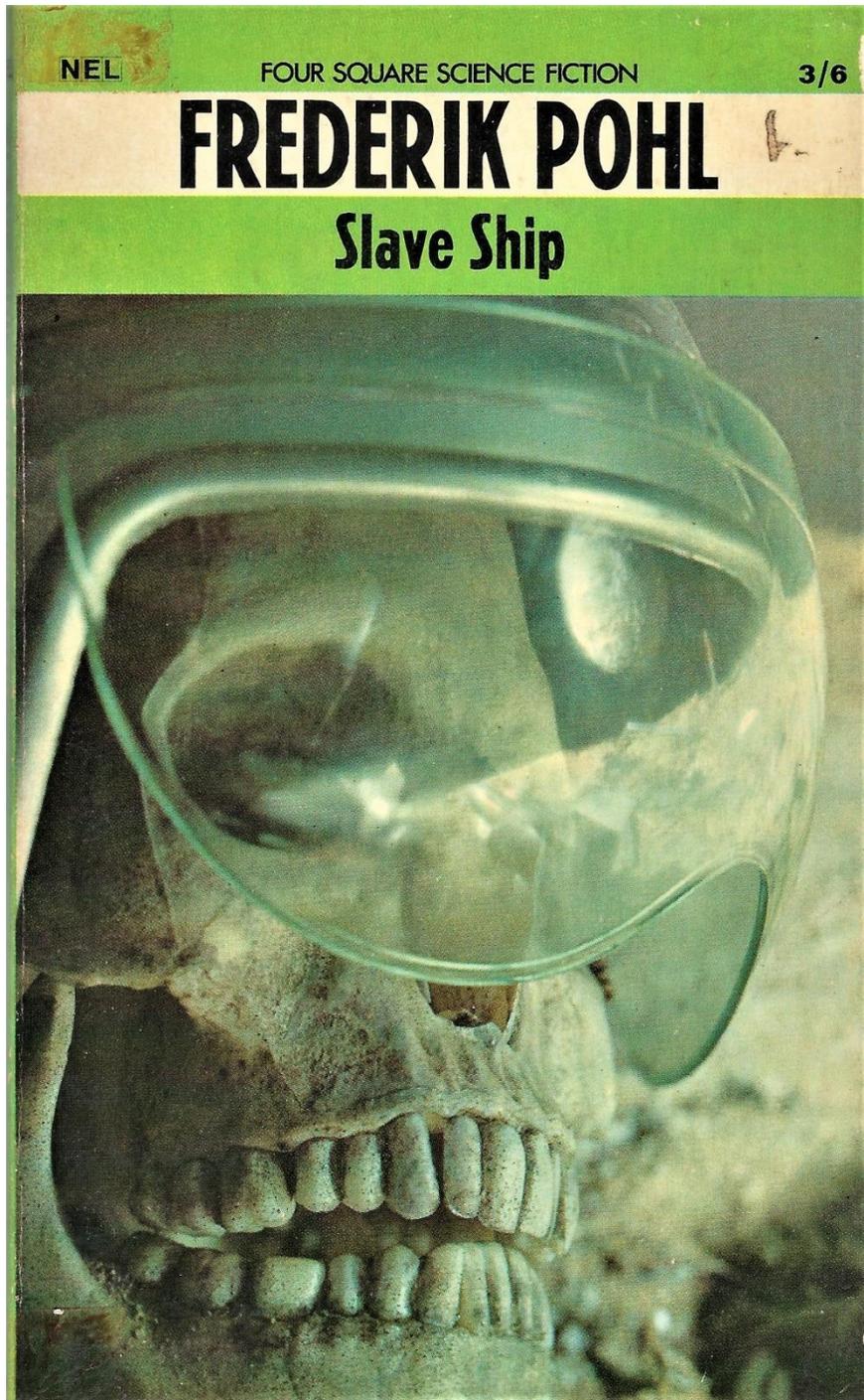


# BCSFAZINE

Clubzine of the British Columbia Science Fiction Association  
(Issue #545 – October, 2020)



(Issue #545 – October, 2020 – Vol.46 #10 WN545 – 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) >

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### **CURRENT BCSFA EXECUTIVE**

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**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, October 30<sup>th</sup>, My simple layout design ensures it will get into the following month’s issue to be published no later than November 2<sup>nd</sup>. Guaranteed.

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### Cover Credit

**Slave Ship** – By unknown photographer (Not stated).

## EDITORIAL: THE GOD-EDITOR SPEAKS!

Arrgh! I've got nothing to say, except this issue is several days late. Consequently, I am rushing to get it done as quickly as possible. So, no brilliant or witty ideas to discuss. Further, no opportunity to peruse the web for material of interest. I'll be lucky if I can cobble together enough of the standard articles to make an interesting read. Fortunately all the usual suspects have submitted great articles, so I'm off the hook there. I'll see what I can come up with in the limited window of time I am granting myself. Publication no later than the morning of October 5<sup>th</sup>, I promise. Earlier if I can do it.

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 way, 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.

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### VOID BREATHER BOMBAST

**Mars is Very Weird** – Heard about the Martian Crustal Dichotomy? One of the biggest mysteries of the red planet. Northern hemisphere is unusually smooth. Southern Hemisphere's crust twice as thick and that's where all the craters, canyons and volcanoes are. How is this even possible? Long story short, from a variety of evidence, including fossil remnants of past magnetic-field flip-flops, scientists figure a Pluto-sized proto-planet grazed the North pole, leaving plenty of magma to smoothly fill the impact crater (Northern Hemisphere more or less) and adding so much magma

to the core that a “hot spot” plume (like that under the Hawaiian Islands) punched through the crust at the opposite pole (South pole, natch) and over a billion years or so not only thickened the crust in the Southern Hemisphere but induced a kind of “temporary” plate-tectonics that crumpled everything up nicely in that region till the plume eventually cooled and went dormant.

The growth of that crust-thickening, previously blamed on the ginormous Olympus Mons volcano (biggest in the Solar System), is responsible for altering the wobbly-wobbliness of the Red Planet and dooming it to a permanent ice age which, in addition to all the atmosphere escaping due to the planet’s weak gravity (because of it’s small size), effectively put an end to the period of warm climate, thick atmosphere and massive Northern Hemisphere ocean which existed briefly between the impact and the thickening. Had there been time for life to evolve, intelligent life in particular, I can envision the conference meeting where the leading planetary geologist of Mars, having studied trends in the ongoing geological evolution of the planet itself, opened the session by saying “Okay, the final results of our survey are in. In terms of what’s going to happen, I’m afraid I’ve got some bad news.”

Seems cosmic billiards is not a game very friendly to the life forms infesting a planetary surface. Oh, well.

**Seven Billion-year-old Phone Call** – A message arrived not long ago, the gravity waves released by the merger of two medium-sized black holes 7 billion years ago. This is evidence that the super-massive black holes thought to lie at the centre of every galaxy were created by a sequence of mergers leading to bigger and bigger black holes. This process is by no means dormant. Galaxies occasionally collide and no doubt their core black holes merge. Dare I hope this means the entire universe will one day be a single super-duper-massive singularity surrounded by all the stars in existence, in effect forming a single, unique galaxy? Has to be the making of a cult in that idea somewhere. This could be the basis of a last minute get-rich-quick retirement scheme on my part. The universe will run out of stars before it runs out of suckers.

**Happy Microbes on Venus?** – Scientists have detected a large amount of phosphine in the Venusian cloud layer about 30 miles above the surface. Big deal, you say? Except that phosphine is formed only by living microbes in a non-oxygen environment. Or, by circumstances of the type found deep in the clouds of Jupiter and Saturn, conditions that don’t exist on Venus. But what about the intense pressure and temperatures on Venus, not to mention the sulphuric acid rain? Okay, must be tough microbes. Since Venus had oceans and a relatively benign atmosphere for about two billion years before the run-away green house effect took over, maybe microbes, once they got started, had time to adapt. Or, it could be the result of a chemical weathering process that doesn’t exist on Earth. I’m kinda curious. Would love to know the answer. Probably be expensive finding out. This is why I doubt the human race will spread about the galaxy. Can’t afford to. But maybe we could fire off deep space probes filled with hardy microbes and even hardier Tardigrades? Could be amusing, in the long run. Never know what they might evolve into.

**Woman on the Moon** – Fritz Lang would be pleased (his 1929 film *Woman in the Moon* justly famous). The Artemis III mission, planned for 2024, will see the first woman set foot on the surface of the Moon. Along with some chap or another. Both Americans, needless to say. NASA just announced the unmanned mission Artemis I will circumnavigate the Moon in 2021, the manned mission Artemis II will do the same in 2023, and Artemis III will fly in 2024. I sure hope so. Been waiting for this for a long time. This assumes everything continues to be funded and there are no glitches in the technology involved. To Quote NASA: *“With Lunar exploration capability re-established, NASA and the world will be ready to build a sustained presence on the lunar surface in preparation for the human exploration of Mars.”* Ah, music of the spheres to my ears. As long as it is all done by 2010. Then we’ll see about my summer cabin on Mars.

**Yet Another Second Moon** – For the third time in recent years Earth will briefly capture a second Moon. 2020 S0 will slip into orbit this month and slip away next May. It’s a weird one, though. Something different. Not the usual, casual asteroid visitor. It’s travelling way too slow to be that. As a matter of fact, scientists think it’s artificial. Before you get excited, I should mention “artificial” as in man-made construct. They suspect it is actually the upper stage of the Atlas-Centaur rocket that launched the Surveyor 2 Lander toward the Moon. Unfortunately, the Surveyor probe “landed” near Copernicus crater on September 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1966, at the gentle speed of 5,840 miles per hour. So much for that mission. The Centaur booster, meanwhile, went into orbit around the sun. Now, after more than half a century tumbling about in interplanetary space, it’s going to drop by for a brief visit. Apparently the Apollo 12 mission Saturn V upper stage did the same thing back in 2002. Seems the human race is quite good at creating artificial asteroids. Something to be proud of.

**Martian Lakes Confirmed** – In 2018 the MARSIS (Mars Advanced Radar for Subsurface and Ionosphere Sounding) instrumentation aboard the European Mars Express probe detected what appeared to be a saltwater lake beneath the Southern polar cap. Recently, researchers at a University in Rome, using techniques normally used to “explore” the lakes underlying the ice sheets resting on land in Antarctica, have re-examined the original data and concluded there are multiple “hypersaline” bodies of water in liquid form at the Martian South pole. We’re talking significant amounts of water. Not something you could drill and drink though. Too salty. And, who knows, teeming with microbial life left over from the good old days of oceans, thick atmosphere, and warm temperatures? Maybe. If not, could be seeded with the microbes that live in similar environments here on Earth? Long term results could be quite interesting. Fatal to us, perhaps, but interesting.

