interzone*. Her first novel, *The Paradise Engine*, was published by NeWest Press in 2013. She received her Masters Degree in English at the University of British Columbia. Originally from Duncan, British Columbia, Rebecca now resides in Toronto.

**The other shortlisted works for the 2019 Short Story Award were:**

- Amal El-Mohtar, "Florilegia" [*The Mythic Dream*, Gallery/Saga Press]
- Kate Heartfield, "The Inland Beacon" [*Tesseract's Twenty-Two Alchemy and Artifacts*, July 2019]
- Catherine Kim, "*The Hundred Gardens*" [*Nat. Brut*, Issue 12, Spring 2019]
- Richard Van Camp, "Wheetago War II: Summoners" [*Moccasin Square Gardens*, Douglas & McIntyre]

The 2020 Sunburst Award jury members were 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 has celebrated the best in Canadian fantastic literature in both Adult and Young Adult publications since 2001.

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 Sunburst 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 Jonathan Auxier, David Demchuk, Cherie Dimaline, Gemma Files, Hiromi Goto, Rachel Hartman, Nalo Hopkinson, Guy Gavriel Kay, Thomas King, Ruth Ozeki, Joanne Proulx, Andromeda Romano-Lax and Geoff Ryman.

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 at [www.sunburstaward.org](http://www.sunburstaward.org).

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## RANDOM MUSINGS

### The Auroras are Just Fine

*By Robert J. Sawyer*

I attended the annual general meeting of the Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy Association, which was held by Zoom, due to the COVID pandemic.

The first issue the chair raised was what he considered to be a precipitous drop in the number of voters over the years. Years ago, he said, the number was in the mid-two-hundreds and he cited year-by-year figures showing a steady decline down to the current tally of 140 or so. Much discussion ensued about how to beef up the

number.

My feeling is two-fold. First, it's *not* an Aurora-specific issue, and, second, it's *not* even a problem.

The Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy Awards—the Auroras—are patterned after the World Science Fiction Society Awards, the Hugos. Both are fan awards, given not just *by* fans, rather than exclusively by professionals (as the Nebulas are), but also, in multiple categories, *to* fans—as well as to literary, artistic, and dramatic works, plus, in each case, an amorphous “related” category, where serious works of scholarship and the like can also be rewarded.

As the chair rightly noted, the sort of conventions that have been the traditional gathering places of so-called literary fans (meaning not that they have highfalutin taste, but simply that they read SF&F books at all), as well as what are termed “trufen” or “fannish fans”—those engaged in such mainstays of SF&F fandom subculture as producing fanzines or running not-for-profit conventions of a few hundred or occasionally a few thousand like-minded souls—are diminishing in number.

Gone are such literary conventions (and previous host venues of the Aurora Awards ceremony) as Toronto's SFContario and Montreal's Con\*Cept, and Calgary's venerable ConVersion which imploded after an ill-advised attempt to pivot into being a media con (one at which the principal attraction is actors being paid an appearance fee and at which the principal activities are paying for photo opportunities with or autographs from said actors).

Of those that are left, Vancouver's VCON, Edmonton's Pure Speculation, Winnipeg's Keycon, and Toronto's Ad Astra are running on fumes (although still very much enjoyed by those who attend).

The only out-and-out non-media successes in our Dominion are two conferences (they aren't “cons” in the traditional fannish sense) that now often take turns hosting the Aurora ceremony and whose organizers likewise alternate in receiving the “fan organizational” Aurora Award, namely Calgary's When Words Collide and Ottawa's Can-Con (the latter formally known in full as The Conference on Canadian Content in Speculative Arts and Literature).

Both are aimed squarely and solely at established and aspirant professional writers, both eschew such fannish mainstays as a masquerade, an art show, and freewheeling room parties (at WWC, these are replaced by “book-launch socials”). Indeed, WWC is a *general* conference for fiction and nonfiction writers in *all* categories—it has no special affinity for science fiction or fantasy, although, yes, its initial organizers certainly came out of the SF&F community.

I attend both WWC and Can-Con almost every year and love them—but they *already* take the Aurora Awards very seriously.

When people talk about bringing in vast new swaths of fans to beef up Aurora voting numbers, they usually mean finding a way to get young fans involved. But young fans, by and large, *aren't* SF&F readers, and have their own fandom traditions—they expect, for instance, their events to be high-cost and run to

professional standards (even if mostly staffed by volunteers).

These are the fine folk who enjoy the Calgary Comic and Entertainment Expo; Fan Expo in Toronto; Anime North, also in Toronto; OtakuThon in Montreal; and so called “comic-cons” across the country. They want to see actors and comic-book artists. Politely, they don’t need us—and *we don’t need them*.

If traditional fandom is shrinking—and it *is*, mostly through attrition as people get old and finally go on to that great hucksters’ room in the sky—then so be it. But is that hurting the Aurora Awards?

I say no. I had no horse in the race this year—I was not even eligible in any category except for related work (for my bimonthly columns in *Galaxy’s Edge* magazine) and wasn’t nominated. But I studied the ballot and, even more important for posterity, the actual winners this year, and my verdict is this: the Auroras are doing just fine.

Back when there were more Aurora nominators and voters, people often claimed they perceived voting blocs. Albertans were particularly prone to claiming that Ontario had somehow taken the bulk of the Auroras by perfidious means (the population of Ontario is 13,400,000; the population of Alberta is 4,300,000).

I’ve never bought into that paranoid fantasy, and it certainly wasn’t true in 2020: Best Novel went to Julie E. Czerneda of Ottawa; Best Young-Adult Novel went to Susan Forest of Calgary. Best Fan Publication went to R. Graeme Cameron of Vancouver; Best Fan Organizational to Derek Künsken and Marie Bilodeau of Can-Con in Ottawa. And so on.

In the past, we’ve also seen ballots with conspicuous omissions and even more conspicuous inclusions. When a Canadian work is nominated for the Hugo, the Nebula, or the World Fantasy Award, it *should* raise eyebrows when it has been squeezed off the Aurora ballot by lesser creations.

This year, though, the best short-form Aurora went to the most-generally-lauded Canadian-authored (or, at least, co-authored) work on the ballot: *This is How You Lose the Time War* by Amal el-Mohtar and Max Gladstone, which had already won the Hugo *and* the Nebula Awards.

In the past, we’ve seen huge numbers of votes of questionable pedigree: people who have no known connection to fandom but a personal connection to one of the nominees nominating and voting en masse, propelling dubious works onto the ballot and sometimes shamefully even winning the award.

(My own view has always been this: it’s perfectly valid to let habitual nominators know that you have a work you’re proud of that you hope they’ll consider, but it’s wrong to try to increase the size of the nominating pool by bringing in people who have never participated before, and, indeed, likely never have even heard of the awards before, who will likely preferentially favour you. You may hand your *work* to someone; you should never hand a *ballot* and your work—and certainly not your ballot and your work *and a ten-dollar bill* to someone.)

Thankfully, those days of hustling seem to have fallen by the wayside. Below are the fiction nominees for 2020. A finer list of deserving nominees even a blue-ribbon



panel of judges would be hard-pressed to put together—this is the wisdom of the crowds in action:

### **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
- “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

Canada, of course, prides itself on its diversity and inclusion, and, again, our Aurora ballots have long reflected that. I won’t belabour the obvious except to say that this year’s ballot was typically inclusive: people of various ethnicities, lots of men and lots of women, various gender orientations, and nominees drawn from across the country.

We also saw books from publishers big and small, stories from the American prozines and small semiprofessional Canadian markets, and established names and talented new ones side by side in each category.

What we have now is a committed, intelligent, and honest pool of nominators and voters who receive a comprehensive “voter’s packet” of nominated works so that they can make informed decisions. The result? The awards are doing precisely what they

were meant to do when founded forty years ago: honour the best.

The Auroras ain't broke, so don't try to fix them: they *work*, and I hope they will continue to shine for *another* forty years.

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

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

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## WHEN WORDS COLLIDE: A "Virtual" Triumph!

**Note:** Friday and Aurora Awards portion previously posted online in my Clubhouse Column at Amazing Stories Magazine. This is the complete review.

It was an exciting weekend. I'm just going to give a quick impression of my experience with the online *When Words Collide* Writers Festival. Numerous recordings are being posted online. Feel free to check them out.

Let me state that I believe the volunteers who put on the festival set the bar very high, to the point where it can be seen as a role model for others to emulate. Nothing less than a magnificent triumph with hardly any glitches.

First of all, it was free to anyone who wanted to attend.

Second, it was ridiculously easy to navigate. All you had to do was download the program which listed and described every event, with a link at the bottom of each description. Just click on the link at the appropriate time and you were in. Unless the item had already exceeded its cap of 100 participants. I was surprised at how many sessions maxed out. Amazing.

There were essentially four types of events:

First, presentations on you-tube or facebook where you just sat back and enjoyed the show.

Second, Webinars featuring 4 or 5 panelists where the attendees were not on screen and could not verbally interrupt, and chat comments were seen only by the panelists (depending on how the host set things up).

Third, relatively open zoom sessions where the attendees were sometimes visible and with chat comments seen by all.

Fourth, wide-open Zoom discussions where anyone could speak.

There were a few technical problems, rapidly resolved, and a number of Zoom Bomber intrusions, but all were dealt with quickly. Considering it was an all-volunteer technical staff, the "professionalism" of the volunteers was remarkable. So far, the best and most effortless and efficient online convention I've witnessed to date.

So much for the technical aspects. Now I'll give you a few quick impressions of the panels I attended. Keep in mind that I paced myself in order to stay sharp. So, I didn't watch panels continuously throughout the day. Several times I broke away to lie down for a rest. Not necessarily to nap, merely seeking to rest my eyes and my thoughts. Very much like my behaviour at actual cons pre-pandemic. Typically I'd start the day moderating a three-hour writers workshop, then go to my room and lie down for an hour. Once back up, I might attend a panel or two, spending the intervening time sitting in lounges talking to assorted friends and fen. A very laid-back approach. I tried to do the same with this virtual Festival.

## **FRIDAY, August 14, 2020.**

**1:00 PM** – *Knowing the Rules and When to Break Them*: Jonas Saul, Holly Schofield, Carol Parchewski, & Talena Winters.

Being an editor, I was keen on hearing how the panelists viewed the sanctity of Grammatical rules. Especially since I know bugger all about such, it being a subject too dry to stick in my brain. All my editing is done by gut feeling, basically.

I was very pleased to discover they all put emphasis on my personal mantra of doing nothing to distract the reader, of ensuring smoothness of flow with no jarring intrusions to knock the reader out of the story. That be my primary goal when editing contributions to Polar Borealis. I was amused that there appeared to be a consensus that attempting a "literary" style often proved the worst offender. In theory writing should be all about clarity and avoiding confusion. I agree. At the opposite extreme, "texting" conventions were seeping into submissions, a practice to be shunned and abhorred.

It was pointed out, what with millions of books being self-published every year, it is now literally a "buyer's market." A writer would have to be insane to risk annoying readers with an obtuse or obstructive style. Far too easy for readers today to toss the book aside, so to speak, and try someone else until they find someone they like. In short, shoddy writing is the path to oblivion. It leads to negative word-of-mouth spreading. Writers have to remember to try their best at all times. That means edit, edit, and edit some more.

Jonas referred to *The Bestseller Code: Anatomy of a Blockbuster* in which Jodie Foster and Matthew L. Jockers analyzed the heck out of 5,000 bestselling novels. Among other things, the authors of those novels avoided colons, semi-colons, and exclamation points. Hmm. Interesting.

**2:00 PM** – *Burnout—It's all in Your Brain: A Neurosurgeon's Perspective*, with Swati Chavda.

This was fascinating. We all experience burnout. In fact for some it is a permanent mode of thought and feeling. As someone who suffered from on-again off-again bouts of extreme depression for about forty years (seem to have grown out of it, thank goodness), I was interested if there was any link or comparison to burnout.

As Swati pointed out, most people tend to think of burnout as a temporary mood, similar to fatigue, that requires only rest and then gung-ho will-power to set right. Well, yes and no. Turns out burnout is a genuine psychological syndrome triggered by exposure to chronic stress. Inevitable symptoms include exhaustion, feeling of detachment, sense of ineffectiveness, lack of accomplishment, unwillingness to get out of bed and face the new day's challenges, and, most interesting of all, cynicism. To sum up "I'm tired and what's the use of coping with anything?" Hmm. I'm not sure how this is different from depression. Seems very similar. Maybe I suffered from perpetual burnout much of my life?

Point is, if you suffer from burnout it's not your fault. You're not some mentally deficient idiot incapable of common sense, but rather a victim of a common disorder virtually all people face off and on over the course of their lives. I would argue the stress of trying to pay the bills while struggling to earn a living income from writing is a common source of stress and burnout among writers. So, what's to be done?

The solution is complicated in that it involves many areas involving self-awareness and self discipline. First, get a grip on your resources. Meaning, make sure you have enough income for your needs, enough food, enough entertainment to please and distract, so that you don't worry over the basic necessities of life. Put your house in order, in other words. Get rid of all the mundane sources of stress.

Second, reignite your passion for writing. Watch out, too much passion can be destructive. Beware of dopamine addiction. This is the drug your brain produces to create a pleasure high. Often, simply accomplishing a goal triggers it. But the higher the goals, the less effective the dopamine. Ultimately, no matter what you accomplish, you become immune to a pleasure response. Accomplishment becomes drudgery. So, dial back your expectations. Aim for mini-goals easily accomplished. This leads to a low-key but steady production of dopamine at useful levels. You'll be happier and more content with your progress. (At any rate, that's how I interpreted what Swati was saying.)

Third, deactivate your Amygdala. Apparently, that's the part of the brain that floods your emotions and thoughts with flight or fight syndrome in the face of extreme stress. Try to remember why you wanted to take up writing in the first place. Cultivate the mind of a child (I do! Not much choice at my age, actually), and wonderingly ask "why?" about everything that interests you. Approach life with your sense of wonder. Stop thinking too much. Don't worry about life based on false and cynical assumptions derived from past experience. Explore life like an unusually intelligent newborn. Find the wonder. This is the path to joy. Makes sense to me.