**New Toilet in Space** – On October 2<sup>nd</sup> 2020 a Northrup-Grumman Antares rocket boosted a robotic Cygnus spacecraft into orbit from Virginia. A brand new toilet is among other cargo taken to the ISS. A steal at a mere \$23 million, it’s 65% smaller and 40% lighter than the previous system. Important to test it in “real” conditions as it is the gizmo that will be used by the Artemis expeditions to the Moon and future expeditions to Mars. Rather important that it proves more reliable than

the set-up it replaces. You'll be glad to know it includes a "3D-printed titanium dual fan separator" to suck urine and waste into the contraption. Hmm, sounds a bit dicey. Also, you'll be glad to know the urine will be recycled into drinking water even more efficiently than before. Still want to be an astronaut? Better to be a space plumber. Going to be lots of work aboard those colony spaceships and L5 stations.

**Bennu Got Vesta Dandruff** – The asteroid Bennu is about 1,650 feet in diameter. NASA's OSIRIS REx spacecraft has been orbiting it since December 2018. Recently it spotted 6 boulders between 6 feet and 14 feet in diameter resting on the surface. What makes them different from all the other boulders is they don't belong. Bennu's rocks are made of water-bearing minerals formed at relatively low temperatures. The "rogue" boulders are made of pyroxene, which forms at much higher temperatures. Scientists believe they are Vestoids, mini-asteroids struck off Vesta via cosmic collisions. Vesta, more than 300 miles in diameter, is one of the larger asteroids. Vestoids strike Earth occasionally, so no surprise some were gravity captured by Bennu. OSIRIS Rex is going to grab some samples later this month and bring them to Earth in 2023. Scientists are hoping a few grains from a Vestoid will be among them.

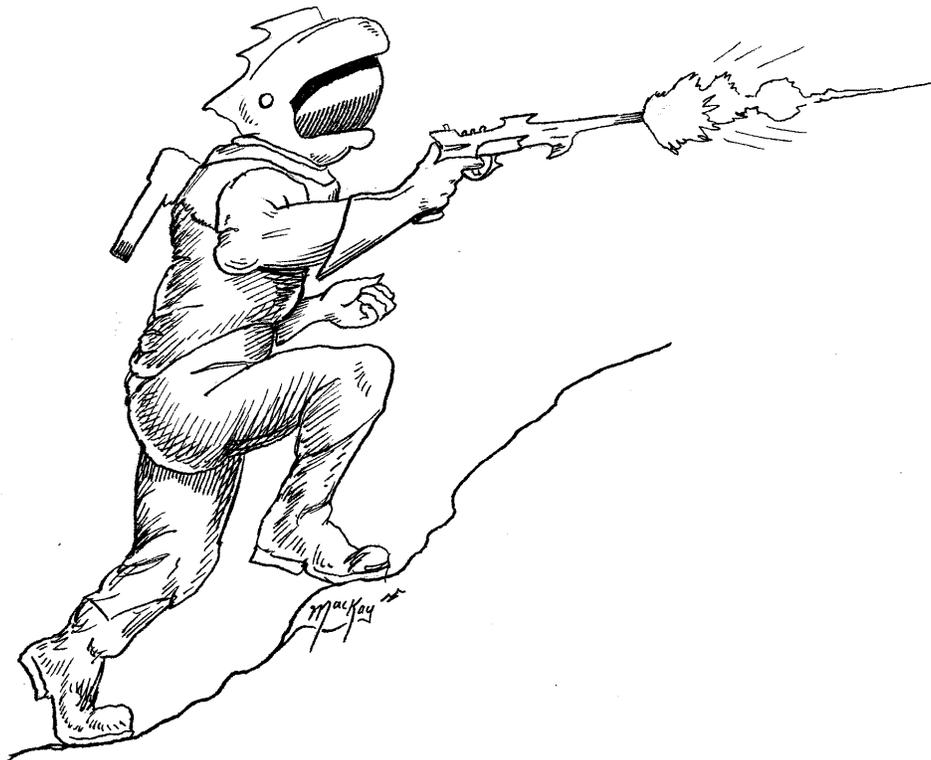
**Rogue Planet Spotted** – Wandering in interstellar space exist dark planets unattached to any star. They are as cold as the space around them, so cannot be detected by infrared telescopes. They reflect only distant starlight, so are too dim to detect with optical telescopes. Occasionally they pass between us and a star, but only once, since they are not in orbit around that star but merely drifting by. Nevertheless, should that star be under surveillance at the time by micro-lensing techniques (don't ask, even Einstein thought it was crazy, and he's the one who came up with the idea) the passage of a rogue planet is easily detected.

Turns out an Earth-sized rogue was spotted recently. It, the 5<sup>th</sup> rogue planet to be discovered, has been named "OGLE-2016-BLG-1928." Pretty romantic, eh? Leaps right off the press release at you.

Anyway, scientists think there could be trillions of them out there. They also think some might still be warm from internal heat, and still possess thick atmospheres that were never stripped away by the gravitational force of a sun. Add to this the fact that the building blocks of life are formed in the very process that creates stars, planets and asteroids in the first place, it may be at least a few of these rogue planets are teeming with life. On the other hand, these planets represent a considerable traffic hazard interstellar craft are liable to smack into. Maybe this is a partial explanation of the Fermi paradox.

**Venusian Life Originated on Earth?** – Maybe. If there is life on Venus (see above), Earth-grazing asteroids, such as the meteor that spent 90 seconds zipping through our upper atmosphere over Australia in 2017 before heading back into space, possibly carrying Earth microbes splattered across its face, could be the source. It is estimated that, during the life of the Solar System, as many as 600,000 space rocks have passed through our atmosphere and gifted our microbes to Venus. And Mars rocks may have brought microbes to Earth. If life exists on all three planets it may well be related. How cool is that?

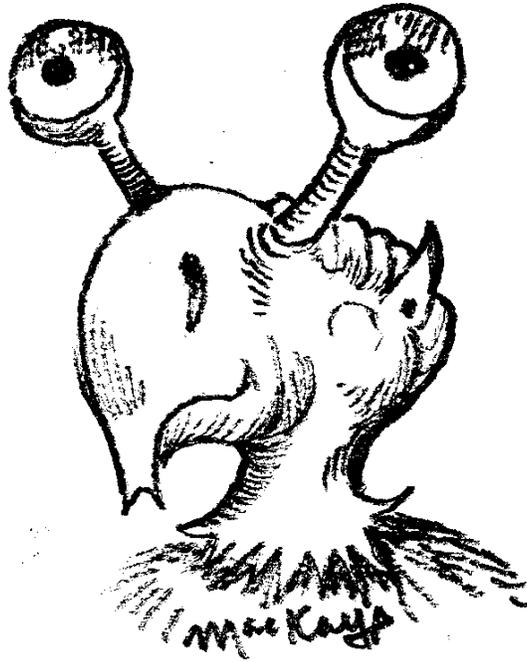
ART PORTFOLIO: BARRY KENT MCKAY



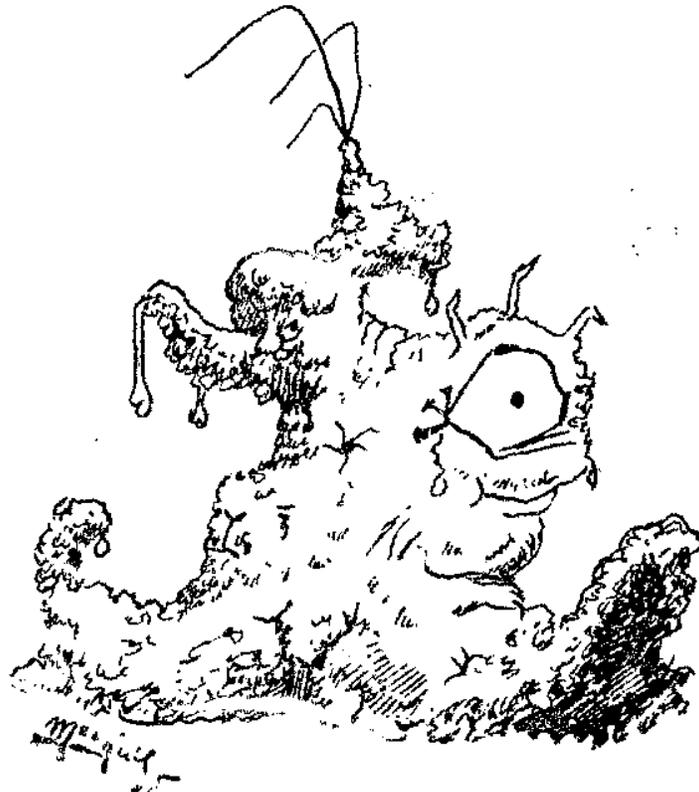


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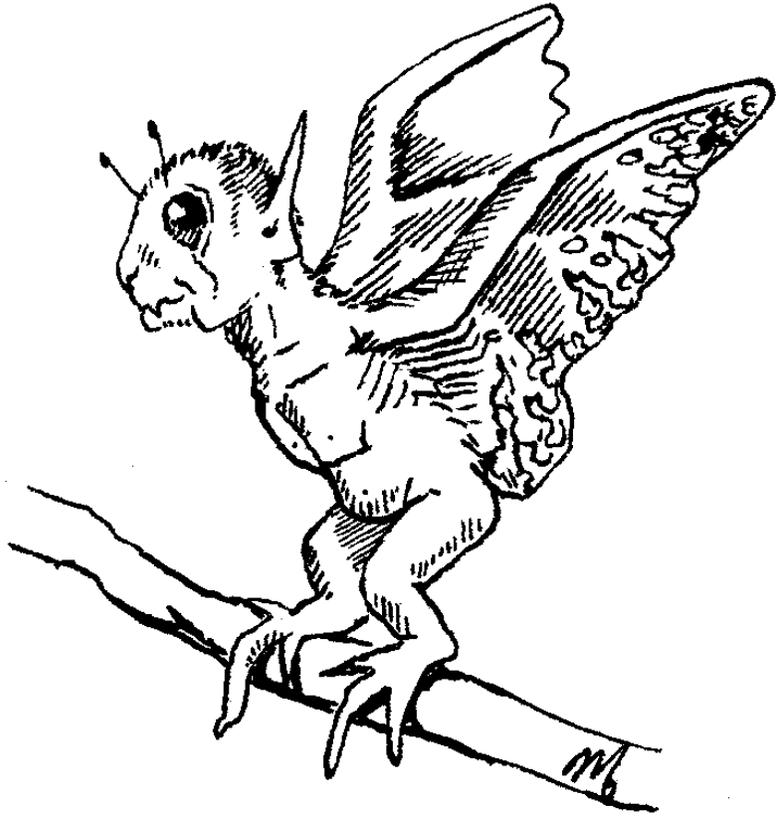


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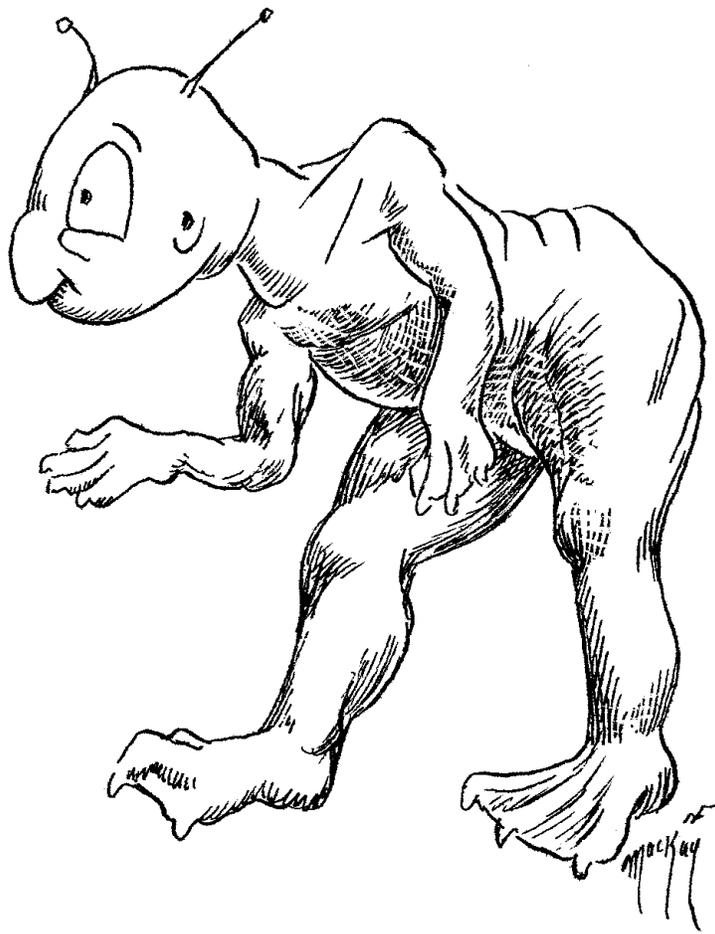
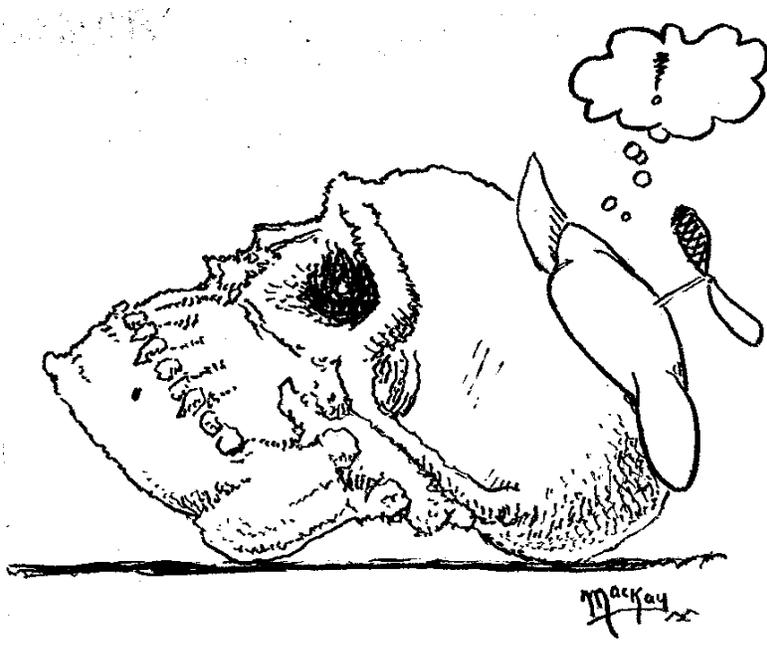




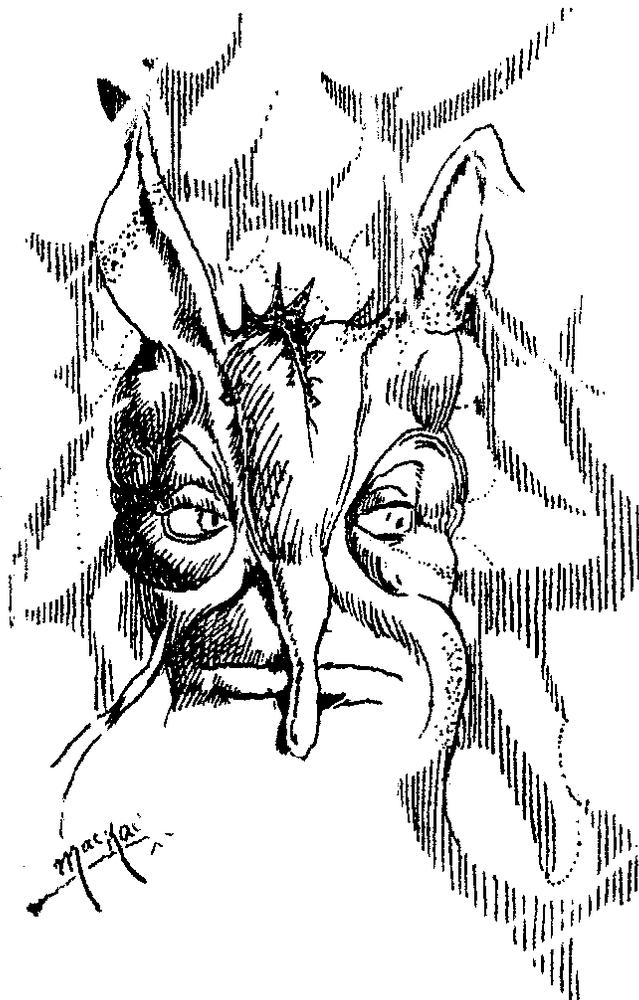
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## Barry Kent McKay Biography

Back in the 1970s Barry used to offer fillos to various SF fanzine editors. The ones included in this selection were passed on to me by Taral Wayne in the 1990s to use in my assorted fanzines of the period. I used them all.

SF cartoons or illos were but a passing phase of doodles compared to Barry's principal interest, art devoted to wildlife, with an emphasis on birds. His mother was a pioneer in wildlife rehabilitation and he grew up in a house filled with birds. He has devoted most of his life "to the study of natural history, and the protection of wildlife and the protection of animals."

He has been a founder, and/or director, of more than a dozen prestigious professional organizations devoted to the preservation of wildlife, done fieldwork for the Royal Ontario Museum, and provided art and articles for newspapers, magazines and books for about half a century. For example, his widely respected *Nature Trail* column ran weekly in the *Toronto Star* newspaper for 25 years.

Currently he is concentrating his advocacy on challenging the misuse of science to justify unnecessary wildlife culls, and the abuses of international trade in wildlife, both practices currently contributing to a decline in many species.

Simply put, Barry Kent McKay is one of Canada's leading environmentalists, wildlife preservationists, and natural history artists. He is what the Japanese would call "a living treasure."

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## LITERARY SHENANIGANS

### 2020 Dragon Awards

The winners of the 2020 [Dragon Awards](#) were announced September 6<sup>th</sup>, 2020, during the virtual Dragon Con. The convention's press release says more than 8,000 fans cast ballots.

#### 1. Best Science Fiction Novel

- *The Last Emperox* by John Scalzi

#### 2. Best Fantasy Novel (Including Paranormal)

- *The Starless Sea* by Erin Morgenstern

#### 3. Best Young Adult / Middle Grade Novel

- *Finch Merlin and the Fount of Youth* by Bella Forrest

#### 4. Best Military Science Fiction or Fantasy Novel

- *Savage Wars* by Jason Anspach & Nick Cole

#### 5. Best Alternate History Novel

- *Witchy Kingdom* by D. J. Butler

## 6. Best Media Tie-In Novel

- *Firefly – The Ghost Machine* by James Lovegrove

## 7. Best Horror Novel

- *The Twisted Ones* by T. Kingfisher

## 8. Best Comic Book

- *Avengers* by Jason Aaron, Ed McGuinness

## 9. Best Graphic Novel

- *Battlestar Galactica Counterstrike* by John Jackson Miller, Daniel HDR

## 10. Best Science Fiction or Fantasy TV Series

- *The Mandalorian* – Disney+

## 11. Best Science Fiction or Fantasy Movie

- *Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker* by J. J. Abrams

## 12. Best Science Fiction or Fantasy PC / Console Game

- *Star Wars Jedi: Fallen Order* – Respawn Entertainment & Electronic Arts

## 13. Best Science Fiction or Fantasy Mobile Game

- *Minecraft Earth* – Mojang Studios & Xbox Game Studios

## 14. Best Science Fiction or Fantasy Board Game

- *Tapestry* – Stonemaier Games

## 15. Best Science Fiction or Fantasy Miniatures / Collectible Card / Role-Playing Game

- *Magic: The Gathering: Throne of Eldraine* – Wizards of the Coast

The winner the [2020 Eugie Foster Memorial Award for Short Fiction](#) was announced September 6 during the virtual Dragon Awards ceremony.

The Eugie Award “honors stories that are irreplaceable, that inspire, enlighten, and entertain.”

The winner of the 2020 Eugie Award is:

- “**For He Can Creep**” by Siobhan Carroll (*Tor.com*)

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## 2020 Norma K. Hemmings Awards

The winners of the 2020 Norma K Hemming Awards, given under the auspices of the Australian Science Fiction Foundation (ASFF), [were announced](#) on September 6, 2020.

The Norma K Hemming Award is given to mark excellence in the exploration of themes of race, gender, sexuality, class or disability in a speculative fiction work (e.g. science fiction, fantasy, horror) by Australian citizens and/or residents. Eligible work includes short stories, novellas, novels, collections, anthologies, graphic novels and stage play scripts.

### **Short Fiction (stories up to 17,500 words)**

- *Winter's Tale*, Nike Sulway & Shauna O'Meara (Twelfth Planet Press)

### **Long Work**

#### **[TIE]**

- *From Here On, Monsters*, Elizabeth Bryer (Pan Macmillan Australia)
- *Ghost Bird*, Lisa Fuller (University of Queensland Press)

Source: File 770

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### **2021 Baen Short Story Contest**

Entries in the [Jim Baen Memorial Short Story Award](#) writing contest are being accepted from now through February 1, 2021. See rules and specifications at the site. Judging will be by Baen Books editors Hank Davis, Jim Minz, Tony Daniel, David Afsharirad, and Baen author David Drake.

Ten finalists will be announced no later than March 8, 2021

The **Grand Prize** winner will be published as the featured story on the Baen Books main website and paid at the normal paying rates for professional story submittals, currently .08/word. The author will also receive an engraved award, free entry into the **2021 International Space Development Conference**, a year's membership in the National Space Society and a prize package containing various Baen Books and National Space Society merchandise.