There was a lot more advice in this lecture. Far from being hippie-dippy stuff, it was all based on typical psychological behaviour as directed by your brain chemistry and the proven means of altering your brain chemistry to improve your moods and viewpoint. Nice to have confirmed that human thought is a physical reaction to the real world around you and that concrete action can be undertaken to avoid needless mental suffering. A positive lecture, indeed!

**3:00 PM** – *Ten Things I Wish I'd Known*, with Mark Leslie Lefebvre, Angela Ackerman, Susan Calder, and Sarah Kades Graham.

I expected this to be amusing and possibly a source of practical suggestions to pass on to beginning writers. I was not disappointed. Mark remarked he originally thought that writing was just a matter of sitting at his typewriter and typing. He quickly found out he was spending much of his time preparing self-addressed stamped envelopes and keeping track of what he had or had not taken to the post office. Susan commented she was horrified to discover just because she liked her MS didn't mean an editor would. Angela mentioned she, too, had thought writing would be the hardest part but felt keeping on top of ongoing changes in the industry was far more challenging.

Much advice I don't remember who said it but it all hit home. For instance, doing intensive research is just a form of procrastination because it's a great way of avoiding criticism. Best to do just as much as you need to set the scene and then get cracking on the writing. Or, an extremely important point to ponder, you can't edit what you haven't written. Equally important, never show your work too early to other people. Their comments may kill your enthusiasm dead. (I know, that's something Ed Wood Jr. might have written, but it gets the point across.)

Basically, this panel brought up myriad house-keeping matters involving procrastination and how to avoid it. Or to put it another way, don't waste time thinking about writing, just do it!

**4:00 PM** – *Open Office Hours* with Mark Leslie Lefebvre.

An open discussion with Mark and several other authors giving advice. Very much like an open Zoom meeting. Even I chimed in once and a while. Mark had some particularly interesting suggestions to make. For example, don't be afraid to offer your e-books for free on occasion. Apparently it's fairly common for a reader, if they really like your book, to turn around and order a hardcopy to add to their physical library. I certainly hope that's true and very common!

On the other hand, He didn't think social media was of much use in hyping your book. He went so far as to say you don't *need* to push your books on social media. People resent it. Far better to concentrate on presenting yourself as a likeable and interesting personality. Even then, the fact you may have 4,000 followers doesn't mean more than a few of them will bother to buy your books. It's just a forum for social interaction. Push your authentic self as widely as possible on social media. In effect, social media doesn't sell books, you do, just by being yourself. I confess I'm not sure I buy this completely, but obviously it is what works for Mark, so worth considering.

Someone brought up the point that if a publisher charges for services of any kind, there's a strong probability they make their money off the authors rather than from selling their books. Definitely a case of "Writer beware!"

Quite a bit of more technical topics discussed, but I was getting tired, and after this panel was over I lay down for a while, then got up and cooked supper. That

invigorated me. True, I missed a bunch of good programming, but hey, every item I watched meant I was missing four other panels. The price you pay when faced with five track programming. So, I didn't feel particularly guilty taking a couple of hours off.

**7:00 PM** – *SF Canada Online Social*, hosted by Ira Nayman.

As a publisher and editor I am a member of SF Canada, which is a sort of SF&F writers union somewhere around 200 in number, I believe. I was happy to converse with authors I've known for years, happy to see and talk to authors I'd only corresponded with, and equally happy to see newcomers bouncing in to learn what SF Canada people were all about. I spent so much time nattering my memory circuits went dormant and all I remember is that I had a thoroughly good time. Pretty darn good substitute for the kind of social gathering that happens at in-person conventions.

I vaguely recall talking with Ira Nayman about hearing Robert Forward, author of *Dragon's Egg* and *Starquake* (among other hard science SF novels) speaking at a Vikingcon in Bellingham years ago. Forward mentioned he owned a castle in Scotland, but not because of his earnings from his books, but because of his income as a scientist working for the US military. Claimed he knew how to build an engine that would get a spacecraft to Mars in a week, and that he'd experimentally fired an anti-missile laser "death beam" *inside* the hull of a 747. At the time I figured he was just spinning yarns. I don't know about the zippity-do Martian flivver, but the anti-missile laser weapon actually works and is currently in production I hear. Yes, I did ask questions about the hyperfast spacecraft, but Forward replied with the classic line "If I told you I'd have to kill you." I confessed to Ira I was still wondering about that gizmo years later.

**8:00 PM** – *Virtual Pool Patio Party*, hosted by Mark Leslie Lefebvre.

Actually, it began at 7:00 PM, but I switched to it after the SF Canada Social was over. Supposed to end at 7:30 but kept on for quite a bit longer. Idea was to replicate a social event normally held beside the pool in the lobby of the *When Words Collide* hotel. Again, memory brain cells switched off. But I know I had great fun. Many of the people present were the volunteers behind the festival, some of them veterans of many years. It was delightful to meet them and learn something about them.

Eventually things wound down and so to bed. Tired, but happy.

**SATURDAY, August 15, 2020.**

Programming began at 10:00 Am, but I slept in. Didn't attend anything till Noon.

**NOON** – *Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy Association (CSFFA) AGM*. Moderated by CSFFA President Murray Moore and described by Robert J. Sawyer in his *Random Musings* article.



I'll just add that much of the conversation was devoted to questions of whether or not CSFFA needs to change or adapt its policies. Sawyer (as per his article) pointed out that much of what CSFFA is doing is successful and that we should build on this. I focused on what had happened with the Hugo Awards and suggested that, while fannish history is fine as a separate topic, the Aurora ceremony itself should avoid the dead weight of the past and concentrate entirely on celebrating the current nominees and winners who are in fact all that is relevant to the vast majority of contemporary fen. And, as I soon found out, that is exactly the procedure that this year's Auroras followed. I be very pleased. Fannish tradition is of interest to a tiny minority of fen. It should never be shoved down people's throats. What most fen are interested in is what is happening now and what's about to happen. That's where the life and vitality and spirit of modern fandom lies. This is what CSFFA needs to focus on, and apparently we are. Huzzah!

**1:00 PM** – *Access Denied*, moderated by Jenni Green with panelists Holly Schofield, Susan Calder, and Naomi Davis. "A panel for writers on how to handle rejections and critiques, and communicate with editors, agents, and publishers."

As an editor, I was definitely interested. Some of the more interesting points I noted:

- Actual feedback from an editor is rare and should be treasured. Pay attention to it.
- Beware of falling into the trap of taking criticism from a writers group for granted. Getting used to the same-old, same-old may prevent you from levelling up. Maybe switch to a new writers group.
- If a publisher demands a complete overhaul it is a sign your book is still in an early draft stage. Ideally they'll state specific improvements desired, which may spread ripples of change throughout the text, but nevertheless will spare most of the text. That's a good thing.
- Only accept valid criticism. You decide. Cherry pick what you need.
- Sometimes you don't know your own strengths. Criticism from a group should include praise for things done right, which is positive reinforcement.
- Be happy with your work, yes, but make sure it is marketable.
- Don't fight needless battles with your editor. Be aware of their house style. Don't overthink everything. Disagree only when important.
- Agents don't like wasting time arguing.
- When should you quit writing? Never!
- Don't internalize rejection. It's not about you, but the marketplace.
- The only thing you have full control over is your own behaviour. Keep that in mind at all times.

There was quite a bit more, but my memory is not what it used to be. This be my mantra for every panel in this review I'm afraid.

**2:00 PM** – *Amazing Stories Magazine*, moderated by Ira Nayman (Editor) with panelists Steve Davidson (Publisher), Kermit Woodall (Artistic Director), and Liz Hurst (Assistant Editor).

Since I was up for an Aurora Award for my columns in *Amazing*, no way would I miss a chance to learn more about the magazine.

Steve explained that a lot of other magazine editors think he's crazy to publish a paper zine when it's far easier and more profitable to stick to E-Mags. He feels current zines have given up too much of the traditional magazine elements such as a readable font size, an illo for every story, multiple styles of art, 3 column text, and so on. Besides, the smell and touch of a hardcopy is important. Adds weight to the reality of the zine.

In his opinion covers of other magazines tend to be generic and boring, often reprints of cover art from twenty years ago. While paying for fiction is expensive, purchasing new art is much more affordable. Why not acquire cover art that is exciting, evocative, and emotional? Nothing wrong with using modern artists. Modern digital art is often striking. Besides, if you're not using contemporary artists you're not really representing the genre very well. Speaking as Publisher of *Polar Borealis*, I agree with all of this.

Steve also commented that *Amazing Magazine* is a family-friendly magazine. There is a sound method to this madness. Surveys show there's a ton of young readers out there. He wants to attract them. They are the future bulk readership, after all. This is why the magazine prefers optimistic and uplifting stories rather than dystopian or depressing fiction. Life will sour expectations soon enough. No need to ruin young readers hopes and dreams ahead of time. (Well, last couple of lines I'm putting words in Steve's mouth. Merely my interpretation, actually.)

A great deal more was covered by the others, including the fact that the submission process is anonymous so all submitters judged equally. I enjoyed this panel.

**3:00 PM** – *Go Indie Now's Live Red Carpet Special Coverage of the Aurora Awards*, hosted by Joe Compton. Essentially a combination of his *Go Indie Now* and Joshua Pantalleresco's *Just Joshing* podcasts. Basically an Aurora Awards warm-up show.

Actually started at 2:30 PM. I joined at 3:00 PM. Randy McCharles of WWC was being interviewed by Joe against a vivid red carpet backdrop. Then Clifford Samuels, the boss of the CSFFA sub-committee actually responsible for the Awards, came on. He held up the new-style Aurora for all to see, commenting that while it lacked the sharp cutting-edges of the old-style Auroras, it was so heavy it constituted a useful weapon in its own right, especially if you dropped it on someone's toes.

Both interviews were a lot of fun, but I suddenly realized I was very tired, so I lay down for a nap. I gather that most of the nominees, plus some of the volunteers behind the awards, were set to be interviewed, but I wanted to be fresh and alert for the actual ceremony. Having forgotten to get in touch and arrange matters beforehand with Joshua, I was not one of the nominees scheduled to be interviewed.

Pity, but probably just as well. Ghu knows what nonsense I would have babbled. Anyway, from what I saw, the Red Carpet warm-up was lively and entertaining.

There were a number of panels I wanted to see, including Researching Alternative Histories and An Editor's Take on Dialogue, but it was probably better I had a sound nap. Then my adrenalin was free to overflow when the Aurora Awards ceremony began.

**7:00 PM** – *CSFFA Hall of Fame Inductions and Aurora Awards Ceremony*, with host Mark Leslie Lefabvre.

You can watch the entire Aurora Award ceremony here < [2020 When Words Collide You-Tube channel](#) >

## **2020 CSFFA HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES**

Heather Dale – Filksinger composer and musician

Cory Doctorow – Author, “*Down and Out in the Magic Kingdom*,” “*Little Brother*,” etc.

Matthew Hughes – Author, “*A God in Chains*,” “*What the Wind Brings*,” etc.

## **2020 AURORA AWARD WINNERS** – ( for works produced in 2019 )

### **Best Novel**

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

### **Best Young Adult Novel**

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

### **Best Short Fiction**

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

### **Best Graphic Novel**

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

### **Best Poem/Song (Tie)**

*At the Edge of Space and Time* – by Swati Chavda

*Bursts of Fire* – by Sora, Theme song for book trailers.

### **Best Related Work**

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

### **Best Visual Presentation**

*The Umbrella Academy* – Steve Blackman, Dark Horse Entertainment

**Best Artist**

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

**Best Fan Writing and Publications**

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

**Best Fan Organizational**

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

**Best Fan Related Work**

Derek Newman-Stille – Speculating Canada

This was a marvel of flawless efficiency. Mark Lefebvre was broadcasting from his apartment in Waterloo, Ontario, with his wife Liz furiously handling the technical aspects via computer off-camera to the left. Everything was 99.99% glitch free.

Clint Budd, the chief judge of the panel in the juried Hall of Fame selection process, introduced the inductees. Then Clifford Samuels, in charge of the Aurora Awards voting sub-committee, spoke about the Auroras and revealed the new look of the award. Absolutely wonderful that the history of both topics was kept to an absolute minimum. The focus was entirely on the current nominees and the winners to be announced. This in striking contrast to the recent Hugo awards.

Using my category as an example, the name of the category was shown in a pleasant slide with the Aurora Borealis over a forest as background. Then Mark read out a description of what the category was all about. Followed by a “slide show” depicting each nominee with Mark’s pre-recorded voice reading out the names of the nominees *correctly*. Again, in pleasing contrast to the Hugos. Back to Mark, showing him opening the envelope and announcing “And the winner is, R. Graeme Cameron, Polar Borealis, Editor.”

Cut to me (I’d been lurking in the “green room”) gaping in astonishment. Mark congratulated me, than invited me to have my say. I had my speech attached to a clipboard leaning against my laptop screen. In my nervousness I added about 30 extra words. The whole thing went more or less like this:

*“Wow. Needless to say, I am very pleased to accept this award. To explain ... my retirement hobby ... is promoting genre authors, poets, artists, editors and publishers. It’s because it’s loads of fun ... and is its own reward. So, winning an Aurora ... for my hobby activity ... is icing on the cake. Makes it even more fun.*

*Thing is, there’s an incredible amount of Canadian talent in the field today. Anything we can do ... you and I ... as fans and readers ... to promote and support these wonderfully creative people ... is vital and necessary in these hard times.*

*And that’s why I pursue my hobby ... why I support the Auroras ... why I support Canadian genre fiction. Not only for whatever good my support does ... but for the sheer fun of it.*

*Fact is I love to celebrate what other people in this wonderful and diverse field do*

*... both the professionals and the fans ... heck of a retirement hobby. I recommend you take it up now, even before you retire ... Thank you, everybody!"*

I was concentrating so hard on enunciating properly and putting passion into my voice (as opposed to my normal monotonous drone) that I literally didn't see myself even though I was leaning forward and my face rather filled the screen. As for my hand gestures, which my older brother commented "were quite good" I wasn't even aware of them. Purely unconscious.

I spent the rest of the day in a happy daze. Indeed, for several days following. And then my Aurora Award arrived in the mail. Wowzers!