**Second** and **Third** place winners will receive free entry into the **2021 International Space Development Conference**, a year's membership in the National Space Society and a prize package containing various Baen Books merchandise. The winners will be announced and notified no later than March 22, 2021. The winners will be honored at the [2021 International Space Development Conference](#) in Los Angeles, California, May 27-May 30, 2021.

Source: File 770

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### **2020 Elgin Poetry Awards**

The Science Fiction & Fantasy Poetry Association (SFPA) has announced the winners of the [2020 Elgin Awards](#) for best collections of speculative poetry published in the previous two years. Named after SFPA founder Suzette Haden Elgin, awards are given in two categories: best chapbook and best full-length book.

## FULL-LENGTH BOOK AWARD WINNERS

**Winner:** *Soft Science* • Franny Choi (Alice James Books, 2019)

**Second Place:** *Elemental Haiku* • Mary Soon Lee (Ten Speed Press, 2019)

**Third Place:** [tie]

*The Comfort of Screams* • G. O. Clark (Alban Lake Publishing, 2018)

*The Demeter Diaries* • Marge Simon & Bryan D. Dietrich (Independent Legions, 2019)

## CHAPBOOK CATEGORY

**Winner:** *The Book of Fly* • John Philip Johnson (Graphic Poetry Press, 2019)

**Second Place:** *The Last Mastodon* • Christina Olson (Rattle, 2019)

**Third Place:** *Fragments from the Book of the After-Dead* • Herb Kauderer (The Poet's Haven, 2019)

This year's Elgin Awards had 13 nominees in the chapbook category and 42 nominees in the full-length category.

The Science Fiction and Fantasy Poetry Association was established in 1978 and has an international membership. The 2020 Elgin Chair is Colleen Anderson, a Canadian author who has had over 170 poems published. She is a member of HWA and SFPA and a Canada Council grant recipient for writing. Her solo anthology *Alice Unbound: Beyond Wonderland* was published by Exile Books. She has served on both Stoker Award and British Fantasy Award juries. Her short-story collection, *A Body of Work* was published by Black Shuck Books, UK.

Source: File 770

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## RANDOM MUSINGS

### Revisiting "Turnabout Intruder."

*By Robert J. Sawyer*

"KIRK:" Spock, Spock, give it up! Return to the *Enterprise* family. All charges will be dropped and the madness that temporarily overcame all of us on Camus Two will fade and be forgotten.

SPOCK: And what will become of Doctor Lester?

"KIRK:" Doctor Lester will be cared for always. It is a debt and a responsibility I owe her from the past.

SPOCK: No, sir. I shall not withdraw a single charge that I have made. You are not Captain Kirk. You have ruthlessly appropriated his body, but the life entity within you is not that of Captain Kirk. You do not belong in charge of the Enterprise and I shall do everything in my power against you.

“Turnabout Intruder,” the final episode to air of *Star Trek: The Original Series*, is much better than you may remember. It’s a fascinating look at transgenderism as seen in 1969, with a character—Doctor Coleman—who steadfastly loves his partner no matter how she chooses to present.

The supposedly sexist line—oft-misquoted, always without the lines that follow it, and certainly open to interpretation—that everyone rails against (if they take it to mean that Starfleet, as opposed to Jim’s career-oriented life, is closed off) is a very minor part of this episode, but it is also clearly identified as being unfair:

JANICE: Your world of starship captains doesn’t admit women. It isn’t fair.

KIRK: No, it isn’t.

And for those of us sick to death of the portrayals beginning with *The Next Generation* and ramped up to fever pitch in the most recent *Trek* incarnations of Starfleet as a venal, corrupt organization, this is a breath of fresh air, and a high note for TOS to go out on:

“KIRK:” Why are you being so defensive? There’s no implied criticism of you in my order to remove you from the case.

McCOY: That is not the reason I’m here. I’m here because Doctor Coleman’s record states that he’s incompetent.

“KIRK:” That’s the opinion of an individual.

McCOY: No, sir! That is the opinion of Starfleet Command. I checked with them. Doctor Coleman was removed from his post as Chief Medical Officer of his ship for administrative incompetence—

“KIRK:” There are no administrative duties required here.

McCOY:—as well as flagrant medical blunders.

“KIRK:” Promotions and demotions can be politically maneuvered. You know that, Bones.

McCOY: NOT in Starfleet Headquarters, Captain! And *certainly* not in the Surgeon General’s office!

Yes, William Shatner’s acting is as spirited as ever in this episode. I rather suspect he was angling for an Emmy nomination based on it (a sample episode is all that’s submitted) after Nimoy had already received two nominations.

But recall not just that Shatner is playing a woman, but also, and I’d argue more importantly, an insane person, and he does that with all the gusto his fellow Canadian thespian, Steve Ihnat, did when playing asylum inmate “Lord” Garth, formerly of Izar, earlier in the season in “Whom Gods Destroy.”

A friend recently said to me, “Rob, I’m not gonna lie. I sat down to try to watch this episode for the first time a few months ago, and I just couldn’t. It struck me as too sexist to watch.”

My reply:

It’s not a transgender “interpretation.” That is literally what the episode is about. Whether they handled it well by the standards of 1968-69 American primetime TV—where EVERY SHOW was cisheterosexual in its narrative assumptions—or by the standards of 2020 is certainly debatable, though.

Here’s not one but two non-cisheterosexual facts for you right from the very first words (the Captain’s log that opens the teaser):

“The Enterprise has received a distress call from a group of scientists on Camus Two, who are exploring the ruins of a dead civilization. Their situation is desperate. Two of the survivors are the expedition surgeon, Doctor Coleman, and the leader of the expedition, Doctor Janice Lester.”

The principal guest star plays *Doctor* Janice Lester (a Ph.D., presumably) and the *leader* of the expedition to Camus Two. That academic rank and the leadership of a space expedition were *progressive* positions for her to have been portrayed as holding in 1969.

We’d previously seen female archeologists on *Star Trek*: Mrs. Crater in “The Man Trap” (whose husband, but not her, was accorded the title of Professor), and two *Enterprise* staff archeologists, neither of whom was accorded the title of Doctor, namely Carolyn Palomas in “Who Mourns for Adonais?” and Marla McGivers, an especially sexist portrayal, in “Space Seed.” Again, “Turnabout Intruder” is *more* progressive than earlier *Trek* on that score.

By the way, Scotty uses the word “hysteria” referring to “Kirk’s” behavior when inhabited by Janice:

SCOTT: Doctor, I’ve seen the captain feverish, sick, drunk, delirious, terrified, overjoyed, boiling mad. But up to now I have never seen him red-faced with hysteria. I know how I’m going to vote.

McCOY: I’ve been through this with Spock. He’s not being scientific and neither are you.

Now, yes, in some recent circles of discourse, “hysteria,” “hysterical,” and other related terms are frequently identified as a sexist.

But I know *exactly* when most North Americans of my generation learned hysteria’s etymological roots (the word often being applied to adults and children of any gender throughout our lives to that point).

It was in 1995 when Marcia Clark objected that Johnnie Cochrane had made a sexist slur when he said she was being hysterical during the O.J. Simpson trial.

People were scratching their heads and some—me included, as well as various trial commentators—went to the dictionary and only then discovered that the word “hysteria” has the same root as “hysterectomy” and “hysterical,” and comes from the Greek for uterus.

Although in the 19th century, hysteria was seen as a female ailment, by the 20th the term was widely applied to men and women.

From the Simpson trial:

COCHRAN: We are certainly not going to become hysterical, your honor, and yell at you and become hysterical.

CLARK: That kind of personal attack is kind of very improper and inappropriate. The court knows it’s advocacy and not yelling at anyone. For Mr. Cochran to make that kind of sexist remark, “hysterical,” and take that umbrage at it and the court should not account for that kind of behavior.

Yes, it’s really hard to reconcile all the things Janice says into any sort of coherent version of reality—which isn’t surprising, because she’s absolutely nuts (she killed all of the other members of her own command—the expedition she was the leader of—except Dr. Coleman).

At the beginning of the episode, she says, “The year we were together at Starfleet is the only time in my life I was alive.”

This implies, to me, that they were together at Starfleet Command—that is, on Earth, not in space. In other words, she knew Kirk at a time when he *wasn’t* out in

space captaining a ship. But later she says, “Love him? I loved the life he led, the power of a starship captain.”

Which I don’t know what to make of. *When* did she know him *while* he was living this life?

To my mind, the psychological interpretation that makes this most sense is this:

- Janice and Jim were in love when they were both at Starfleet on Earth (or, at least, Janice was in love with Jim, and they had a relationship).
- Janice thought they’d make a life together.
- Jim broke up with her to leave Earth and take command of a starship, leaving her behind.
- Janice came to hugely resent that Jim had chosen the captaincy over a life with her *and so* when Janice stumbled upon an alien technology that would let her take that thing Jim valued more than he valued her from him—the captaincy—she did so.

At the end, she does indeed say:

“Ohh! I’ve lost to the captain. I’ve lost to James Kirk! I want you dead! I want you dead! I want you dead! Oh, I’m never going to be the captain. Never. Kill him.”

And that’s really hard to parse, but I think the most coherent version of it is this, rephrasing each sentence after the “Oh.”

- She’s lost out *again* to the notion of the captaincy.
- She’s lost her Jim to the grand notion of [Captain] James Kirk.
- She wants *the captain*—which now is synonymous with Jim—dead.
- She repeats: she wants the captaincy—the thing that came between her and happiness—destroyed. And then she says it once more.
- She then says she’s never going to be [as important to him as] the [rank of] captain. Never. Kill the captain.”

No matter how you try to interpret it, it’s hard to make sense of her insane ravings. After all, it’s not *Jim*’s fault that *she* didn’t become a captain herself; it’s not that *he* took the command SHE was up for—there’s zero evidence to support that. And, even if you argue that Starfleet *doesn’t* allow female captains, which I still think is contestable, *Jim* didn’t make the policy.

In the end, this is the ages-old story of a lover scorned setting out to destroy the rival. In a non-science-fictional setting, the rival (the captaincy) and the person embodying it would have been inseparable, but here, they ARE separable, and, as Kirk said of her behavior *even back when they were at Starfleet*, “And you punished and tortured me.” To which Janice’s response is the one of many an abuser: she did it because “I loved you.”

We can say that Janice isn't an admirable woman, and again try to cast all this as stereotypical sexism—but I really think the point is that she was a mentally ill *person*, full stop, and again I draw the parallels to Garth of Izar from earlier in the season, who likewise slaughtered countless people and was manic, illogical, and ultimately their own worst enemy.

Was this the best possible way for *Star Trek* to end its initial run? Of course not. But, in my view, it's a damn good episode that has been unfairly maligned for decades. Give it a rewatch and see if you don't agree.

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Hugo Award-winner Robert J. Sawyer's 24th novel, *The Oppenheimer Alternative*, is out now in print, audio, and ebook formats.

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

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## BOOKS TO BE IGNORED: Slave Ship— by Frederik Pohl

At VCON 14 in 1986 I wanted to get Frederik Pohl's autograph. When I went up to him he took the *Slave Ship* pocketbook from my hand and stared down at its cover. "I forgot I wrote this," he muttered. Then, on inquiring who I was, he wrote "To Graeme – Best wishes – F Pohl" and handed it back to me. Yes, Pohl had let the book slip from his mind. It is a minor work, and a bizarre one.

First serialized in *Galaxy Magazine* in 1956, the British Four Square Science Fiction pocketbook version came out in 1963. My copy is their second edition I picked up in 1967. Nowadays it's hard enough to find Pohl's Hugo Award-winning 1956 novel *The Space Merchants* in a book store, let alone this obscure rarity. I imagine it hasn't been reprinted in a long time, though old editions are available on Amazon. It's significance lies in the fact it was Pohl's first solo-effort novel. How well did he do?

The basic premise involves America in a cold war with an evil Asiatic ideology ruling Africa and Asia, with Europe a ruined mass of rubble hosting a bunch of proxy mini-wars. Puts me in mind of Orwell's 1948 novel *1984* and its Earth divided into three camps: Oceania, Eurasia and Eastasia, or Edgar Rice Burrough's 1916 novel *Beyond Thirty* (also known as *The Lost Continent* in later editions like my 1977 Tandem Pocketbook version), in which America has been cut off from the Eastern hemisphere for 200 years. This kind of world division, for the sake of a planet-wide war, is an old trope.

Where Pohl was startlingly original lay in his choice of villain, the Vietnamese religion of Caodaism. I remember those guys from their political activities in South

Vietnam during the Vietnam war. Even now apparently 2.5% of the population of Vietnam are Caodaists (the Communists banned the “cult” in 1975, but reversed their ban in 1997). There is an extraordinarily accretive and syncretic religion combining Asian philosophy with French culture. Founded in 1926, their principle patron saints are Victor Hugo, Sun Yat Sen, and Nguyen Binh Khiem. Lesser saints include Moses, Mohammed, Joan of Arc, Shakespeare, Louis Pasteur, and Lenin. It’s a wonder it hasn’t caught on in the West, as Hare Krishna did, but for some reason it remains largely unknown.

It is bold of Pohl to pick Caodaism as the modern Asian peril, but he makes little use of it. The Caodaists are simply the threat of “the other” for most of the book. When they do appear it’s obvious they are not a racial threat (as in the old-fashioned “yellow peril” concept so beloved of the Kaiser) but a subversive threat, as their adherents include Asians, Africans, and Europeans. Pohl perhaps using them as a substitute for the Communist ideological threat of the day, just as modern writers often point to the “threat” of the universal (as in pan-racial) appeal of Islam. Basically, the paranoid threat du jour.

The protagonist is Lieutenant Commander Logan Miller of the U.N. Navy. Little emphasis is placed on the international nature of the Navy. The reader forgets it is a UN force and thinks of it as the American Navy. Logan is fresh from a year’s duty aboard the 12,000 ton undersea warship *Spruance* which, being Nuclear powered, is seldom in port. All warships in this near future are submarines. Even 40,000 ton battleships. Hiding from the orbiting satellites I guess. Incidentally, the main reason the conflict is mostly a cold war is the fact the hundreds of satellites overhead carry nuclear bombs. Pohl has envisioned a variation of M.A.D. (Mutual Assured Destruction) as the state of affairs. This is but an exaggeration of the real MAD, and not by much.

On his way to his new posting Logan witnesses the awesome power of “the glitch,” in that an Air Force (UN air force?) Captain in the airport waiting room is killed by something akin to spontaneous combustion. It’s been happening more and more, seemingly at random, but in such numbers as to suggest it’s a Caodaist secret weapon. This makes people hate Caodaists all the more.

Now, the hilarious thing is that the plot of the book centres on Logan being assigned the mission of discovering what the Caodaist secret weapon actually is, where it’s located, and how it works. Hilarious because the blurb on the back of the book undercuts his mission. It reads “A new and seemingly invincible weapon claims over a million victims at random before each side discovers that the other is not responsible ... But then who is?”

This has the unfortunate affect of removing all suspense from Logan’s mission and substituting an impatience on the part of the reader for Logan to discover what the reader already knows and start hunting for the real villain. Alas, this doesn’t happen till page 118, or 8 pages before the novel ends. The true identity of the villain is an afterthought, one that literally is dismissed with the last sentence in the book “But that’s another story.”

Oh, COME ON now! How annoying is that? It is to arrgh!

Logan is upset with his new assignment. He's to work at a Florida Dairy farm. Fortunately, it is only a front. His actual job is to learn the language of cows, pigs, and dogs. Or rather, as a computer specialist, to analyse the research of other officers who are grunting and barking with the critters all day long. Say what? Impossible premise is permitted in SF, but since much of the book is taken up with explaining what the officers are doing and why it is perfectly credible, whereas I consider it far-fetched, reading the book was at times painful and exasperating for me.

An appendix at the back of the book allows Pohl to back up the premise with information gleaned from scientific journals. Granted, in more recent times Gorillas have mastered an extensive vocabulary of concepts, as have chimpanzees. But in 1956 Pohl is claiming things like "A philologist named George Schwidetsky believes he has found traces of chimpanzee loan-words in ancient Chinese ("ngak"), in a South African Bushman dialect (a tongue click), and even in modern German! (The German word "geck," derived from Chimpanzee "gack.")

Oh, doubleplus COME ON now! I frankly don't believe a word of it. I think Pohl is making this up. Granted, "geck" or "gecken" actually translates as something like "to cackle" but I doubt it comes from the Chimpanzees. Can't find any Philologist named Schwidetsky via google either. I call shenanigans!

Pohl's basic idea seems to have been that most animals have a limited variety of noises, but in varying combination could conceivably express myriad concepts, therefore that must be exactly what critters are doing. We can figure it out if we just try to engage them in conversation.

It helps if you have ESP tendencies, as Logan apparently does. A true ESPER, or ESP psychic, can induce telepathy in a sensitive like Logan, so at one point, while on leave in Miami, he is able to communicate telepathically with his wife Elsie, a prisoner of war held by the Caodaists in Zanzibar. Sure. Right. Why not?

Logan is assigned a partner, a fellow UN Navy guy (originally Soviet Army) named Semyon Ilyitch Timiyazev. Semyon misses the good old days when the Soviet Union took on Tito's army in Yugoslavia and wound up being annihilated by the Caodaists. He seems about as paranoid as Stalin was. When he and Logan are on leave in Miami and there's a disturbance on the beach, Semyon whips the crowd into a lynch mob frenzy by yelling they've captured "pacifists" and let's get them. Turns out to be a dead Caodaist frogman saboteur killed by "the glitch," the first indication in the book it can happen to the other side too. Throughout the book Semyon can be relied upon to misinterpret every situation and make things worse. Also, pacifists are portrayed as villainous traitors who deserve death. I think here Pohl is having fun with typical American paranoia of the day. The danger of that mindset and all that.

Anyway, Logan and Semyon knuckle down and create an effective commando team consisting of themselves, a dog, two female chimpanzees, and a seal. Alrighty then. But they are some upset to be given an obsolete monitor to use as their landing vehicle. For one thing, the reactor has been stripped of its shielding to improve the

speed of the decrepit contraption. Logan and Semyon figure they can hide behind a bulkhead to avoid most of the radiation, but the rest of their crew may well be fried before they reach their destination. Doesn't seem fair.

Turns out, they don't have to worry. They're ferried to their destination by the 40,000 ton carrier *Monmouth* which, in the middle of a battle, drops them off in an armoured and armed shuttle vessel to go ashore in Madagascar.

And now a word about Logan. He's an idiot. He overthinks everything. He always does the wrong thing. He's the living incarnation of Private SNAFU. He's the least decisive Commander in any Navy in the history of the World. He habitually disobeys orders out of mere impulse. For example, he's told not to go near the Caodaist secret camp until the dog has finished its recon. So he marches straight into the camp and is mildly surprised when he is captured. He says things to his captors like "Please don't hurt me" and "please let me go" and is mildly surprised when they refuse to obey. He is completely useless. Brave, yes, but foolhardy to the point of not only being an embarrassment to his own side but to the enemy as well.

This has got to be intentional parody. I see Pohl in my mind's eye chuckling constantly while writing this book, knowing full well many readers would take it seriously. It's a satire on militarism in general, the US Navy in particular, and on the paranoid nature of American exceptionalism. That's the way I see it.

But in the minds of many readers it boils down to military science fiction sidetracked by whoo-whoop stuff and betrayed by an unheroic hero incapable of accomplishing anything except by accident. Some of the critical response of the period apparently viewed the book as a failure because it presumably targeted the military SF crowd using characters and situations that failed to live up to their expectations.

I regard it as a failed anti-war satire that probably swooshed over the heads of the majority of readers who actually read it. Pohl wrote it around the time he'd been working on *The Space Merchants* with Kornbluth, and I suspect he thought it would appeal to the same readership. I think, instead, the military SF crowd flocked to the book because of its theme of total warfare (albeit cold warfare) against an Asiatic foe whereas the satire-sympathetic crowd probably ignored it as just another military pot-boiler. Pity.

*Slave Ship* is worth reading as a satire, if you can put up with its episodic nature, irritating characters, and incredibly weak ending. Not one of Pohl's best works. He ran away with a few concepts but didn't manage to pull it together as a convincing whole. It was a failure all right, a failed experiment.

Superficially, the *Slave Ship* of the title refers to the poor animals trained for a doomed mission. In fact I believe it includes the human characters as well, and overall literally everybody in America enduring the political miasma of the day. Consider it a warning of the Vietnam escalation to come. I truly believe that's what Pohl had in mind. But as such, too subtle to get the message across. Oh, well. Nice try.

At the very least, it is a most interesting period piece. An example of a science

fiction author trying to be topical along the lines of William Gibson's comment "The best science fiction is about today." Sometimes it doesn't work.

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## WHY FREDERIK POHL THOUGHT I WAS A LUNATIC

In 1986 I produced a one-shot fanzine titled *Entropy Blues* that sank into oblivion before it was even printed (or so it seemed). Still I believe, in my humble manner (still God-Editor of *BCSFazine* after all), that some of the articles are worth reprinting. So I snuck them into #200 of *BCSFazine* back in January of 1990. Those of you who were BCSFAns back then will have read this there. However, the majority of today's readers will, I trust, be reading this for the first time and possibly find it of interest.

### TO MEET THE MASTER!

At V-Con 14 in 1986. Ah yes. First into the Salish lounge for the SEMI-PRO VS. FULL TIME WRITING panel. Pohl walks in, ahead of the other speakers. I leap from my seat in the front row to confront him. Graciously he extends his hand.

"Do you mind if I take pictures, Mr. Pohl?"

"Of course not." [Thinks: Who is this twit?]

"I gotta 80,000 word novel at Del Rey under *serious consideration* (I know it's true cause they told me) and I wonder if you could tell me anything about the editor, Shelly Shapiro, and how she thinks and all like that?"