**8:00 PM** – *Aurora After Party*, hosted by Mark Leslie Lefebvre.

Many of the winners and most of the nominees were present. A lot of excited smiles and congratulations all around. I guess I was more or less coherent. I didn't take notes. I just remember I had a good time, mostly listening to what others had to say. Some were celebrating with a glass or two. I no longer drink, but you couldn't tell from my broad smile and intermittent fits of giggling. Believe me, when it comes to winning an Aurora, I am the very opposite of jaded. Thank you everyone who voted for me! You made my year!

**SUNDAY, August 16, 2020.**

**10:00 AM** – *How to Win an Editor's Heart*. Moderated by Dwayne Claydon with panelists Suzy Vadori, Jonas Saul, and Diane Terrana.

Essentially how to apply simple fixes to your manuscript. Some of the points I noted:

- Proper use of tense one of the most common problems.
- Typos are minor. Contextual Dialogue is far more important.
- Avoid crutch words like "I think" or "suddenly" or "very."
- Don't overuse "that." It slows the pace.
- Avoid word count bloat. Readers skip over unnecessary words.
- When hiring an editor, interview them so you'll know what you're paying for. Don't skint on expense. A good editor is worth their weight in gold.
- Avoid anything which hangs up the reader and prevents them from turning the page.
- Avoid speech tags like "intoned," "queried," etc. Context should be clear.
- Be aware that if there's not enough story in the MS, it won't sell. A plot is vital. Literary writers think they can get away with no plot, but they're wrong.
- Don't lose your hired editor by being an ass. Editors will quit if they can't work with the author.
- Listen to your hired editor. They are here to help, to define where your MS is ready and where it's not ready.
- Don't rely on self-editing alone and then self-publish. You'll miss all your worst faults. A professional editor is worth the money.

I was startled to realize I was desperately tired. Too much excitement the day before, and not enough sleep. So I went back to bed. Missed the Space Force versus Mars panel, among others. Oh well, I hope to catch it when it is posted online.

By the nature of the next panel I tuned into you'll see I stuck to my focus on editing matters.

**2:00 PM** – *Jonas Saul on Editing*. “Editor and best-selling author Jonas Saul shares his experiences about editing and offers tips and strategies to improve your work.

I'm guessing Jonas is a workaholic. Certainly hard driven. Started his own business at 17 and was able to retire at 30. Then took up writing. He has sold more than two million copies of his 30+ books. Very much regards writing as a business. You have to invest \$ and effort into a book before you see a profit. He typically spends \$4,000 to \$10,000 on editors before he submits a book to a publisher, or self-publishes. I would add that most novelists don't earn that much per book, so he's not exactly a role model for beginners.

Still, his point that relying entirely on self-editing will produce an inferior product is well taken. Too often writers fail to see even their most grievous flaws. Other eyes are needed, the more the merrier, depending on your budget.

As I understand it, Jonas creates the plot first, then a first draft which he gives to Beta readers, always resulting in rewrites. Then it goes to a development editor who looks at the larger issues involving characterization, plot arc, and such. More rewrites. Then to a line editor searching out flaws like passive voice, awkward phrasing, continuity errors, etc. Then to a copy editor looking for grammatical mistakes. Finally, last of all, to a proofreader correcting typos. Then and only then does he self-publish or submit to a publishing house.

All through the above process he is shedding money like crazy. His book *Dark Visions* cost him \$10,000 USD to make it worth publishing. Then again, it was his biggest best-seller to date, so worth every penny he invested in its creation.

He pointed out that once you sell your book to a publisher, you completely lose control of it. The publisher owns the book, the intellectual rights, the copyright, and so on. Their editor makes the editorial decisions. They decide the cover, maybe even the title. They decide when and how to market. You, the author, are involved only as a courtesy.

Jonas, however, has sufficient clout he always has written into the contract he alone has the e-book rights. He also edits and produces his own audio books. Sound's like he is very much on top of things. Very much in charge of his writing career. Possible to imitate? Don't know. Certainly a writer to be envied.

One piece of advice struck me. There are apparently 5,000 differences in language use between American and Canadian writing standards. His point? Always use the American standard, because that's where your biggest readership exists, assuming you are being sold both in Canada and the USA.

I add the insignificant info that, since I publish Canadian authors primarily for a Canadian readership, I always use Canadian rules, even to the point of converting

American spelling to Canadian. This may seem odd, since the readership of my zine is 4 times bigger in the States than what it is in Canada, but I don't care. I charge nothing for my magazine, free to all who want to download it, so Jonas' sound business advice doesn't apply. But, I must admit, if your publication deal in the USA is going to be different than what you've arranged in the Canadian market, then it would probably be a good idea to submit an America-ready MS to the American publisher. I guess.

He had lots more interesting stuff to say, but I've recovered about as much as I can from my indecipherable notes. One quote is fairly clear:

"Books are never finished. They are, however, frequently abandoned."

**3:00 PM** – *Cities of the Future*, hosted by Tammy Lyn Carbol, with panelists B.G. Cousins, Ariel Kroon, Holly Schofield, and Ron S. Friedman.

According to my notes, they started off discussing the role of science fiction in defining both the problems and the solutions to urban evolution. On the one hand, all too easy to slide into dystopian visions of failure. On the other, very easy to apply single rather simplistic solutions that are in fact unworkable in the scheme of things. Still, SF can serve a purpose in getting people to think about the problem.

What's needed is long-term planning directed by intelligent political leadership seeking practical and economically viable solutions. Knowing what I know about politicians and economics, I immediately concluded we are doomed. I remembered that Mexico City has a phenomenal reputation for increasing its electrical, sewage and water services year by year. Best in the world, if memory serves. Unfortunately, due to the rush of rural poor into the city, the growth of slums greatly exceeds the growth in infrastructure services. Can't win. Can't catch up. Falling further behind as time goes on. Drastic redirection of national economies is needed to provide sufficient funding to "save" our cities. Political will tends to shy away from such things. Too risky.

Someone quoted William Gibson, "The future is here, just unevenly distributed." Someone else pointed out parts of downtown Vancouver still uses a multi-block steam-heating system more than 100 years old. It works. It's economical. Would be insane to replace it when there are more pressing concerns. A good many cities of the future will not "look" futuristic, at least not entirely, as much from the past will be retained. Transformation will be piecemeal. Gibson's quote will always apply.

I had expected a review of science fictional ideas concerning cities. Should they be domed? Contain towering structures of crystal and adamantine steel? Look like the cityscape in the film *The Fifth Element* with myriad levels and flying cars? Should they be self-contained like the colonies imagined for the Moon and Mars? Nope. None of that was discussed.

Instead the focus was on what combination of political will, scientific advancements, and economic reform would keep cities alive and functioning, never mind improving. The consensus seemed to be on identifying with European city planning (as European cities are often more liveable and "local" than North American

sprawl), European economics (high taxes improve standard of living and provide adequate funding), and European social reform (such as universal income which ends a lot of government red tape and stimulates the consumer economy). There appeared to be a strong implication that the American approach to city planning and infrastructure, in comparison to the European, would accelerate the decay of cities and city life. Look to Europe for inspiration. There people remain the priority.

It all boils down to living in a post-capitalist age where sustainability and human happiness is more important than money. All it requires is enlightened leadership, and dedicated and willful effort on the part of self-aware citizens. In other words, everybody calm down and do things sensibly for the benefit of all. Almost as if the solution lies in converting society into a gigantic hippie commune, in the best sense of that cliché concept. Everybody working together for the common good. That's what people deep down inside really want to do, right? Because of this we dare hope solutions will be found to what Henry Miller used to call "The air-conditioned nightmare?"

Alas, the cynic in me has doubts. Still, the usual riotous tumble of activist groups pursuing this or that specific cause (in terms of city improvements like better sidewalks or whatever) may force politicians to actually do something now and again. No master plan possible to enforce, but the collective incremental improvements brought about by a rather kaleidoscopic reform demand might ultimately amount to needful advances. I figure that's the best I am willing to anticipate, realistically speaking.

In sum, I'm not sure the panel brought forth solutions. But, at the very least, they listed a number of intriguing options definitely worth thinking about.

**4:00 PM** – *The Birth of a Poet*, Host Jennifer Slebioda, with panelists Sandra Fitzpatrick, Bob Stallworthy, Shawn Bird, and Amy LeBlanc. How do you, an undiscovered poet, discover the poet in yourself?

I was getting tired and didn't take many notes. To start with there was some discussion about whether describing oneself as "I'm a writer and a poet" means the same thing as "I'm a poet." I believe it was considered the former is expressed by someone not yet fully convinced they are a poet, and the latter by people confident in their ability as a poet.

Bob declared that poetry is not only a form of writing but also a form of storytelling that goes back to the earliest campfire tales. Poets are in fact bards "singing" to the reader/listener. Poetry is the most direct form of storytelling there is. Certainly has quite a pedigree. Nothing to be ashamed of.

Shawn brought up the idea that the use of poetry in novels is a striking and effective way to convey the character's emotions in a scene. That never occurred to me before. Interesting and useful technique, maybe.

Bob suggested that a poet should never, ever set out to write a book of poetry. Looms too large as a formidable task. Leads to much unnecessary worry about what sort of poems to attempt to write. Instead, far better to simply write a bunch of



individual poems as your whim and muse move you. Then once and a while go through them to see if you have enough related to a common theme. Seems like a sensible plan to me. Frees you up to write as many poems as you please, with the added advantage of occasionally publishing a chapbook whenever you figure you've got enough relevant material. Good advice, I figure. I'm a great advocate of worry-free writing.

**5:00 PM** – *Dead Dog Party*. Hosted by Randy McCharles.

Quickly built up to around 80 people. Everyone having a good time, in a celebratory mood. Then the Zoom bombers showed up and ruined everything. Randy was forced to shut the meeting down. He couldn't very well tell everyone his email address so that people could contact him to get the link to the new Zoom meet location, as the Zoom bombers would simply have followed as well. He had to hope most people already knew his URL and would think to check it out.

It took me about 15 minutes to think of that. So I was able to get back in, along with 37 other people, or roughly half of those who had shown up for the first meeting. Fortunately, many of the rest gravitated over to the *Open House* meeting hosted by Mark Leslie Lefebvre. It was supposed to close down by the time the *Dead Dog* was supposed to begin, but he kept his meeting running much longer than scheduled so it functioned as a kind of substitute *Dead Dog*.

I took no notes. I just remember everyone was really pleased how well the festival had gone, particularly the awards ceremony. Excellent work done by the volunteers. Set a role model standard for online cons if you ask me. I'm glad I attended.

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## BOOKS TO BE IGNORED: Catseye— by Andre Norton

I last read this book nearly 60 years ago. It was one of the first SF pocketbooks I ever bought, certainly in the first 10. I've always known that I liked it, but I forgot why, exactly. All these years I've been lugging it around with the rest of the personal library I refuse to part with, always liking the cover and assuming it was a good read. But when I decided to reread it in order to review it for *BCSFazine* I didn't anticipate it would be anything other than an entertaining juvenile fiction. I am surprised to discover it may have been a major influence in my life.

Basic setup: Humanity has expanded to multiple star systems where some planets are more powerful than others and wars are frequent. As a boy Troy Horan was happy enough on Planet Norden helping his family run a ranch, but like everyone else on the planet, was driven off by Commander Varan Di from Planet Kowar during the War of the Two Sectors. Now he's a refugee living in Dipple, a refugee camp/city for non-citizens on Kowar. As a Dippleman, he has no rights and

virtually no chance of survival. All very annoying, since Kowar is a pleasure planet catering to the rich and powerful from across the galaxy, but at best, all he can hope for is a menial job if any can be had.

The book begins with a robot assigning Troy a day's work at Kyger's Pet Store in Tikil, the city where the rich gad about. First job he's had in a long time. Pets are big in Tikil, the rarer and more exotic the better, and it turns out the rarest and most unusual come from Earth, now an insignificant backwater vaguely respected for being the origin of humanity but otherwise a bore.

Troy was chosen because he has a natural affinity for animals, being a ranch boy in origin. Long story short, he gets involved with some Earth critters, namely a pair of housecats, a pair of foxes, and a Kinkajou. All more than worth their weight in gold. Just for their pet value. They also happen to be intelligent, telepathic, and involved in a galaxy-wide conspiracy, albeit against their will. Troy finds this disconcerting. Takes him about half the book to get the gist of this, and not until the last page to work things out completely. You might call this an action adventure thriller mystery with many twists and turns. Much more complicated than I remembered or expected.

First thing that struck me is how cynical the book is. Everybody is not what they seem, and all are up to something. No wonder Troy keeps his mouth shut and his eyes and ears wide open. Kowar not a planet to loll about awash in complacency. Danger lurks everywhere. As Nerne, one of the Rangers looking after the Wild Lands comments "What does the past matter when the future swoops in for the kill?"

As a kid I was used to bad guys on TV and the movies. This book may have been the first time I was exposed to the idea that *everybody* might be a bad guy. I don't think my mother would have approved. But the animals on the cover look so cute. Obviously a children's book. *Not!*

Further, the book offers a gloomy prediction of what human expansion among the stars will mean. Some might consider prescient.

Nerne lectures Troy: "We have learned very little, most of our species. I can name you half a hundred planets that have been wrecked by greed. No, not just those burned off during the war, but killed deliberately over a period of years. As long as we can keep Kowar as a pleasant haven for the overlords of other worlds, some of them the greed-wrecked ones, we can hold this one inviolate. One does not want such desolation in one's own back yard. So far those of the villas have the power, the wealth, to retain Kowar as their unspoiled play place. But how long will it continue to be so?"

I suspect this passage planted the idea in me that mother nature is malleable and killable, preserved at the whim of the rich and powerful who are prepared at all times to destroy it should there be profit to be had. Tell me Andre Norton wasn't writing about today. I dare you. Anyway, pretty heady concept to find in a juvenile. The very opposite of the near-fascism found in the Tom Swift Jr. books of the 1950s and 1960s where science, a pair of fists, and a set of handcuffs solve everything. Norton seems to be suggesting we can't solve *anything* and are, in fact, doomed.

Speaking of which, I thought most of the book takes place in an alien forest where Troy and his fur-buddies are on the run from the bad guys. Nope. Troy crashes a flitter into a vast alien ruin, built by unknown aliens eons ago, which is off limits to everyone living on or visiting Kowar. Since an automatic forcefield, designed to keep people out, also keeps people in, Troy is forced to depend on his furry friends and their superior senses to lead him deeper and deeper into the alien labyrinth. In that it appears to have been abandoned, containing no machinery or artifacts, the civilization which created it must have met its doom too. Apparently civilizations have an expiry date. Much of the book covers Troy's journey within the ruin.

The reason the city is out of bounds is revealed. Seems an expedition led by an archaeologist named Faulklow attempted to search the lower levels of the ruin in hopes of finding artifacts. They took with them a device called a "Recaller" which, through some super-duper technology, has the ability to project shadowy images of past events. This often led to remarkable revelations in the ruins of other extinct alien races on other planets. Here, however, something approaching past reality was conjured up, resulting not only in all of the members of the expedition going mad, but many of them being torn to pieces. No one knows why. Hence the strict off limits policy.

Troy is not pleased to discover that the Recaller is still humming away where it was setup, not active exactly, but not dormant either. Who knows when it might start operating again? He is even less pleased when his furbabies warn him there are plenty of "not-alive-but-waiting" dangers lurking about. The sight of a canal of dark water in which ripples can be seen moving against the current is a bit unsettling. More so when he discovers other humans have somehow entered the ruin and are hunting him. Even worse, something unknown is hunting *everybody*. Troy finds it hard to sleep during rest periods. Can't say I blame him.

This is definitely one of my early reads which triggered my permanent interest in the concept of alien ruins offering great mystery and adventure. I perk right up when a derelict alien city comes into view. Or an abandoned alien spaceship. (You betcha I loved the opening sequences of the movie *Alien*.) Or even just an alien gizmo lying around. What's it for? What's it all about? What does it mean? I faunch for this kind of stuff.

In fact I believe this sort of early influence also triggered my lifelong interest in archaeology. There's a poignancy to every ruined building I find irresistible. To the point that I thoroughly understand the fad of building artificial ruins on one's estate. Started up in the Renaissance I believe. Canadian Prime Minister Mackenzie King was one of the last known practitioners, I believe. When Westminster Abbey was bombed and damaged during WWII Winston Churchill sent King some of the rubble knowing it would please him. But I digress.

The plot of the book, especially toward the end, is complex and unreliable, in that it is impossible to tell who the good guys are. Not till the climax are the tangles straightened out, the alliances and allegiances made clear, and motivations explained. Still leaves a lot of characters and organizations, which you might in

traditional SF consider good guys, under a shadow. No saints on *this* planet, or anywhere else.

Thing is this book not only activated my sense of wonder, it expanded the parameters of my mental landscape, in part by planting the concept of questioning everything.

For example, the cover is a lie. Troy does not have cat eyes. His eyes are normal. Obviously the artist took the title literally. Or perhaps he or she glanced through the book and came across the following comment by Nerne on the second-to-last page:

“I will admit that I am willing to have a catseye view of life.”

Regardless, it’s a nifty cover. Evocative. Everyone looks tense and alert, hinting at the darkness and paranoia within. Danger everywhere. That’s the lesson this “juvenile” offers young people. I find that remarkable. But then, this is a remarkable book. It’s not obsolete. It’s more relevant and meaningful now than it was in 1961.

Makes me wonder what I will find if I reread Andre Norton’s other books in my library. I may discover she’s a much darker writer than I remembered. Beginning to think her reputation as “merely” an author of entertaining juveniles vastly underrates her influence and impact on young readers. Heck, I’m thinking she may have shaped my life and mentality far more than Heinlein did with *his* juveniles.

If true, I be amazed.

**Note:** Andre Norton’s real name was Alice Mary Norton. Born 1912. Died 2005. After two decades as a librarian worked as a writer full time. In the 1950s and 1960s she wrote mostly SF, then became primarily a fantasy author. Almost always marketed as a “juvenile” writer, she wrote around 100 novels as well as some non-fiction works. I own just 12 of her books. All pocketbooks purchased in the 1960s.

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## REVIEWS DRENCHED IN MAPLE SYRUP (Canadian Zines & Books Worth Reading)

**Dragon-Rain and Other Stories** – by Eileen Kernaghan

I reviewed this collection in my Clubhouse Column in *Amazing Stories* (online) Magazine on August 28<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

As a sample, this is my review of the story *The Weighmaster of Flood*.

*Premise:*

An old wooden bridge is the only lifeline to the outside world for a tiny post-flood community. There is no timber available to repair it. Hence the extreme importance of

the weighmaster who determines whether a transport wagon is light enough to cross the bridge without causing it to collapse. He's lucky if the merchants toss him a few moldy turnips or a piece of cheese in payment. His pregnant wife requires healthier food. What's an honest bureaucrat to do?

*Review:*

In contrast to the previous story this post-apocalypse dystopia depicts a world where subsistence-level survival is the most anyone can hope for and is not at all guaranteed. Here tradition and duty are vital because maintaining them prevents individuals from giving in to despair. Unfortunately, there is no cause for hope. One has to be satisfied with a harsh and bitter life, because things can only get worse. As indeed they do.

What makes this story worth reading, apart from the unexpected and shocking ending, is the perfectly credible logic behind what at first seems like an arbitrary and Kafkaesque requirement. In fact the survival of the community depends on it. That it involves a very low level of technology, yet utterly irreplaceable, once gone it's gone forever, adds a touch of poignancy to this sad tale. Some post-apocalypse visions, such as the *Mad Max* movie series, suggest post-apocalypse survival can be dynamic and exciting. The reality is probably much closer to what Eileen depicts, dull survival hanging by a thread easily broken.

This is not a happy tale, but its message is well worth contemplating. Packs a lot into what seems at first glance to be a straightforward story about a simple, basic lifestyle and culture. In truth a simple world is not a safe world. The lack of options can be truly terrifying. Another thought-provoking and powerful story.

See the full review here < [Dragon-Rain](#) >

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## CHURCHILL EDITED, TOO

I am reading *Assignment: Churchill*, the memoirs of Scotland Yard Inspector Walter H. Thompson, who was Winston Churchill's bodyguard for 19 years. It's a great source of information regarding Churchill's nature and personal habits. He wrote a great many articles and books. And then there's his speeches. Churchill had a particular method of composing them which may be of practical interest to those of you who are writers. Thompson writes:

*"To the question 'Does he write his own speeches?' the answer is a decided 'yes.' He writes every word of his speeches. He moves about rooms, declaiming, changing sentence structure, asking for lines or whole paragraphs to be read back to him. Often he is looking down at jottings in his hand, thoughts put down previously and mentally studied over till the actual moments of speech creation have arrived. Putting a speech*

together is a desperately exciting task of composition for him.

From the clerical side of it, he dictates to either of his two personal secretaries using a typewriter. He allows shorthand to be used only when travelling by car. All such work is transcribed as soon as the typist comes in contact with a typewriter.

When Mr. Churchill decides to compose a speech, he usually gives his secretary a good notice of it. She clears away all other work and settles before a typewriter. Sometimes Winston forges ahead with little apparent effort for many pages before inspiration seems to run out. On other occasions he will pace up and down the room, murmuring words and phrases over and over, trying them out on himself, before he is satisfied that the exact meaning has been put into words which cannot be misunderstood or misinterpreted. Warming to his subject, Mr. Churchill will enter so completely into what he is dictating that tears will sometimes literally stream down his solemn face during the evolving of a particularly dramatic passage. All of Churchill's writings have measurable emotional content. Similarly, when composing some of his famous epigrams—the humorous ones—a wholly delighted expression will come over his face and he will chuckle at his own invention and look gleefully at his secretary to see if he is being adequately appreciated.

When a speech has been dictated and typed in its first draft, Winston takes the typed sheets and goes over them carefully, word for word, erasing here and substituting there, until he can see no further cause for complaint. The whole is then retyped. This process is repeated two or three times. Finally it is put into what is known as 'speech form.' This consists of arranging the matter on octavo sheets of paper in what looks like a form of blank verse. Paragraphs, sentences and even phrases are separated to facilitate delivery when the time comes. And when it does come, he deviates hardly at all from the finished script."

Yes, he was renowned for his ready wit in parliamentary debate, but when it came to important speeches, he polished and polished them until they became the oratorical masterpieces that that he is still remembered for. In sum, editing is never a waste of time. It is a path to acclaim equal with the act of writing. Don't neglect it.

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## THE LIGHT-HEARTED VITUPERATOR AND JOLLY REVILER: How the Gathering Places have Changed ...

*By Stan G. Hyde*

**"What is Man?" they'll ask.**

**Or perhaps: "What is a city?"**

**Or: "What is a war?"**

***There is no positive answer to any of these questions.”***

So is the discussion to the puppies from the pacifist dogs who have inherited civilization in Clifford Simak's CITY.

For those who know it, the novel (made up of separate stories from ASTOUNDING from 1944 to 1951) tracks the abandonment of cities and urban society, (originally because of fear of nuclear war) while humanity fragments into individual families ... with robots working as servants to them ... eventually clearing the way for civilization of dogs, other animals up-lifted by the dogs, and finally ants.

The original stories were written around World War 2, and humans do not fare well in them. Essentially humanity is flawed in a way that the other animals are not, and we can't seem to overcome our innate aggressiveness ... even when isolated.

Simak didn't really get over that feeling.

In a coda written in 1973, the robot servant Jenkins lives alone on Earth, surrounded by Ant Hills.

(Dog civilization was unable to halt the spread of the ants, and were pressed to the point that they asked Jenkins to awaken some humans from suspended animation to ask what they would do. The human answer is to feed the ants slow acting poison so they will take it back to the hive and all will die. Jenkins realizes the pacifist dogs will never accept this solution, so he tells them that the humans—"Websters"—have no answer. The dogs moved off planet and left the Earth to insects.)

As Jenkins is about to leave Earth, to go to the robot worlds, he realizes the ant city is dead and breaks inside. He finds that a single sculpture is infinitely repeated inside: a human boot kicking over an ant-hill.

So even by 1973 Simak's vision of our nature hadn't particularly changed - but he always expresses things in such a gentle pastoral way that I can't help but feel some tears welling up in the corner of my eyes, and I recommend the book if you've never read it. If you worry about its vintage, well, Michel Houellebecq, in a 2010 interview with the *Paris Review*, describes the book as a masterpiece.

And judging by the news these days ... Simak's observations about our nature as a species seems as true today as in 1944....

CITY has been weighing on my mind lately, because the notion of abandoning the cities, or at least the 'gathering' way of life, seems to be a possible outcome of life post Covid-19. If it is a pandemic which is responsibly for the abandoning of the gathering way of life rather than fear of nuclear holocaust; nevertheless, there are some similarities to Simak's scenario

And it's not all a bad thing.

I'm using zoom and Skype for my job. (I'm missing travel to exotic locals like Cardiff and The Hague ... but not really missing air travel that much.) By and large, virtual meetings work pretty well.

Better yet, I may be spending more time with my far-off friends than I ever did. A group of us now gather every Thursday night to watch movies and television series on

ZOOM. Stretched across the country from New York, to Ann Arbor, to Chicago, L.A. and Vancouver—we used to count on trips to a convention in Chicago (or occasional trips to Japan together) as our ‘fannish family’ time.

Now we meet every week online.

It has its drawbacks—you can’t give anyone a hug—but right about now you’d probably hesitate to do that anyway.

I have one other meeting with fannish friends in the week, hosting by our God Editor, which I make occasionally. Frankly I’ve made it to more virtual fan club meetings than I have made to in real life meetings in the past decade.

So overall, I may be spending more time getting my fanac on now than ever before, and it’s good to see people and talk to them, even if we’re not in the same room.

I can’t help but think that as this pandemic drives this technology further forward, as in CITY, that there will be less and less need to leave my house to do essentials like work.

Half my groceries each week now arrive at the door from online ordering. . . along with helpful recipes. I’m a much better cook at this point, and more adventurous to boot. Flowers are delivered from online every two weeks, so my surroundings are much more pleasant (although the lilies have stirred up my allergies).

Though I still make trips to the store, there is less and less reason.

This week I ordered a model kit from Amazon Japan, which arrived in three days, and Katie ordered a sweater from Ireland, which arrived in two days.

The world has become smaller, and I’m connected to it through the screen that I’m viewing as I type these words. I still find this amazing, though I’m sure younger folks are thinking, ‘so what?’

Sigh ... there are things I miss the old, slow, analog world.

My writing tend to get finished close to deadlines ... so at one time I would finish writing the column, put it on a disc, print it at a friend’s house and drive it to the God-Editor’s house ... frequently the process all happened at some time after midnight. (This tended to result in much good conversation, and often video game playing, at a time at night which was unhealthy for both of us.)

Alas, the days of spending time together is gone, but I won’t have to drive to Nanaimo to give this column to Graeme when I finish it.

So are the days of Simak’s CITY upon us? Is this the first act of the dissolution of the times of gathering?

I wonder...

To borrow an idea one of the stories from Simak’s book, *Huddling Place*, I wanted to talk briefly about some of the online “huddling places” I’m responsible for, and as always invite folks to join in if they are interested.

I have a Pinterest page, a twitter account, and an instagram account ... but they pale in comparison to the time spend on Facebook.

It pains me somewhat to say this, as Facebook is responsible for the spread of some less than ethical information (I can’t begin to tell you my personal page was



inundated with false stories about Hillary Clinton being responsible for murders, treason and even the abuse of children in dungeons under pizza parlors.)

However, as an easy way to publish text, pictures, and files that can be instantly shared with other people it remains a useful, if ill-managed at times, resource.

Besides a personal page—just Stan Hyde—I manage three groups that focus on fannish interests online. I’ve provided a link and some discussion of the groups below. We’d be happy to have you join us—all the groups are moderated by me to make sure they stay on topic.

### ***FACEBOOK MONSTERLAND***

This group is focused on giant monsters—most people who know me probably expected that I would run a page focused on the subject. At this point there are a little over 8,000 participants from around the world

*“The monsters look almost cute when you see them this way.”*

The group is supposed to be family friendly. Please no swearing or (even if it's topic-appropriate) nudity. Please no posts that are bound to create argument (and are off topic anyway) such as posts about Politics, Religion, et cetera. The focus of this group is giant monsters, in particular Japanese giant monsters and kaiju film and television. Other ‘International’ giant monsters may also apply to Monsterland ... Ymir sized (approx) and larger.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/136983692987284/>

*I run two other relevant FACEBOOK groups.*

If you are a Monster Kid, or especially interested in other science fiction, fantasy, horror, and monsters in general.