"I'm afraid not, I only met her once." [Thinks: Good God, where do these people come from?] (Thanks thanks thanks.)

Stare at Pohl for next hour snapping pictures every thirty seconds from distance of five feet. Make him feel comfortable.

Immediately rush to Ballroom Centre for HOW TO GET STARTED AS A WRITER OF SF panel. Sit in front row directly in front of Pohl. [Thinks: Damn, here he is again] Absorb every word, eyes blinking hero-worship, drooling with happiness. [Thinks: Wonder what his I.Q. is? If any]

Question period. "Mr. Pohl, I have a book at Del Rey—[Thinks: Again? Sure likes to toot his horn]—and I was wondering what the process of revision is like, how one works with the editor?" (Please, please, enlighten me!)

Pohl looks at me as if I'm some kind of pest. (Me? Never!) [Thinks: This guy is a maroon. Better give him my stock answer for neophytes.] "Of course you don't want to antagonize an editor, so learn to accept their suggestions." [Thinks: Now shut up and leave me alone] (I will. I will.)

Panel finished, Pohl gets up to leave. "Mr. Pohl, would you autograph this please?"

“Of course.” Pauses to stare at the cover. “I forgot I wrote this.” [Thinks: *Slave Ship*? This came out thirty years ago. Hasn’t this twit bought any of my recent stuff?]

“Mr. Pohl, I just want to say, I’ve always admired your satire, the deft way you fool around with everyday concepts, like in *The Space Merchants*.”

“Oh gosh, you make me feel soooo good. Well, must be off.” [Thinks: *The Space Merchants*? Why is it always bloody *The Space Merchants*? Ah well, even this idiot has some taste. Kornbluth would be pleased] (Gosh, I think he likes me.)

FREDERIK POHL READING: Salish Lounge. Resolved: being sensitive and perceptive, it finally dawns on me I’ve been pushing myself on Pohl in an unseemly manner, so have decided to sit in the back row and be quiet.

Halfway through Pohl’s reading a small bee appears beside my cheek. Arrrrgh!!! I leap to my feet and shuffle furiously sideways, punching my right fist frantically at the tiny—and I dare say to Pohl—invisible bee. Pohl looks up. [Thinks: Holy Christ! It’s him! *And he’s gone berserk!*] I bound clumsily from one side of the room to the other waving my arms above my head. [Thinks: Better pretend nothing is happening, go on reading. Maybe he’ll calm down.]

I continue to prance and canter, desperately attempting to drive off the bee. Pohl speeds up his reading to a furious pace. [Thinks: Done! I’m outta here.]

He leaps up and runs from the room. The bee finally disappears, leaving me standing drenched in perspiration and embarrassment as people exchange puzzled glances while filing out. (Oh God, this is not my day.)

I avoid Frederik Pohl for the rest of the convention. Pretty sure he was determined to avoid me.

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

### **Augur Magazine issue #7, Vol. 3, No 1.**

I reviewed every story and poem in this Magazine for Amazing Stories (online) Magazine. Here is a sample review from that column:

### **She lies an island** – by Michelle Payne

#### *Premise:*

An Irish giantess, a sort of forest ogre-fairy, is felled by arrows when she stumbles across a hunter encampment. This being modern times, everyone on Earth is astonished. Her massive body is transformed into a tourist attraction. Blair

remembers her Gran's tales of befriending such a creature long ago. Blair feels compelled to visit the dead giantess to honour Gran's memory.

*Review:*

The mythical "they" say every legend has a basis in fact. What if the truth behind the legend of the unicorn is not rumours of rhinos or narwals but rather the presence of a herd of unicorns in a hitherto-unexplored forest? Even true believers would be amazed. Hence one of the charms of this tale is the reaction of sceptics in government and science to the confirmed existence of the giantess. Every square foot of Ireland is promptly searched for her lair, her relatives, and any evidence of supernatural beings in general. Then the scientific theories to explain it all spring up like mushrooms. Meanwhile, entrepreneurs quietly go about their business exploiting her corpse.

In all of these coping mechanisms something is lost, namely the original faith in half-hidden magic-lore that offered more than mere facts. Perhaps the point of the story is that confronting the reality of what one believes destroys belief. The focus on Blair keeps things on a personal level, however, and gives the reader hope humans can cope with just about anything. On the other hand, maybe it's a commentary on our innate ability to turn the exotic into the mundane. Maybe that's our superpower survival trait. This story not only entertains but makes one think. I rather like it.

See the full review here < [Augur Magazine](#) >

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## THE LIGHT-HEARTED VITUPERATOR AND JOLLY REVILER: A Trip to the Future

*By Stan G. Hyde*

In 1970, when I was fourteen, I went to Japan for the first time as part of a High School trip to Expo 70. The theme was "Progress and Harmony for Mankind" and it was held in Osaka from March 15th to September 13, 1970.

I was there in July with a bunch of other high school kids when I was in Grade 8. It was my first trip into "the future," with the Expo exploring all kinds of different paths for mankind's future. I was already a science fiction fan and, more importantly, a Godzilla fan. There are a lot of science fiction connections, so hopeful folks will forgive this little trip down memory lane.

This was the first World's Fair held in Japan, and like the Tokyo Olympics in 1964, it represented a national desire to put the unpleasant memories of World War 2 to rest and show Japan as a nation connected to and embracing the modern world.

The idea was that peoples of the world could come together to stimulate ideas, and another particularly Japanese idea was that it would be less of an exposition and more of a festival.

As a fourteen year old monster fan (there was no use of the Japanese word "kaiju" at the time) I spent the first two weeks in Tokyo trying to escape from the group whenever I could to check out bookstores. Though I had no knowledge of Japanese, I could recognize Godzilla in Japanese on the spine of a book and so sought out what I could whenever I could.

At the time there was a popular form of children's book based around the concept of Sonorama books. Sonorama was conceived as a way for folks to get audio entertainment cheaply. Music, documentaries, and children's shows—both animated and Tokusatsu (Japanese special effects shows)—were put on cheap vinyl discs (so floppy there was a place marked where you placed a coin to weigh it down so it did not flop on the record player).

Although the dream was that these would catch on with adults, ultimately it was kids who were the main market. The discs were folded into books, with original artwork. In the case of kaiju, this included images of battles that never happened with characters from different companies (Gamera or Ultraman fighting Godzilla, King Kong fighting King Ghidorah) in the artwork. A giant monster alternate world.

I was only fourteen, and didn't come with a lot of spending money, but as the yen was only worth 1/3 of a cent at that time, I was able to come back with tons of monster memorabilia.

Another strange thing about the experience is that—when I gone to Japan - I am one of the few foreigners who has serious nostalgia for what was called the "Showa" era ... The era of the rule of the Showa emperor.

For instance, we discovered Japanese candy stores—at the time, the main floor of a family residence where you wandered around on the wooden floor room and found treats on low tables. The other school kids went there because they discovered you could buy fireworks—firecrackers and little two stage "rockets" with tail fins that flew briefly and then exploded. (Being Canada's bad-will ambassadors the kids bought these and shot them off pedestrian overpasses at passing Datsuns, a couples walking down the narrow streets, and especially at the Volleyball team that was housed in the Olympic buildings where we stayed in Tokyo. It was discovered that if you disassembled the rockets you could build one that shot all the way from our rooms on one side of the courtyard to rattle off the windows at the other side of the courtyard where the volleyball teams stayed. There was soon a battle royale that continued while we were there with the sports teams and the Canadian students launching attacks at all times of the day and night. (This continued until some of the Canadians set their curtains on fire and barely escaped burning the ex-Olympic residences down.)

For this monster kid, the discovery in the candy shop were bromides. These were somewhat similar to baseball cards. There was a book with paper envelopes. You paid 5 yen and then got to choose an envelope to rip open. Inside was a bromide (a photo approximately the size of a postcard) with an image from the Gamera series, the Ultraman series, the Godzilla series, and even Guilala (A giant space chicken featured in a single film—Remember, this was at the height of what was called the “monster big bang” in Japan, where every film company had made a giant monster film and where Ultraman and Kamen (Masked) Rider ruled the airwaves with new monsters on view every week).

Strange as it is, if I’m in a small town in Japan now, and find myself in an old bookstore or shop, I get overwhelmed with nostalgia for that time.

On to Expo ... After two weeks in Tokyo we headed for the fair.

If you remember the fair, you probably remember the image of the Tower of the Sun, a surreal object with a shining gold face on one side, and a giant image of the moon on the back, jutting through an overhead roof so that people could gather and speak to each other. Festival Plaza was covered by the world’s first large-scale transparent membrane roof.

The Theme Space under the space frame was divided into three levels designed by the artist Taro Okamoto. Okamoto is famous for his surreal artwork dominated by distorted objects and bright primary colours. His motto was “Art is Explosion,” and if you’re ever in Shibuya JR Station, look for the explosive mural he designed on the wall.

Other Okamoto designs include the aliens in the movie *Warning From Space* (just released for the first time in a decent print by Arrow Films by the way). In the autobiography of Stanley Kubrick, by John Baxter, it’s pointed out that much of the inspiration for *2001: A Space Odyssey* came from Japanese science fiction films of the 1950s, including *Warning From Space* with its “nameless two-meter tall black starfish with a single central eye who walk en pointe like ballet dancers.” (At one point Kubrick thought of portraying aliens in *2001* with ballet dances wearing costumes with spots that would be optically removed so that they seemed to be a blurred cloud of coloured motes ... Even more of a call back to *Warning From Space*’s ballet starfish. Of course, the huge space battles in *Battle In Outer Space*, *The Mysterians*—and the planetary destruction film *Gorath*—were also inspirational for *2001* and *Star Wars*, with their widescreen visions of the future created with models and sets similar to, but more ambitious than, George Pal’s work. The Japanese science fiction films of the 1950’s and early 60’s were the “test of concept” for the films that began the science fiction revival in the late 1960s and 1970s.)

Some of the Expo 70 pavilions directly inspired science fiction film. The Landmark Pavilion at Expo ‘70, a towering steel grid work with clusters of pods at the top in which displays were housed, was directly responsible for the spaceship designs in Doug Trumbull’s movie *Silent Running*. Trumbull took the image of the pavilion and laid it on its side, put engines at the back and geodesic domes in place of the pods, and had the design for the “Valley Forge,” the spaceship that is the guardian of

Earth's last forests at a time when Earth itself no longer had any natural landscapes left.

For a Grade 8, travelling internationally for the first time, the experience of being surrounded by visions of the future (and art displayed as spaces to be moved through—such as a pavilion designed by Joan Miro), my life was changed by the idea that words and images could be used to bring visions of the future to life. For the first time I felt engaged in creating the future and walking through it—a heady feeling—which has to some degree informed my real life career as an educator and teacher ever since.