### **MONSTER FIGHTERS INTERNATIONAL HEADQUARTERS**

We deal with art, toys, movies, television, and everything to do with Monsters! Home of the MONSTER OF THE WEEK (when I get around to it). The idea is to reminisce a bit about movies great and not-so-great, and also turn people on to those movies if they haven’t experienced them before.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/58198980959/>

If you’re interested please think about joining us.

And finally, for those folks who are creating science fiction and fantasy objects in 3 dimensions ....

### **MONSTER ATTACK TEAM INTERNATIONAL**

Basically this is an online model club for folks who like to build fantasy and

science fiction model kits. (In this case, it could easily be an original creation in any medium ... so the “kit” can be one’s imagination.)

It’s an extension of the local club (*Monster Attack Team - Canada*) which has been meeting since 1989 ....

Though many of us are based in the Lower Mainland of the West Coast, the online group is an International conversation for people who love building monster models, dinosaurs, science fiction subjects, Mecha, and anything else “so long as it's not real.” There are folks from Japan, England, and of course the USA. We would be happy to add more and see pictures of your creative projects. As well, the idea is also to answer questions for folks who are beginners or trying out something new.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/57336069342/>

Looking forward to meeting up with you online ....

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## MILLION WORD YEAR BLOG

(Thoughts Inspired by an Interview with William Gibson)

*By Michael Bertrand*

*(Originally posted online October 31, 2010)*

I am listening to a podcast from the CBC in which Nora Young is interviewing science fiction scion William Gibson about his latest book, *Zero History*.

I’m only three minutes and change into the interview, and already my mind is abuzz with ideas, because apparently the central theme of *Zero History* revolves around the idea that, in response to the increasing availability of traditional luxury goods to anyone who merely has enough money, the currency of the old idea of luxury and glamour has been completely worn out. When you are wearing the exact same thing every other wealthy person is wearing, and the old money and the new money is dressed exactly the same, well, what’s the point? The idea is to make you feel like you are part of an exclusive club of only the very best people, but if some working class schmuck who won the lottery can wear the same clothes as you, well ... might as well go naked.

And honestly, there is only so expensive clothing and other luxury items can get. You can only put so much gold leaf and other ridiculous accouterments on something for the sole purposes of making it more expensive, and most wealthy people would consider that hilariously tasteless and garish anyhow, so you are not going to solve the problem like that anyhow.

So what do you do when too many of the wrong people can afford the very best in the world? You are a shallow and vain rich person, so developing real values is out of the question.

The solution is brilliantly simple: secret fashion. Brands so elite, so exclusive, that even to know they exist, you have to know just the right people. Imagine the fun of showing up to some event in a fabulous new outfit and beautiful new jewelry, and when the others ask you where you got it, you can just smile and say “I’m afraid I can’t tell you...it’s a secret. They swore me to silence!”

Now *that* is exclusivity. An artisan or clothier could leverage their brand into the stratosphere and create enormous margins merely by producing a very small amount of goods for a very small number of customers and convincing them that this makes them part of a super exclusive club, not just the only people dumb enough to buy something nobody has even heard of.

Of course, this would be an extremely risky operation. You would be asking your wealthy customers to take a big gamble that their peers will envy their exclusive access to chic luxury items instead of mocking them for being out of touch or weird, and that means the goods you make and sell this way have to be inherently impressive to the right people in exactly the right way. Without the widely recognized name to buy you cachet (Darling, it’s a *flaming queer* brand, and I think they know more about fashion than you!), the clothes (or whatever) have to sell themselves on effect alone.

But if you could pull it off, well, people will pay a hell of a lot of money in order to try to get one up on the other rich people. Whether you are poor as dirt or filthy rich, there is always a market for products to make the purchaser feel like they are better than their peers. The human hierarchical competitive instinct is inescapable. No amount of money can insulate certain sorts of people from the need to know where they are relative to their tribe. The rabid pursuit of money in search of status is, ultimately, futile.

Rich or poor, the best long term strategy is to please yourself and to hell what other people think. That way, you do not build your castle on the shifting sands of the opinion of others.

Myself, I am a fairly self-contained person. When you have had as much social isolation as I have, there really is no other option. You have no tribe, no group of peers to have a place within, even at the bottom, and so you have to develop the ability to, if not exactly make up your own mind about your own self-esteem, at the very least find some way to function with very little social input.

So I do not give much thought to what others think of me. I truly do not care about the opinions of most people. I care about the opinions of people I know and like, and I care about the opinions of people I don’t know personally but know and like their work or otherwise think they are intelligent and thoughtful people and therefore their opinion merits some weight.

I mean, who gives a shit what morons think of you? They’re morons! Ditto for the unenlightened, the morally inept, the heartless, the unevolved, and the small of spirit ... midgets of the soul.

To a lot of people, this all sounds like boundless arrogance. I suppose it is, but for me, it is basic to my personality that there is nobody’s judgment I value more

highly than my own, and that is not because I think I am the smartest person who has ever lived or that I know better than everyone about everything, but because my own judgment is the only one I can verify. I can examine all the reasoning that goes into my judgment and decide if it is sound or not. Therefore, I make up my own mind about nearly everything.

Of course, I defer to superior knowledge. If I think one thing about a fact of history or English literature, and my far more learned roomie Joe says another, I will assume he is right and I am wrong. He knows more than me about those things. If I am really sure, I might look it up online, but even then, I would be doing so in expectation of being proven wrong.

I have a lot of knowledge in this head of mine, but it's very eclectic and scattershot. I know little bits about a lot of things but not a whole huge amount about any one thing. I am thinking and judging oriented, not knowing oriented. That is why I am good at trivia, but not great. And, I suppose, it's why I was always a B student and not an A.

But when it comes to matters of judgment or opinion, I make up my own mind entirely. I listen to what others have to say, and I am always looking for more perspectives to add to my own and further refine my view of the world, but when it comes down to it, I decide what I think.

As, I suppose, does everybody. Or at least, they think they do.

But you'd be surprised (or maybe not) at how some people react to a person who is politely but firmly confident in making up their own mind. They almost take it personally, like how dare you make up your own mind on things when there are so many really smart people in the world.

They might be smart, but I am the only person who has to live with what I decide 24/7. So I will trust in my superior incentive and verifiable process.

And it is my considered judgment that that is quite sufficient!

Now what the hell was I talking about again?

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## MESSED-UP MOVIE MOPES

**The Keep** (1983) – I've written about this before as a film that impressed me when I saw it in the theatre in 1983 but have been unable to watch since because it was suppressed by its director and studio. Finally acquired a decent quality DVD via Amazon and got to see it again. Another item crossed off my bucket list.

Quick summation: a visually stunning film defeated by odd direction and poor editing.

Opens with shots of a convoy of Wehrmacht vehicles moving through the narrow Dinu pass in the Carpathian mountains of Romania during the opening stages of the German invasion of Russia in 1941. Impossible to get a clear idea of how many

vehicles in the column. Three or four, maybe. All the vehicles are authentic, including a standard type of German half-track pulling a field kitchen. Editing consists mostly of close-up shots of wheels turning. Seems designed to convey the *idea* of a convoy rather than *reveal* the convoy. An artsy approach. The strength of the film. And one of its weaknesses.

The convoy pulls into a village. It is refreshingly different from the usual villages one might find in, say, a Hammer film. The architecture is quaint, and somewhat odd, or at least unfamiliar. The church is circular and covered with fading, painted murals of Saints. The natives stand about in colorful embroidered costumes. High cliffs loom to either side because the village sits at the bottom of a narrow ravine. It has an ethereal if claustrophobic beauty. Impressive.

Even more impressive, the Keep. High stone walls slope against the cliff face. There are no battlements. The walls simply merge with the cliff. A single entrance, wide enough for vehicles, leads into a huge, roofed courtyard (we never see the ceiling) off which a labyrinth of corridors run. Fittingly, given the title of the movie, the Keep is bizarrely unique, an oppressive character in its own right, maybe even *the star* of the film. Creepy from the get-go. Full marks for effective set design.

To get into the keep, one must drive across a rickety-looking wooden bridge over a moat seemingly hundreds of feet deep. Not for a minute did I buy the concept the bridge would support the weight of the vehicles. In fact, there are no scenes, as far as I remember from my viewing, of that happening. Though one or two are seen entering the interior courtyard.

First things first, the commander, Captain Klaus Woermahn (played by Jürgen Prochnow), runs into the castle janitor and his two sons. Seems the family has been looking after the castle for generations, all the while never being paid or knowing who the owner is. Plus, they never spend the night in the castle. Refuse to say why. Okay, also creepy.

The Commander notes that the outside walls are made of small stones with a climbable slope, but the interior wall against the cliff face is constructed of massive stone blocks. He comments "This wasn't built to keep people out, but to keep something *in*." Before he pursues this line of reasoning further, he breaks for lunch, or something. But *we* know there's definitely something to worry about, don't we?

Unlike Hammer castles, which are stuffed to the gills with assorted Knick knacks, the Keep is devoid of furniture and decoration, apart from a row of metal crosses set into the stonework. They look silvery, but the janitor swears they're made out of nickel. Nevertheless, one of the Soldaten tries to pry one loose with his bayonet. The Woermann loses his cool and rants at the guy, condemning him to a week of sentry duty. Commander a bit on the edge it seems.

Come nightfall said soldier (I'll call him Gunther) is on duty at the castle entrance. A buddy stands out in the open on the far side of the moat. Both look miserable. The cross at the back directly opposite the entrance begins to glow, and I mean *glow*, with all the intensity of an anti-aircraft searchlight. Gunther runs toward it like an idiot moth attracted to the light, convinced it is indeed made of silver. I'd be

running in the opposite direction. Not natural for metal to glow like a miniature sun. Something wrong! Don't know what, but I wouldn't hang around to find out.

Anyway, he and his buddy pry out, not the cross, but the block of stone it is embedded in. This reveals a crawlspace with an even bigger cross at the end. They tie their belts together, attach one end to Gunther's ankle, and in he goes. While scrabbling at the larger cross its block of stone falls away into a black void. We see "Gunther" peering into the darkness, and the camera falls back so he and his flashlight become a tiny point of light high up the wall of a truly gigantic cavern.

Pulling further back, we see a double line of square columns, a ceremonial roadway perhaps. A light flashes down the road and drifts up the cave wall toward Gunther. Cut to his buddy pulling on the belt, pulling out Gunther. Surprise! His head and upper torso are missing. Then the second soldier is hurled against a wall. Yep, super-duper creepy. Throw in lots of light and smoke effects to add to the camerawork, and the whole sequence is surreal and eerie. Very effective. The film is building suspense and dread nicely. Alas, it begins to go downhill after this.

We've seen the arrival of the "good" Nazis, or at least "ordinary" Nazis, commanded by a chap who seems a decent sort, if a little high strung. Now the "bad guy" Nazis show up. We can tell, because they're wearing black uniforms with the standard brightly-coloured swastika armbands.

This is where the film begins to shed credibility as far as realism goes, and enters the realm of metaphor and unnecessary political lecturing (we already know Nazis are evil). The black uniforms are supposed to be S.D. Einsatzkommandos (S.D. a police branch of the S.S.), but they're wearing dress uniforms of a type never worn outside ceremonial or social functions. Certainly never on active duty anywhere near the front. Granted, no big deal. Nobody cares. It's just a gimmick to make sure the audience understands *these* Nazis are *the* bad guys, worse than the others, and as such are justification for the moral dilemma to come.

Just to drive the point home, the black-uniforms (I'll just call them S.D. from now on) round up some villagers and shoot them as punishment for supporting the partisans who've been killing the German soldiers in the Keep. Shocking scene, and to those who know their history, standard practice in the occupied countries.

Captain Woermann comes running up and tries to stop the shooting. He has two points, both delivered in a histrionic fit of passion: there are no partisans, and the Romanians are Allies. How dare the S.D. shoot them? This cuts no mustard with S.D. Sturmbannführer Eric Kaempffer (played by Gabriel Byrne).

We learn, in addition to the two soldiers we witnessed being killed earlier, three more have died. That's news to us. Also that Woermann had requested permission for his unit to go elsewhere, but his superiors had sent the S.D. to help out instead. I get the feeling a connecting scene or two had been edited out, to the detriment of the flow of the story.

I have to say the Woermann's anger over the hostage shootings is jarring. The regular army was under standing orders to aid and even participate in such "counter-partisan" measures. That he would object on the grounds that there were no

partisans is one thing, but the sheer intensity of his moral outrage is totally unconvincing coming from a German Officer. What it in fact represents is the moral outrage of the modern audience. Fair to say the frequent debates and arguments between these two men in the course of the film are designed to allow the viewers to vicariously vent their contempt for hardcore Nazis. An opportunity to go back in time to slap the bastards in the face, so to speak. But this aspect of the movie, where we get to observe Nazis being lectured by other Nazis about what jerks they are, strikes me as an element that drives the viewer out of the plot and situation, rendering it near impossible to merge with the ongoing flow of events. This is what I mean when I say this film is more about ideas than storytelling.

A lack of necessary explanation, possibly due to over-zealous editing, is one of the self-defeating practices built into this film. For example, once the Demon of the Keep is roused to action, we see a man with glowing eyes (played by Scott Glen) wake up in a bed. So, we know he's supernatural too. Turns out he's some kind of Guardian assigned the job of destroying the Demon should it escape the Keep. So, what's the Guardian doing in Piraeus, the port of Athens? Shouldn't he be living in the village?

And when the Guardian hires a fishing boat, where does it take him? To the north coast of the Aegean Sea? Later we see him riding a motorcycle, presumably cutting across Greece and then Bulgaria. Then we see him use his supernatural charisma to blast his way past Romanian border guards at the frontier. Fine. A little bit of explanation would have clarified what was going on. I mean, we never even find out his name (though listed in the credits as "Glaeken Trismegestus"), or precisely what he is. He's sort of like a D&D character. He is what he is. Don't need to know his background, I guess.

Long story short, the village priest, Father Foenescu (played by Robert Prosky), reveals the only person who can translate certain cryptic graffiti is a Jewish Professor currently confined within the Bucharest ghetto, about to be sent to a concentration camp. So, disease-ravaged Professor Theodore Cuzo and his lovely daughter Eva (played by Alberta Watson), wind up imprisoned in the Keep along with the Priest. Seems they're old friends. The Priest is Devout. The Professor is an atheist. They like to argue. (The graffiti says "I want to be free," by the way.)

Now we come to the rape scene. On her way back from the kitchen with plates of food for her father and the Priest, Eva is accosted by two soldiers, one of them S.D. They proceed to rape her. Along the corridor comes a mini-tornado of smoke in which a red glowing brain and two glowing red eyes are visible. This be the Demon. It sucks the souls out of the soldiers and melts their bodies. Then spectral red hands emerge from the smoke to pick up Eva and carry her back to the cell. The Professor is upset to see his daughter in such a state. Even more upset to come face to face with something he doesn't believe in.

A word about the Demon, whose name, Radu Molasar, is never mentioned in the film. The 2008 Brenden Fraser movie *The Mummy* (one of my favourite films) uses exactly the same concept; the more the creature sucks the life out of others, the more intact its body becomes. All done with CGI in *The Mummy*. But back in 1983, not

possible. The “growth” of the Demon was achieved with props and latex. At one point its body consists of musculature and veins. At the end it is nearly complete, albeit with cracked skin and odd extra bits not found on normal humans. Played by Michael Carter, it is a humanoid giant with eyes and mouth glowing red. A bit lame by modern standards, but back in 1983 either risible or impressive depending on the viewer’s mood. I remember being amazed at how different it was from anything I had seen before. Gave the makeup special effects people full marks for originality.

I do remember being a tad disappointed, on the occasion of its first meeting with the Professor, that the Demon spoke perfectly good English in a BBC sort of manner, and was surprised when it stretched out its hand to touch the Professor and instantly cure him. Not only was Theodore’s skin now clear, he could stand up from his wheelchair and freely move about.

Getting back to Eva. She’s been raped. I assume traumatised by the experience. Her father tricks Kaempffer into letting her leave the Keep and stay in the village Inn. There’s only one room overlooking the entrance to the Keep. The Guardian shows up and insists it be his. She insists she stay there as well. They become lovers in a scene reminiscent of a crucifixion (I told you this film was in love with ideas and evocative imagery). So, within a day or two of being raped, she’s willingly having hot sex with a quasi-demon lover. Does this seem credible to you? It certainly doesn’t to me.

I figure the only reasonable explanation is that the touch of the demon while he carried her back to her father somehow cured her of her trauma so that it no longer applied. I also figure her sensing the supernatural power of the Guardian led her to believe that he alone was capable of protecting her against everyone else so best to claim him as boyfriend. Then again, maybe the film makers simply checked off the rape scene and sex scene as two necessary commercial components without worrying about any connection between the two. No idea.

Back to Professor Cuza. Grateful to be cured, he allows the Demon to convince him its heart’s desire is to escape from the Keep and kill Hitler in Berlin, along with maybe every other Nazi in the world. The prospect is enticing. All the Professor has to do is remove a certain talisman from the Keep and the Demon will be free to go. Simple. Bit of a naïve chap, this Professor.

Still, it makes sense of a sort. Though not explicitly stated, the Professor appears to believe the demon is a modern incarnation of the Golem legend, a mythical being whose purpose is to rescue Jews from evil persecutors. So, it’s perfectly understandable the Professor would seize the opportunity to crush the Nazis and free his people. But, of course, that’s not actually what Molasar has in mind.

So, why watch this film? It features “good” Nazis and “bad” Nazis which is problematic for viewers, especially in today’s political climate where neo-Nazis are emerging out of the woodwork. Might be considered distasteful. On the other hand, all the Nazis get theirs, what with being melted and all, not to mention getting yelled at, so a little bit of a feel-good film in a way.

And visually often a striking film. The climactic battle is a real light show, vivid and impressive in its day.



But the main reason to watch this film is the actor portraying the Professor. It is Ian McKellen in the days before he was known as Gandolf or *Sir Ian McKellen*. His acting, in contrast to almost all the other actors, is subtle and restrained for the most part, and even when he goes over the top he is in fine Shakespearean fettle and always entertaining. Also, he announces clearly, unlike Prochnow as Captain Woermann, who mumbles a lot and seems to belong to the Marlon Brando school of acting. Can't make out what he's saying half the time. Never mind. Sir Ian McKellan makes up for many of the film's flaws. He is fascinating to watch. His acting skill places the film on a higher level.

And now, after some online research on my part, a word of explanation. The film is only 96 minutes long, or just over 1.5 hours. The original version, as shot by Director Michael Mann (who also wrote the screenplay), was 210 minutes long, or 3.5 hours! More than twice the length of the released version! Paramount did do a few test showings, to tepid response. Desperate, they cut out over half the movie.

According to Wikipedia, among the scenes cut were: the backstory relationship between Glaeken and Molasar, scenes explaining how and why Glaeken and Eva fall in love, assorted killings in the village as the maddening influence of Molasar expands, and the original happy ending in which Glaeken, Eva and Theodore escape Romania by boat. Presumably the film makes a lot more sense in its original length in terms of continuity and editing, not to mention plot and meaning. Probably the histrionics of Kaempffer and Woermann had been properly built-up over the course of the film so as to seem credible. Maybe.

Another blow to the film had been the death of visual effects supervisor Wally Veevers two weeks into post production. No one knew what sequences he had planned for the film's finale. A hoped-for Molasar-on-a-killing-rampage wiping out all the German soldiers was never filmed. Consequently the ending seems a bit truncated and a trifle anticlimactic, and confusing, but hey, Mann stepped in to supervise 260 effects shots himself, so at least something got put on film. However, Paramount refused to budget the spectacular ending he envisioned. In fact, they even cut the budget for sound-mixing, which is why the dialogue is hard to hear at times. Siskel of Siskel and Ebert (remember them?) described *The Keep* as "one of the most inaudible movies ever made." So, safe to assume even the 210 minute version was less than satisfactory from Mann's point of view.

As for the author of the novel the movie was based on, F. Paul Wilson, he thought the film "visually intriguing but otherwise utterly incomprehensible." The film was released on VHS long ago, but both Paramount and Michael Mann resisted the idea of releasing it on DVD or Blu-ray. In essence Michael Mann disowned the film. He stated in 2009 he still liked its production design and form, but not the content. In 2016, upon being asked if he was in favour of releasing the film to the public, he answered "no."

But, somehow, an Australian company was able to release a DVD version in January of this year. I'm pleased to own it, to relive my 1983 theatre experience. I'd be keen to see a Blu-ray release of the original 3.5 hour cut. So would the film's cult

following who've been demanding this for years. I'd say the chances of this happening are zero. Pity.

Frankly, the current version of the movie is a confusing but often beautiful oddity. Well worth watching at least once. For the visuals. For Sir Ian McKellen. He, at least, can be proud of this film.

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## 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 THREE: GENRE FILMS 1911 TO 1915.

#### 1911:

- *The Aerial Anarchists* – London's St. Paul's Cathedral bombed from the air.
- *The Automatic Motorist* – Robot chauffeur drives newlyweds to rings of Saturn.
- *Electric Boots* – Improve life by speeding up workers for quick results.
- *The Electric Villa* – Remote control appliances go berserk.
- *The Elixir of Life* – Causes over-population, so all Mothers-in-law put to death.
- *The Inventor's Secret* – Police mistake robot servant girl for missing maid.
- *The Magnetic Umbrella* – Attracts people who come running from all directions.
- *A Marvellous Invention* – Device accelerates city life into frenetic chaos.
- *The Motor Car of the Future* – Leaps over obstacles and can even fly.
- *One Hundred Years After* – In 2011 only women can vote. Men wear skirts.
- *The Pirates of 1920* – Airship captures and then sinks ocean liner at sea.
- *Scroggins Goes in for Chemistry* – Assorted people shrunk to solve problems.
- *Tales of Hoffman* – Filmed fragments of an opera version performed in Vienna.

#### 1912:

- *Conscience* – Eloped couple are trapped in a chamber of horrors.
- *The Conquest of the Pole* – Explorers aboard Aerobus encounter Ice Giant.
- *Dr. Brompton Watts Age-adjuster* – Old man becomes child, then monkey.
- *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* – Each played by a different actor.
- *The Electric Belt* – Causes soldier to lunge at everyone with his sword.

- *The Electric Leg* – Takes Mr. Hoppit places he doesn't want to go.
- *Freezing Auntie* – Only pretends to be frozen, then "awakes" as ghost.
- *How Patrick's Eyes were Opened* – Visual telephone reveals girl not faithful.
- *The Invisible Cyclist* – Professional thief does well till invisibility wears off.
- *The Lunatics* – Visitor discovers lunatics have taken over asylum.
- *Sammy's Flying Escapades* – Inventor of flying bicycle shows off.
- *The Sea's Shadow* – Grim Reaper entices unhappy woman to watery grave.

1913:

- *Baloo* – Gentle ape turned impish human dies for love.
- *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* – Considered superior to contemporary stage versions.
- *A Message From Mars* – Martian comes to Earth to reform selfish man.
- *The Werewolf* – Navajo witch woman's daughter hunts white men.

1914:

- *The Avenging Conscience* – Frustrated lover's visions drive him to murder.
- *The Basilisk* – Mesmerist compels woman to kill her husband.
- *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde Done to a Frazzle* – 1 reel comedy version.
- *The Electrified Hump* – Humpback electrified, shocking all who touch him.
- *England's Menace* – Codebreakers use enemy's code to turn back invasion fleet.
- *Ein Seltsamer Fall* – German version of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.
- *An Englishman's Home* – Homeowners rebel against billeted German Officers.
- *The Exploits of Elaine* – Perl White repeatedly rescued by gadget-laden detective.
- *The Golem* – First film version, this one set in 20th century.
- *The Great German North Sea Tunnel* – Germans burrow their way to England.
- *Der Hund von Baskerville* – Two-part German version of Conan Doyle's Tale.
- *If England were Invaded* – "Nordeners" attack seaside village.
- *In the Year 2014* – Women are the aggressive sex, run all businesses, etc.
- *The Magic Glass* – Inventor's glasses can see through walls, unfortunately.
- *Percy Pimpernickel, Soubrette* – Life in 1950, revealing sex roles reversed.
- *Sammy's Automaton* – Mannequin brought to life gets out of hand.
- *Wake Up!* – Peace politician dreams his misguided policies result in invasion.

1915:

- *Beneath the Sea* – Experimental high speed submarine is sabotaged.
- *The Black Box* – Serial involving gadgets, invisibility suit, and an ape-thing.
- *The Great Bet* – German comedy portrays automated life in America in 2000.
- *Der Hund von Baskerville* – Another German version of Doyle's book.
- *Lady Baffles and Detective Duck* – Serial about detective with myriad gadgets.
- *Life without Soul* – 70 minute version of Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein*.
- *The Madness of Dr. Tube* – Inventor breaks apart light to distort vision.
- *The Mysterious Contragrav* – Gizmo makes airplanes fly faster.
- *The New Exploits of Elaine* – Sequel serial to *The Exploits of Elaine*.

- *Pawns of Mars* – Arms race in which good guys win with Death Ray.
- *The Return of Maurice Donnelly* – Innocent executed man comes back to life.
- *The Romance of Elaine* – Frenetic final sequel to *The Exploits of Elaine*.
- *Tales of Hoffman* – This version noted for its remarkable sets.
- *The War o'Dreams* – Inventor regrets inventing powerful explosive.

#### 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.

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## IT IS WHAT IT IS

(Mansplaining the State of Fandom)

*By Garth Spencer*

Here's an idea: Can we open a BCSFA Museum of Fannish Memorabilia, or an online Olde Fannish Curiosity Shoppe, or—dare I say it—The BCSFA Press?

You're probably wondering what brought this on. Well, it occurred to me that I am contemplating getting more shelving to organize all the hardcopy fanzines I have. About half of them are a portion of the former BCSFA Archives, which was largely a library of fanzines received over the years, in trade for *BCSFazine*. (The other half are fanzines *I* received over the years, in trade for my own zines.) And then the lightbulb came on: why haven't we founded a clubhouse yet? A place to exhibit our memorabilia, and expose people to curious fan activities, like say fanpublishing?

(Well, money, that's why. But we can maybe get around the cost of a meatspace F2F forum with SCIENCE!!, or at least Interwebbing. Onwards.)

It is one thing for a BCSFA Museum to *exhibit* classic fanzines, convention T-shirts, program books and anthologies of faanfiction. To my mind, this easily transmogrifies to the concept of a BCSFA Curiosity Shoppe *selling* memorabilia, such as T-shirts and program books—and, maybe, some publications if people want them.

Now, I know what you're thinking. Not everybody wants to read, and a whole *lot* of somebodies just don't want to read other fans' writing, in any way, shape or form.

But there *is*, visibly, an audience for online fiction, and for nonfiction about science fiction, about writing, and about publishing. I keep getting Facebook ads for self-published novels. (Many of them are free to download, as a marketing strategy.) *BCSFazine*, the *Burnaby Writers' Newsletter*, and SF Canada, among other sources, keep chronicling the changes in SF markets, foreign and domestic. Numerous people

have written articles and books about the crafts of worldbuilding, whether for science fiction or for interactive games or for the movie industry.

These and other publications are fair game for a fannish press. The New England Science Fiction Association, the Los Angeles Science Fiction Association, and major conventions have published volumes of fanhistory (e.g. *A Wealth of Fable* by Harry Warner Jr., from NESFA Press), or collections of fanwriting, as in *Fandom Harvest* (Terry Carr's fanwriting) or *Let's Hear It for the Deaf Man* (David Langford's writing).

Now, of course, any fannish press—in fact, any fan activity!—depends at any time on people having enough motivation to carry it on. I have learned that what motivates people is hard to predict, and it is even harder to motivate people. So, we have to find out what actually motivates people at the moment. And not inflate the volunteer workload to the point of burning people out!