Our little group was treated very well at the fair, Canadian school kids in a group that got special tours of the Canadian pavilion and the B.C. pavilion. There were 77 countries, as well as many different Japanese corporations, featured. To a large degree, the corporation pavilions were the most interesting, because rather than touting national pride, they spent time inventing creative spaces to experience.

The area designed by Okamoto was divided into three levels. The underground level represented the past and was a symbol of the source of humanity. As you went up there was a tree of evolution with models of prehistoric life becoming more advanced. The surface level represented the present and the dynamism of human interaction, while the space frame represented the future and a world where humanity and technology would be joined.

The designer of the Space Frame envisioned that the exhibition for the future would be like an aerial city.

It would be impossible to describe all the wonders to be sampled there, but there was one more pavilion that was a source of fascination for a kaiju fan.

The Mitsubishi Pavilion was developed by Tomoyuki Tanaka, who was the producer of the Godzilla series (and also of most of Akira Kurosawa's most influential films, lest one think we are talking about someone who was only a genre filmmaker).

The theme of the Pavilion, was "Nature of Japan" and images were projected onto screens that stretched eight meters from either side of "The Travator," a moving walkway. Mirrors were used to extend the depth of the illusion below the screens.

It was like being inside a special effects film. My memories are especially of riding the walkway through a tsunami and a volcano. The rainstorms were a combination of real-life typhoon footage and effects filmed in Toho Studio's special effects pool. Likewise the volcano used real-life eruptions enhanced by effects work filmed at the Anahi Ironworks Factory. Models for the sequences were created by Toho's special effects department.

The music that engulfed the viewer was by Godzilla veteran Akira Ifukube (whose pounding ostinato scores backed up the greatest of Toho's kaiju films). Later, some of the cues were actually used in 1972's *Godzilla vs Gigan*.

I didn't know it at the time, but the images also represented the end of an era.

The special effects work was done by Eiji Tsuburaya. Although in the past it was common to decry Japanese special effects, Tsuburaya is known in Japan as the "God of Special Effects" and his contributions to film history are celebrated to this day.

By 1970 he had created special effects for war movies and disaster movies, as well as creating the monsters of the Godzilla series and other kaiju films for Toho Studios. He had also created Ultraman and many other television series for the company that bears his name, Tsuburaya Productions, which is still active today.

He began the work on the effects for the Pavilion and oversaw shoots in November and December of 1969; however, he was hospitalized briefly for a heart condition and, while taking a brief vacation in January 1970, he passed away from a heart attack.

The work was taken over by director Yoshimitsu Banno, who directed *Godzilla vs Hedorah* (the smog monster) the next year in 1979. (Banno was very serious about the environment. I had supper with him once and he mentioned Rachel Carson who wrote *Silent Spring*, and who he admired as a marine biologist and strong woman who was brave enough to battle American companies about, among other issues, synthetic pesticides. Banno believed that she took real risks in resisting the tide of opinion at the time and had made a lasting contribution to the world).

Banno was happy to find out when we met that I had visited the Pavilion (I actually went back 3 times on the 3 days when I was in Osaka), and that I still had vivid memories of the experience. (He also thought I looked like Ernest Hemingway ... Not so sure about that).

(Ultimately Banno was also the man who brought the Godzilla series to America, with *Legendary's* on-going series beginning in 2014. But I've written about that elsewhere.)

Beyond the "nature of Japan" section, the Mitsubishi Pavilion also displayed "The Skies of Japan" which depicted a future in which weather control had been achieved. The third area was "The Japanese Seas" which focused on an undersea city. The fourth area was "The Japanese Land" which presented a diorama of a future city built at the base of Mount Fuji.

Between the third and fourth areas there were special smoke screens jointly developed by Toho and Mitsubishi, which allowed the audience to pass through images of sharks and tropical fish which were projected on the smoke.

There were a few more kaiju moments related to the fair. Expo '70 was the setting for Daiei Motion Pictures *Gamera vs Jiger* which featured the giant, rocket-propelled turtle fighting another monster on the fairgrounds. (I was amazed by the bromides I had purchased which depicted the film but never saw it until years later. Director Noriaki Yuasa's film was apparently known as *Monsters Invade Expo '70* in some markets.)

The experience changed my life—because it's the first time I realized that the science fiction mindset isn't just limited to books and movies, but also can generate a vision that affects architecture, social planning, art, and so many other things, and that futurism really can change the world for the better.

There will be another Expo in Osaka in 2025 (Covid-19 allowing), so you might want to make your plans now. It will be held from May 3, 2025 until November 23, 2025.

## MILLION WORD YEAR BLOG

I'M HERE – a film by Spike Jonez.

*By Michael Bertrand*

*(Originally posted online September 28, 2010)*

In a mild variation on routine, I am going to live blog a movie from my bedroom computer, as it's a movie I am watching via streaming online, and we still do not have a way to do that in the living room.

Dammit, why are YouTube videos quieter than absolutely everything else on the Internet? for a s long time, I thought it was my bad speakers that made it so, but no, I have new speakers, and they work fine, and YouTube is still insanely quiet compared to everything else on my computer. I am always having to turn the software volume sliders all the way up in order to hear anything, and often I have to turn up the physical hardware volume knob too. And then, of course, I forget I have done that, go back to do something non-YouTube, like play a Flash game, and *oh my God it is so loud! Ow!*

Anyhow, back to the movie. I was not sure I was interested in it, but then I watched a trailer and I thought "The guy has a computer for a head ... OK, color me intrigued, Mister Jonez." So, I figured I would give it a shot. What the heck. Take me to your world of metaphorical magic, Spike!

One thing that immediately impresses me deeply is how much everything in this movie looks exactly like everything in my life. The only other film that came close to that for me was *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, and that did not look like my life, necessarily, just life in general.

But this movie ... the bus, the hallway, the scenery he looks at as he drives by in the bus, everything looks like it came directly from a camera located in my eyeballs. That just blows me away. Was this shot in Vancouver? Does it have something to do with how nerds see the world? Has Spike Jonez been following me around with a camera or something? However he has done it, I am transfixed.

Jesus, even his apartment looks like the very apartment I am in. Not, admittedly, as incredibly cluttered as this place is, in fact, the opposite) but the same plain furniture and off white walls and light fixtures.

He is giving me no choice but to identify strongly with Mister Computer for a Head. And hey, what do I do all day? Read books and use a computer. I might as well have a computer for a head. Frankly, then I would probably be able to solve my own mental problems with a little code hacking and a deep defrag.

I guess he's a robot all over, not just the head. I love that thing he plugs himself into every night. Is that his recharger, do you think? Or perhaps it's the robot equivalent of television. After all, what do we humans do after work, a lot of the time? We flop down in front of the television and unplug our brains.

Robots just plug theirs in, apparently.

If it is their recharger, I can't help thinking that it feels sort of like robot dialysis.

I find this rise in robot pathos lately to be quite fascinating. *Wall-E* was only the beginning, it seems. It makes me wonder about this era and what, in us, is responding to these robot characters. Do we feel that cut off from the real world that we feel like machines? Like we are robots, just trying to do the right thing in a world that doesn't make sense to us?

Of course, in a more technical sense, these robots are animated characters, and thus can be given super expressive eyes, eloquent body language, and so forth. But that is as true for cartoon animals as it is for cartoon robots, so ... why robots? Why now?

Perhaps it is no more complex than the fact that cartoon animals have been used in so many ways that they are just kind of ... done, for now, and moving to robots lets a film-maker create a character who arrives with no enormous burden of cultural references, similarities, history, species assumptions, or any of that baggage. Each robot is unique, and there is a whole new language of translating mechanical parts into things which express emotion in a human way to explore.

It works because it is fresh, in other words.

Gah. OK, robot's name is Sheldon, and to further make me identify with him, he is intensely uncomfortable sitting in the car with the loud, obnoxious drunk people. If I was him I would just want to escape at that point. These are not my kind of people. That kind of thing makes me think crazy thoughts.

And I know that, while that is true for me, objectively, there is nothing particularly wrong happening in the car. Part of me wishes I could just relax and enjoy people's company as what it is, and not be so uptight and introverted about things. But I am what I am, and what I am is shy and introverted, and being around loud random drunk obnoxious people would make me want to flee, or kill.

Perhaps I'm just a badly made robot. I don't know.

Hmmm. Another layer of robot pathos just occurred to me: perhaps the Millennials feel like robots, with their hyper programmed and controlled upbringing from super involved parents who plan out and plot out every aspect of their lives.

And then, one day, boom, time for the real world, where you will have to make all your own decisions and you are not even allowed, by our culture, to consider that anything but a good thing. You have absolutely no experience with making your own way and doing what you want to do, but too bad, you are stuck with it. Ironic that your parents should have controlled so much but done so little to get you ready for life.

Freedom is mandatory.

Hmm, so, so far, fairly standard "shy dorky guy meets wild, free-spirited girl" plot. Curious as to where robots come from in this world, but this movie gives the impression of being done in a form of magical realism and so I know I might never get an answer.

Presumably, there is more of a reason for these characters to be robots than "it made it look cooler."

I suppose charging together is quite intimate to robots. I can't help but imagine Bender making crude comments about it, though. Dang you *Futurama!*

Gah. The Lost Trees kinda suck. Oh well.

Holy crap, she lost her fucking arm! I am robo-horrified. And he is going to be all sweet and selfless by giving her his arm. He is literally giving his right arm (well, OK, his left) to make her happy.

If she is not impressed by that, to hell with her.

Oh shit, now she has lost her right foreleg. I do not like where I see this going at all. And the thing is, I identify with her as well, being a clumsy and impractical and downright helpless dreamer myself.

In a way, I have Sheldon's problems and hers, without her charm or his competencies.

Ain't that a kick in the head.

At least I have one good thing in common with her: I'm a very good dreamer.

OK, I am bracing myself for this to go in any number of disturbing directions. Please don't hurt me too much, Mister Jonez, I swear I will watch *Where The Wild Things Are* even though I didn't really like the book as a child.

Well, at least she had the decency to completely refuse his foreleg outright. I would have done the same. And after the little speech about his dream, I might have caved in too, because that was highly unexpected and touching. But I am extremely stubborn, so I might have fought back harder, I am not sure. I know that I would not be able to handle watching him hop around on crutches while I walked around on his leg, knowing I am the reason he is on crutches, my stupidity and clumsiness and his sweetness and kindness. That would make me feel like low grade dirt. I would want to kill myself.

But I suppose he would argue that seeing me without a leg makes him feel bad, too. I am not sure what the ideal solution would be, assuming, of course, that it is not just a matter of going down to Future Shop and getting a brand new replacement leg. If it was that easy, he would have replaced his arm by now.

Gah, it's even more emotionally wrenching than anything I imagined. He donated his ... everything. It makes perfect sense and yet I did not see it coming, which makes it, of course, brilliant, from a writer's point of view. Some of the most profound moments in art come in the revealing of an unexpected yet perfectly logical and contiguous truth. You have that revelatory moment of "Of course! It makes so much sense now!"