We can do any of these things, if we choose. We are not without resources. Don DeBrandt, if he consents, could offer a collection of his articles on writing (from editions of *BCSFAzine* in the 1980s). I might have some texts to offer, myself.

Do these suggestions spark any ideas on your part?

[ The Graeme responds – I used to dream about building a BCSFA clubhouse. Remember the classic 1950s-style Flying Saucer “UFO-H2O” (complete with little Green Man pilot) that stood over the childrens waterpark at Expo 86? I wanted to buy it (everything for sale after the World's Fair closed down) to use as the roof of the foyer to my proposed clubhouse, but no money at hand so no deal. It stood over the abandoned water park for a year or so, then was purchased by the Mount Layton Hot Springs Resort in Terrace, B.C. but, rumour has it, has decayed badly and is no longer on display. Sigh.

I also dreamed of filling the clubhouse with the magnificent models put together by Stan G. Hyde and fellow members of Monster Attack Team Canada. Just about every movie monster, spaceship, and alien would be on display, but, alas, only a dream.

At one point it was suggested the club build its own clubhouse, even if it was just a plywood contraption atop a flat-bed trailer. Or a shanty-hut in someone's back yard. Still too expensive. There's a chap in Vancouver who rented a small, one-room storefront to put on display his tourist souvenirs and post-cards. It existed for years. Can't say the public beat a path to his door. He was only open one day a week. I believe even this option is way out of reach.

I mean, BCSFA doesn't have a formal membership roster these days and charges no membership fee. I believe the club's financial balance is roughly zero. What you propose requires an eccentric patron of some sort. Should we come across such, I believe the preference would be to point their wallet at VCON to aid the effort of getting that going again. Sorry, but a Museum/Shoppe/Clubhouse is a non-starter.

As for a BCSFA Press, back in July 19<sup>th</sup>, 1997, I presented a motion to BCSFA calling for the establishment of “THE BCSFA PRESS, the purpose of which is to publish a series of chapbooks of potential interest to SF fandom, thus fulfilling our

mandate to promote sf.” Among the conditions proposed: “... be administered by the current club archivist... none of the publications to be at the club's expense .... that the printing and mailing costs be borne by the author... that each publication under THE BCSFA PRESS imprint be numbered in sequence...” The proposal was passed.

The press got off to a good start with several publications, and dozens more planned with titles like “A Brief History of the Elrons,” “A Guide for Administrators of the C.U.F.F.,” and “Famous Canadian Faneds.” But for a variety of the usual reasons the press was put on hiatus, to be revived when conditions were appropriate, which is to say, never.

Here is a list of publications that did come out:

- 1998 - (#1 - Mar) - CANFAPA, V1#1WN1 - by R. Graeme Cameron. The Canadian Fanzine APA devoted to: promoting awareness of Canadian SF Fanzines, converting Canadian SF fans into faneds, & preserving Canada's SF fanzine heritage. 6 pages.
- 1998 - (#2 - Mar) - WIERDS DID IT! THE CHRONICLES OF BCSFA, Volume One: 1968 to 1972 - by R. Graeme Cameron. An account of the early history of BCSFA, including VCONs one and two plus Philip K. Dick's life in Vancouver. (Note: Old English spelling of 'weird', a 'wierd' being a race of fates or supramundanes who do odd things.) 30 pages.
- 1998 - (#3 - Mar) - INDEX TO BCSFAZINE, Volume Three: 1990 to 1997 - by R. Graeme Cameron. 33 pages.
- 1998 - (#4 - May) - HARRY WARNER, JR. FAN OF LETTERS - by Murray Moore. Reprint. Assorted contributions in praise of HWJ. Originally published in FAPA. 30 pages.
- 1998 - (#5 - May) - CANFAPA, V1#2WN2 - by R. Graeme Cameron. 22 pages.
- 1998 - (#6 - Jul) - CANFAPA, V1#2WN3 - by R. Graeme Cameron. 32 pages.
- 1999 - (#7 - Jan) - CANFANDOM, (Name change from CANFAPA), V2#1WN4 - by R. Graeme Cameron. 48 pages.
- 1999 - (#8 - Mar) - THE TRUFAN'S ADVISOR, AN INTRODUCTORY GUIDE TO FANDOM - by Arnie Katz. Reprint of the 1995 edition pubbed out of Las Vegas, Nevada.
- 1999 - (#9 - May) - CANFANDOM, V2#2WN5 - by R. Graeme Cameron. 46 pages. (Never distributed)
- 2000 - (#10 - July) - TORONTO THE GHOOO - by Taral Wayne. Reprint of a 1988 anthology of fanwriting by fans living in or near Toronto from the 1940s thru to the 1980s. Included articles by: Beak Taylor, P. Howard Lyons, Boyd Raeburn, Peter Gill, Susan Wood, Rosemary Ulyot, Mike Glicksohn, Victoria Vayne, Bob Wilson, Janet Wilson, Phil Paine, Taral Wayne & Bob Webber. 43 pages.

Apart from the members of CanFAPA, there wasn't much interest in any of the BCSFA Press publications. Today I have but one personal copy of each.

As for recovering articles written by assorted contributors to BCSFAzine, keep in mind that, while the archive once possessed a complete run starting with issue #2, it was widely dispersed when I moved and had to dispense with most of my possessions. I know you have quite a few, and Felicity, but I forget who else grabbed portions of the remainder. It was first-come first-serve in a frantic rush to find people willing to preserve bits of the archive. Nobody wanted the complete set of BCSFAzines, alas, much less the complete archive. I retain personal copies of the issues I edited, and a few early issues, but that's all. Some are up at eFanzines, and others at my Canfancylopedia website (which I haven't been able to access for a couple of years now), but the ability of any researcher to access the complete run of BCSFAzines no longer exists. So, your proposal to reprint stuff from BCSFAzine is limited to whatever issues you possess and whatever you can find elsewhere.

Still, you should be able to put together monographs on various topics, and collections of whatever material you have at hand, and offer them online. In theory, you could go the self-publishing route and wind up with books on, say, Amazon, offered in both E-book format and print copies. Perhaps print-on-demand. All it takes is the appropriate level of commitment and enthusiasm and, perhaps, a bit of money.

NESFA Press does a magnificent job. Not sure how well their books sell. I can only speak to the couple of decades I was in charge of the archive. During that time the assorted manuals on con-running were borrowed maybe three times. Maybe twice people from outside Canada contacted me for information. I can't remember *anybody* requesting to borrow *any* fanzines. Apart from my own use for research purposes, the archive was essentially a dead-weight boat-anchor apparently of interest to no one.

Still, there are fen, probably mostly older fen, interested in preserving the past. Hence the popularity of fanac.org, the *Fanac Fan History Project*. Anything you can publish and present to them to display online implies a certain level of preservation for however many years it will continue to function as an online resource.

As for myself, it occurs to me I still retain most of my Canfancylopedia research files in my computer (which is where I got the above info on my BCSFA Press publications). I should start sharing some of that info in BCSFAzine. Trick is to pick bits that would interest the casual reader. Hmm. Must think on this.

Meanwhile, Polar Borealis is my retirement hobby, and dang if it didn't net me an Aurora Award!

So, if you make fannish history publishing your principle hobby, who knows? After all, you were the first Canadian fan to win an Aurora (called Casper back then) in May of 1986 at Convention 6 for "editing The Maple Leaf Rag" and your "dedication to Canadian Fandom." Your competition (which you beat) were:

- *Ed Beauregard & Al Betz*—"for lifetime contribution and unselfish devotion and skill in many Vancouver area club and convention activities."
- *Mario Giguere*—"for contributions to *Solaris*, organizing cons, and editing *Blanc Citron*."

- *Georges Giguere*—“for editing *Neology* (clubzine of the Edmonton Science Fiction and Comic Arts Society).”
- *Robert Runté*—“for editing *New Canadian Fandom*.”
- *Elisabeth Vonarburg*—“For lifetime achievement, editing *Solaris*, participation in Boreal, promoting SF and holding writers workshops.”

All in all, your victory that year was a significant accomplishment, considering the calibre of the competition. Something to be proud of. ]

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## FANNISH FAILURES AND FOLLIES

**“Slow Pint Glass”** the final volume in the collected fannish satire writings of legendary Northern Irish fan Bob Shaw, is now available for free at the Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund site. A small donation would be appreciated.

Bob’s dry and witty style of humour is entertaining and amusing, to put it mildly. He was a wonderful guest at VCON 17 in 1989. His books are equally wonderful.

You can download it from [here](#).

The other three books are: in *The Enchanted Duplicator* (1954 with Walt Willis; much reprinted; TAFF ebook May 2015), *The Serious Scientific Talks* (TAFF ebook November 2019) and *The Full Glass Bushel* (TAFF ebook June 2020).

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**Memphis Worldcon Bid for 2023** – Will not host Retro Hugos for 1948 if they win the bid. This in order to prevent the kind of controversy over the past which afflicted the 2020 Worldcon. The other bidder is Chengdu, China, which many assume will not win for political reasons. So, the Memphis bid may well be the wave of the future, swamping the Retro Hugos. Sure to be a subject of intense debate.

Nice, France, had also been a contender, but dropped its bid in July.

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## RECENT SF FEN CONFAB MEETING

*By Felicity Walker*

Graeme acting as host: Zoom Meeting,

Monday 10 August 2020 at 3:00 PM

[Topics from 6:05 PM–10:15 PM when Felicity was present and taking notes]



In attendance: R. Graeme Cameron (and Vader), Moss Whelan, Paul Carpentier and Julie McGalliard, John Mansfield, Brandon Butler, Murray Moore, Keith Lim, Felicity Walker (and Charcoal), Graham J. Darling, Wayne Cusack, Steve Forty, Chris Sturges, Joe Devoy, Julian Castle, Casey June Wolf, and Michael Bertrand.

Topics included: *I, Robot* book (1950), *The Door into Summer* book (1956), the divinity of Roman Emperors, political shenanigans in the time of Nero, Montreal SFA Zoom club meetings, MonSFA film projects like *Plant Nine from Outer Space*, the infamous B-movie *Brain Eaters* (1958), SCTV episode “Zontar,” *Zontar the Thing from Venus* TV movie (1966), size of Mercury capsule, film *The Right Stuff* (1983), Sputnik, *I Dream of Jeannie* TV show (1965), USS Shenandoah Dirigible, Helium sources, *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (1954), *Mission: Earth* book series (1985), *The Space Ship Under the Apple Tree* book (1952), *Fireball XL5* TV show (1962), *The Wonderful Flight to the Mushroom Planet* book (1954), *Time Cat* book (1963), *The Tripods* BBC TV series (1984), *Miss Pickerell Goes to Mars* book (1951), *Pinocchio in Outer Space* animated film (1965), *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* comparing the (1916) and (1954) film versions, *Space Master X-7* movie (1958), *Inherit the Stars* book (1977), James P. Hogan author Guest of Honour at VCON 16 in 1988, *The Haunted Stars* book (1960), *Galactic Breed* book (1952), *City at World’s End* book (1951), *Farnham’s Freehold* book (1964), *Sea Siege* book (1957), *Cowboy Bebop* anime. (1997–1998), *The Powers of Matthew Star* TV series (1982), prospects for VCON 43, changing convention expectations, and the future of the future.

I think you can see from this bald list of topics that the main themes were early influences and fond memories. Nothing was planned. People simply talked about what interested them in the moment. Very much like a typical fannish group conversation. Every meeting is like this, though sometimes more focused. Beats talking about the weather at bus stops. I, for one, find these Zoom meet conversations enjoyable and invigorating. So I will continue to host them as long as people are interested.

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## 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: **Lloyd Penney** – (August 5<sup>th</sup>, 2020)

Dear Graeme:

Sometimes, there's never enough time, time for all the things that need to be done, yet time for the relaxation and general goofing off that needs to be done, too. I won't incriminate myself further, but I have issues 542 and 543 of BCSFazine here, and it is definitely time to catch up.

542 ... Well, you might now have the ability to go to a restaurant-based FRED. At least here, Ontarians can now go to a restaurant and sit inside, but with some measure of social distancing, and in groups no larger than 10 people, and I suspect that's the way it will be for some time to come. This also means that our own Third Monday pub nights will start up again at our restaurant, too.

One friend is not against Zoom meetings, but finds them impersonal and a little dull. Nothing beats getting together. I might disagree about the first statement, but definitely agree with the second. They are better than nothing, true. I hope we can soon have something. AmazingCon was fun, but I wish we could all gather together and do everything in person. Not enough money, too much pandemic ... I guess Zoom it is.

*[ Well, I'm spending 12 hours a week in Zoom Meetings and enjoying the experience. Zoom is fine by me. ]*

Graeme, you keep spelling my last name wrong. Damned Autocorrect! I didn't get to help Paula Johansen out much with her manuscripts, but I have a date with a later manuscript, coming out this fall.

*[ Sorry. I'm not very good at proofreading. I often miss the obvious. ]*

543 ... Busy, busy ... I have been working on a number of books as proofreader/copy editor, with a hint of structural editor thrown in should a notice something apparent. They have been for Amazing Stories magazine, and I am getting busier. That's what's been keeping me away from other activities like writing letters. We also have a bit of a steampunk event, too. Now, pretty well all events have been cancelled, but we have been asked to come up to the town of Coldwater anyway, not for a big event, but to help provide online content for the online version of the event. Two suitcases of costumes go up to Coldwater Friday morning. And, with some luck, more paying voicework will come my way soon. (If book sales are going down, keep the Amazing Selects in mind.)

I have made no real comment on the Hugs or Worldcons, for I believe we will no longer attend or participate. GRRM's presentations, I did not see, but we have decided we won't bother, and sorry to friends running the Worldcons in Washington and Chicago. I know many people hated the idea of a Saudi Worldcon, but I never thought the Saudi bid had a chance, and when it came to the 2022 Worldcon, I was right. I think they should be allowed to bid, but the fannish voting public will make the right choice. I gather the Saudi bid is retooling for 2026. Brisbane in 2025? Well,

I suspect the majority of Worldcon fans who have not been able to travel to Helsinki or Dublin or New Zealand (I know, it went virtual) will be pleased to see a Worldcon they can afford to go to, maybe even drive to, and are probably now buying their memberships and arranging their hotels.

The National Fantasy Fan Federation gave me such a surprise to announce my nomination for Best Fan Writer, and a true surprise again when I won. I did not expect to win any such awards at my age, and at least no one has taken me to task about the award, or tried to tear it and me down, so I am at least pleased with this lack of negative reaction. I thank the NFFF for this surprise, and a bit of egoboo is always a pleasure.

*[ Yes, egoboo forever! Again, congratulations! Well deserved. You are, after all, the modern Harry Warner Jr. ]*

I think I may be done for now. Good luck with the Auroras, and see you with the next issue.

Yours, Lloyd Penney.

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From: **Garth Spencer** – (August 19<sup>th</sup>, 2020)

Loc on BCSFAzine 543 Aug 2020

Dear Graeme,

Congratulations on your Aurora Award win!!

*[ Thank you! ]*

Reading your editorial last issue was sobering, because I read it just after I drafted suggestions for an online BCSFA fannish museum, or memorabilia shop, or – dare I suggest it?—a BCSFA Press, like unto NESFA Press. (This mention is an invitation for readers to look up the New England Science Fiction Association, and the several publications of its press.) Would Graeme’s articles on the finer points of appreciating B-movies have an appreciative audience? Or Don DeBrandt’s old articles on the craft of writing?

*[ Could be. ]*

From what you write, any fannish press—in fact, any fan activity!—depends at any time on one or more people having enough motivation to carry it on. You and I have learned that what motivates people is hard to predict, and it is even harder to motivate people. So, we have to find out what actually motivates people at the moment. And not inflate the volunteer workload to the point of burning people out!

*[ I don’t think figuring out what motivates people is particularly possible. It varies from time to time and individual to individual. I think a higher priority should be assigned to FINDING motivated people, and recruiting them. ]*

(If I knew how to raise people's enthusiasm and energy and interest, I would firmly recommend that we do it while calling for VCON volunteers, committee heads and understudies. We never seemed to have quite enough participants to shadow the committee heads as apprentices, so when we had an overturn of committee membership, we had a lot of burnt-out veterans succeeded by under-briefed committee heads, including convention chairs. Correct me if I'm wrong.)

*[ No, you are mostly correct. The problem today seems to be there are NO volunteers willing to be understudies available. Hard enough finding people willing to be department heads. The implication is that, for all practical purposes, the old system is dead as a door nail. That is why there is no VCON ConCom as such. Something different is being contemplated. We'll just have to wait and see what WCSFA comes up with. ]*

Of course I am not mentioning my own attempts to self-publish, or to pretend I am a publisher titled *Stop Press*. I could turn some of my old articles on worldbuilding, or crackpot fan articles, into pamphlets. I could turn my old fanhistory columns into a book-length work.

So: in the column I drafted, I have invited your readers to tell us what might interest them—online publications about cosplay, maybe, or worldbuilding, or amateur film creation? Filksong books, or recordings, or online website collections?

*[ Frankly, I regard it as a waste of time trying to figure out what “fandom” wants, or needs. “It” doesn’t know. Besides, the vast majority of fen, the ones who spend billions on books, films, and games, aren’t interested in traditional fandom, fannish history, or fanzines. Their interests are totally different from yours. They’re not relevant to you. Instead, concentrate on writing and publishing what “you” are interested in. It will resonate with like-minded fen who share your passions. Write for yourself. Write because you want to. Write about what you enjoy reading about. That’s what I do. It makes me a happy lad.*

*But if you write only out of a sense of duty to an unknown mass of fen who probably could care less, the task will be a ceaseless burden to you. Don’t write for people who don’t give a damn. Write for people who are genuinely interested in the info you want to share. Write for people who want to read what you write. Where are they? Bugged if I know. I always write for myself and the “mythical” readers I fondly imagine share my tastes. Result, I enjoy writing. Then I publish it and simply assume readers will find their way to my writings. I don’t worry about whether they do or not, because I’ve moved on to the next project. Every now and then people tell me they like what I do. Good enough for me. Keeps me going. I don’t care about people who don’t like my stuff. Certainly don’t fret over it. Don’t have the time.*

*I almost get the impression you are waiting for “permission” to pursue the projects you are keen on, “permission” in the sense of approval from “fandom” itself. Not going to happen. No such individual entity exists. It has no voice. My advice to you is to stop obsessing over what “fandom” wants and concentrate on what “you” want. I believe that will increase your productivity immeasurably. I believe you’ll find it more satisfying and rewarding, too. ]*

Onward.

You also wrote:

“In general, publishers need to avoid the traditional ‘mistake’ common to fan-run SF&F conventions, namely ‘If we plan big and commit to big spending, the fans will come in large numbers and we’ll make a profit!’ That doesn’t work anymore. Best to determine the precise budget required and have sufficient funds to cover all costs beforehand.”

It's gratifying to see that *someone* else actually perceived a point I once thought everyone ignored. But I don't know that over-the-top promotion is actually *traditional*, in any industry or activity.

*[ Probably “traditional” was a poor word choice on my part. I simply meant it is a common, often repeated practice that originates in much of the bafflegab culture surrounding business “philosophy.” I’ve witnessed it first hand in a number of companies I worked for. Sales and PR people are particularly prone to it. ]*

(When it came to SF conventions, the mistake you describe seemed to occur roughly about two or three times per decade in any region where fans attend each other's conventions—maybe a dozen times a decade, in the whole continent. Just my impression.)

Onward.

It was gratifying to see science news, and publishing news, in a science fiction clubzine.

It was good to see fan news, if only about awards and an upcoming convention. I wonder if it's time to compile a calendar of upcoming conventions again? Surely the COVID-19 restrictions can be lifted in 2021, if not earlier?

*[ That would be nice, but it could be much later. We won't know till we know. ]*

It was sobering to see that several small presses are suffering from financial pressure, burnout, and the insidious effects of the COVID-19 outbreak on the world economy.

Onward.

Robert Sawyer's take on the latest Great Worldcon Exclusion Flap was interesting, but I also found myself amused. He must know better than I what the Americans' issues were with the Arabian bid—he actually gets out and about, and actually corresponds with the larger conrunning reality—but from my isolated and provincial perspective, the Arabian bid was like a previous bid to hold the Worldcon in Jerusalem. In either case, if I attended such a Worldcon, I would expect to disappear in a sudden civil war. (No, I haven't gone off my meds, why do you ask?)

Onward.

Michael Bertrand's take on a strangely-titled Japanese animation brought up an old thought on my mind. Is it just my impression ... or have decades of screen cartoons taught a few generations of people to recognize cartoon expressions, rather than real human expressions? (Or is it just me?)

*[ Interesting point. I don't think people recognise cartoon expressions in lieu of normal human expressions, but they may be disappointed human expressions are so limited and restrained compared to anime grimaces. Hmm. Could be fodder for a government research grant, methinks. ]*

Onward.

It was a little uncomfortable to read my own column. I have definitely got to edit out my run-on sentences, flag the dropped words, explain unresolved external references, and so on—all the things I do for my own clients, when I transcribe their dictation. Graeme, feel free to edit me!!

*[ Nah. If I did that people would probably expect me to edit myself. How then, could I experience the joy of seeing my run-on sentences in print? And just about all my opinions are based on unresolved external references. No, sir. Not going to do it. ]*

Onward.

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From: **Felicity Walker** – (August 30<sup>th</sup>, 2020)

Comments on *BCSFazine* #543.

Cover: I like the “fumetti” approach to the lower third of the *Horror of Party Beach* cover. Nice lettering on the whole cover, too. I can't remember if I drew a *Horror of Party Beach* drawing or not.

“Editorial: The God-Editor Speaks!”: I spent a lot of time following links, starting from “Critique of George R.R. Martin” and Googling “2019 John W. Campbell Award Acceptance Speech” and moving on to a lot of Cory Doctorow articles. I never knew a lot of this stuff. I'm in the middle of some uncomfortable growth that came from trying to write jokes in comedy class and finding that I don't necessarily know what's going to tread on people's feelings. Even my own good intentions are no guarantee of not doing harm. Fortunately, I don't mind modifying my behaviour or apologising, because people's feelings matter to me. However, being misunderstood hurts. Still, I'd rather be aware of what to avoid, even if being called out on a faux pas is sometimes scary and depressing. It's good to learn.

*[ This is an era of great sensitivity. Difficult to know what not to say. Self-censorship is the rule to avoid confrontation. Good intentions count for nothing. The trick is to depend on one's own knowledge, avoid the obvious triggers, and stay clear of humour dependent on laughing at others. In today's climate self-deprecating humour works best. It's okay to laugh at yourself. Be a Bob Newhart-type rather than a Don Rickles. Above all, avoid Vaudeville-style ethnic humour. That just doesn't cut it anymore. I believe there's plenty of humour to be found in wry, off-beat tales of an individual struggling to cope with their world. We all do that, so a focus on yourself actually expresses a commonality people can identify with. Plenty of source material there.*

*Some people regret political correctness. One good thing, it seems to be trending*

*“insult” humour to an early death. Good. I’ve always hated “insult” humour. Never found Don Rickles funny, for instance. Always preferred Bob Newhart. ]*

I have mixed feelings about the issues Doctorow raised with “The Cold Equations.” ( <https://locusmag.com/2014/03/cory-doctorow-cold-equations-and-moral-hazard/> ) On the one hand, in order to critique something in a story that troubles me, I’ve had to do what he did and “go outside the page” and ask why the writer set up the situation in that way—was it because he wanted to create a straw man? On the other hand, it seems to me that the point of the story is not to punish the girl for being emotional, or to brainwash us with “lifeboat morality” propaganda, but to set up a hypothetical situation where there is no “right” answer, only a “least bad” answer. It makes it an interesting moral problem for us to chew on. It’s true that the author had to force some dodgy starting conditions into the story—like did the Earth government really think there would never be a day where the pilot might need a little extra fuel?—but the point of the story was to explore a no-win scenario, a *Kobayashi Maru*. That’s what I make of the story itself; I don’t know what Campbell’s motivations were.

*[ I’m guessing to point out that sometimes reality can be fatal. Simple as that. ]*

“Odds and Sods About This Zine”: My favourite memories of Stewart Smyth are in my LOC in the last issue...I don’t have many photos of him because he didn’t like to be photographed and I honoured that. I may have a few somewhere, taken with his permission. If not, I should work on a drawing of him.

“Art Portfolio: Al Sirois”: Enjoyed good chuckles from the cartoons. Loved the art and lettering in “Two-Fisted TAFF Tales”! Dashiell is a fun name for a cat.

“Messed-Up Movie Mopes”: I’ve never read the graphic novel *Superman: Red Son*, but based on your review, the movie sounds interesting, so the comic probably is too. It sounds a lot less one-sided than I would have guessed. It’s part of the “Elseworlds” concept which explores alternate timelines in the DC universe, and I liked the lead story in *Action Comics Annual* #6, “Legacy,” by John Byrne, an “Elseworlds” which imagines if a Kryptonian adult had escaped in a rocket before Krypton exploded, landed in 18th-century England, gained superpowers from Earth’s yellow sun, and become a tyrant who crushed the American revolution.

I miss *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* TV series. The 1980s *Doctor-Who*-esque effects, classical animation portraying computer animation, and blurry VHS image quality would be good things, from my point of view.

“Films to See Before You Die: A Checklist for Obsessive Completists”: If there was a 1980s equivalent of this, I would dedicate myself to watching and checking off all of them. Maybe in several years this column will work its way up to the 1980s! If so, I look forward to it. :-)

There certainly were a lot of fluids and magnetism in those days. I get the sense that the filmmakers were still enjoying the novelty of the medium itself.

*[ Absolutely. ]*

“The Light-Hearted Vituperator and Jolly Reviler: A”: *One Million Years BC* would be a good name for a documentary about the history of British Columbia.

I want to read back issues of *G-Fan*, starting with #1. The *G-Fan* website linked in the article does have a link to a page of back issues ( [http://www.g-fan.com/html/gfan\\_backissues.php](http://www.g-fan.com/html/gfan_backissues.php) ) but it doesn't seem to display anything but a blank black page on my computer (although I will admit I'm using a slightly old operating system). Aha! I came up with a workaround. I saved the "blank" page as a text file and then read that. It seems I'd need PayPal and the back issues start at #16.

"Afterwords": You won! Congratulations!

[ *Thank you!* ]

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## AFTERWORDS

Hoo boy, I'm exhausted. It was finishing my When Words Collide review that held me up. Otherwise I would have gotten this newsletter out on time. Still, it's done. I hope readers find much of interest in it.

Can't complain too much. I do enjoy writing my various articles and editing the contributions of others. It's just the time pressure of a deadline I find wearying. And now I need to concentrate fully on prepping issue #16 of Polar Borealis Magazine later this month. Apart from writing several columns for *Amazing*, that is the only project I will be working on. Not till it's done will I be free to start work on the October BCSFAzine. So the next newsletter may not be so large in size. Then again, I already know which novel I intend to review, and which movies. And Robert J. Sawyer was kind enough to send me his next *Random Musings* in advance. Am confident Garth Spencer and Stan G. Hyde will send in their columns. I have a number of columns by Michael Bertrand to choose from. So, preparing the next issue not as formidable a task as you might think. No worries on my part.

Writing and editing adds structure to my life. As do all my other writing projects. I wake up every morning with a choice of things to think about and accomplish. Life is not boring at all. Time may be racing by but at least I am getting things done. I live in the moment, appreciating each task as I'm working on it. Once finished and sent out, I let it slip from my mind and I concentrate on what I choose to do next. You might say I'm too busy having fun to bother documenting it. Sounds selfish? You betcha! Having a grand old time. All the same, it would satisfy me if it turns out you appreciate the opportunity to read about old movies and such. I do aim to please.

One thing I would like to see is more letters of comment. In part because it is one of the finest traditions to be found in fanzine tradition. Indeed, some fans in the past declared letters of comment to be the most interesting content in many a fanzine. I suspect because fans found a good cross section of fannish opinion to be enormously appealing. Now, of course, we have the internet at which opinions are flung much as monkeys sling their feces at presumed foes. In short, opinion has become as common as dirt and something many people consciously avoid. But if we could revive the fannish tradition of informed and amusing opinion, that would be a treat! Cheers!