That is almost the definition of profound.

OK, I have tried to avoid it for this whole film, but here it is, time to be excessively logical and think too much about things: how come he can survive without a body, but she couldn't?

Different parts needed, I guess.

Once more, I note how all doctors and surgeons in movies are now of Indian heritage. I find that to be very cool because I feel like I am witnessing a demographic shift in the zeitgeist as it happens. It is like when cops stopped always being Irish

and started always being Polish. That was the media world reflection of a true demographic shift, where the Irish immigrants had become more established over generations and left the police force, or got promoted above detective, and so it was the next wave of immigrants who saw becoming a police officer as a way to serve the community that took them in, and earn some respect in the process. Being a cop is a tough and dirty job, and often, it is the new arrivals, who often come from someplace of back breaking labour and terrible living conditions, who are willing to do it.

Now, it seems, in modern times, we in North America and Europe are reaping the rewards of an Indian culture that highly values education and wants their kids to become doctors because they quite rightly see that as a noble and lucrative and highly respected calling. Not so long ago, it was Jewish culture that produced these pressures, and a lot of people's doctors had Jewish names.

And as a way of gaining acceptance in a culture, becoming doctors or cops is a pretty good route. Once you save enough people's lives, they have trouble of thinking of you as some inhuman caricature.

Anyhow, back to the movie. I kind of wish it hadn't ended where it did, because that is a pretty depressing ending, to my mind. I know he looks all happy to be there sitting in her lap as just a head, but I still can't help being horrified by it all. She had no choice but to end up with his arm, his leg, then his whole body, and she can't even object without seeming like the most horrible, selfish, ungrateful person in the world. In a way, he is controlling her via martyrdom. Perhaps that is why he is so happy at the end. He knows that he will have the emotional leverage in the relationship from now on.

A cynical view, perhaps, but not an unrealistic one, I think. I mean, she has to live with his massive sacrifice 24/7 for the rest of her life, with his happy smiling head always there to remind her that she owes absolutely everything to him. She will likely spend the rest of her life playing nursemaid to him because nothing she can do can possibly thank him enough for his sacrifice.

And having rendered himself completely helpless and dependent on her, he is absolved of all responsibility for having his own life, and can, in fact has no choice but to, leave everything up to her.

If I was her, I would not be able to live like that. Sooner or later, I would have to escape, and if that meant finding someone else to care for him and moving on with my life, that is what I would have to do, even if it meant seeming like the most horrible person who ever lived.

People are simply not built for permanent gratitude. Sooner or later, you will run out, and then what?

So, seeing as I am already coming across as cynical, I give their relationship another year or so, tops. I mean, how long is a free spirit like her going to be able to take being tied down to taking care of him? How much fun is that going to be?

If I was writing a sequel, it would be the story of how they are happy at first, but then the strain gets to her, especially when she is helping him adjust to being, basically, a quadriplegic now and sacrificing her own life and all the things she used

to enjoy in order to be with him whenever he needs her. First there would be the occasional thoughtless-seeming comment, that she would quickly disavow, and then after a while, there would be more and more arguments, always with him saying “I can’t believe that, after all I have done for you ...” and that, of course, just making it worse.

Eventually, she would leave him in some robotic care home, just for a few hours the first time, but for longer and longer till one day, she shows up with a new boyfriend, and tells him it is over, and he is crushed, emotionally speaking.

So I suppose my ending would be even more depressing, but that is how I see it going.

And everyone would hate her so much, but she was only doing what she had to do to survive.

On that cheerful note ... good night folks.

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## MESSED-UP MOVIE MOPES

**The Island of the Lost** (1921) – This rare German film is an almost-workable combination of social satire, broad ethnic (racist) humour, an over-wrought love triangle, and mad science inspired by H.G. Wells novel *The Island of Dr. Moreau*. It suffers from missing scenes and sorely needed title cards, but enough survives to get the gist of the tale.

Robert Marston is lolling about on his submarine-yacht dockside in London, England, when he reads in a newspaper a reproduction of a message in a bottle found on a beach somewhere. He recognises the handwriting of his fiancée Joan Crawford who disappeared five years ago. Seems she’s trapped on an island off the West Coast of South America.

He leaves his sub and runs into his new fiancée Evelyn. Naturally he doesn’t tell her about Joan. He goes to the office of his friend Ted Fowlen who has but two patients who are insurance frauds. Ted tells them “It’s not healthy to be sick all the time.” But, being unemployed, like millions of others in Germany in the immediate postwar period, this is the best they can come up with to apply for government money. No doubt a familiar type to German audiences at the time and here used as comedy relief.

Rob confesses to Ted he’s worried someone will rescue Jane and return her to London, which would upset Evelyn. Ted suggests Rob rescue her instead and convince her to keep quiet. Things get complicated when Evelyn shows up and indicates she has read about the bottle message too, but has not yet clued in that it refers to Joan.

Meanwhile Ted’s efforts to get more patients, namely a newspaper ad claiming he has invented an artificial human and thus has proved his ability to cure anybody of

anything, has instead resulted in a flood of reporters pounding on his door demanding evidence. Ted panics, yelling he has to get away for two months so the furore will die down, so now's a good time for the two of them to go in search of Jane.

They exit through a back door and run down to the dock to get aboard Rob's submarine, which gets underway. There's some very good footage of the same submarine submerging, presumably one of the very few the Kriegsmarine was allowed to operate in 1921. Of particular note is the black butler serving a meal to Rob and Ted inside next to the periscope. The actor's name is Louis Brody, and I'm guessing he's an American soldier stationed in Germany (there were still a few at this time) earning some extra money, or perhaps he was an ex-soldier who had stayed on in Germany for some reason.

Next we see Rob and Ted being rowed ashore on the Island. Rob instructs the sailor who is going back to the sub to tell the Captain to anchor in a nearby river. Then Rob and Ted set out to explore. While they are creeping through some bushes a giant, hairy ape-man leans out of the foliage and glares at them, then backs away. All Rob does is gulp, then carries on. Not a big deal, I guess.

They discover a long thatched hut on stilts out on a lake. They also find a convenient dugout canoe. Once they've climbed up to the landing of the hut they spot Jane's shadow in a window. Exploring further, they discover the office of Professor McClelland. He seems glad to see them. They tell him they came to the island by accident on their yacht. He says "Then you are welcomed by a lonely guy like me." Sounds ominous.

Ted says he is going to go back to the yacht to get a bottle of sparkling wine to celebrate their arrival but instead goes to a metal door to Jane's cell. He opens a hatch. It's large enough to pull Jane through, but all they do is exchange pleasantries till the Prof's assistant Dr. Fung-Lu shows up. Ted demands the key, but Fung claims the Prof has it. So, Ted drags Fung to the office and demands the same from the Prof, who shrugs and goes with Rob and Ted to the cell to let Jane out. Meanwhile Fung hides Rob and Ted's rifles which they had carelessly left behind.

Rob and Ted paddle Jane ashore. Fung-Lu demands opium from the Prof, who tells him not yet, first there is a task he must perform. Meanwhile Jane tells Rob and Ted she had been kidnapped by three Chinese who brought her to the island to give her to the Professor. She complains of hearing terrible animal screams at night.

We see the black butler standing in the swamp wearing a top hat and carrying a suitcase. There's an explosion behind him. Evidently the sub has blown up with all hands. We see a shot of Fung-Lu laughing. Now we know who did it. Pity the budget didn't extend to a sub model being destroyed. All we saw was a small explosion throwing mud into the air. Oh well, it'll have to do.

Fung-Lu tells the Prof "Done! The ship is gone!" and demands opium.

"I can't. Your hand gets too unstable."

"I can't live without it," pleads Fung. The Prof gives in, but first makes Fung sign a document in which he admits he was nothing but a henchman in the experiments. "But I worked so hard for you!" Nevertheless, he signs. Seems the Prof wants all

future credit.

Jane shows Rob and Ted a large, one-room treehouse which they climb in to, leaving Louis the butler to count the soup cans in his suitcase by way of doing an inventory. Then he's ordered to go off in search of firewood. Which he does, and comes across the sole-surviving native on the island, a black woman in a grass skirt played by Desdemona Schlichting. With a name like that I assume she was originally from one of the German colonies in Africa, namely German Southwest Africa or German East Africa (roughly modern Namibia and Tanzania). Might have been given the name by missionaries or something.

Des takes Luis to her hut. He comments "five [soup] cans, 4 people, nothing left for poor back people" and starts ripping his butler uniform off. He embraces Des. "Back to nature!" states a title card.

We see Fung-Lu awash in opium dreams of gardens.

Rob, Ted and Jane are cooking soup over an extremely smoky campfire. Ted is fed up with Rob's refusal to tell Jane about Evelyn. Mischievously he asks Rob "Do you think often of Evelyn?"

"Who is Evelyn?" asks Jane.

"His bride in London," replies Ted. Rob looks stunned. Jane cozies up to Ted.

We cut to the new domestic setup. Two large huts have been built. One for the lads, one for Jane. Ted milks a goat in the corral then knocks on Jane's door to offer it to her. Rob gets jealous and refuses their offer to join them for breakfast. "I don't want to disturb your love idyll," he snarls, and runs off to work on the raft he's building. Ted and Jane flirt, then begin kissing passionately.

Now we see the Prof telling Fung he will allow Jane two days of freedom till he has need of her. Hmm, evidently the two huts and corral were constructed overnight. The Prof and Fung leave the office, and in comes the ape-man following instructions from Fung to wreck the place. The Ape-man is an interesting sort. Big, hairy guy, played by Umberto Guarracino (who also played the monster in the 1920 Italian Film *Frankenstein's Monster*) wearing cow-skin shorts over furry pants which are supposed to represent the creature's own fur. Huge man, so genuinely threatening in appearance.

The Prof and Fung return just after the ape-man has ripped the top of the desk in half. The Prof cows him with a whip. "Who created you?" demands the Prof. The ape-man points at Fung-Lu. Now we know who's been doing the real work in the lab. "I created you," insists the Prof, who is some pissed off.

Meanwhile, Ted and Jane, out hunting, see Louis in front of his hut. He is now King of the island. He has feathers in his top hat, a circular bone disc dangling from his nose, a necklace of claws and shells, and is wearing a grass skirt. Des is frantically beating a tom-tom. Louis jumps up and prances about. Ted and Jane laugh and laugh and laugh. Racist, you think? Methinks.

Jane asks Ted to reconcile with Rob. Difficult to do since it is now clear Rob is planning to leave on his raft by himself. Ted returns and tells Jane "to no avail." Stubbornly, she insists on going by herself to convince Rob to make nice. No luck. I

should point out that Hanni Weisse, who plays Jane, is the one actor in the film who actually performs with camera-friendly subtlety. She's surprisingly modern, compared to the theatrical over-acting of every other cast member. Would have been a much better film if all the others were as talented as she.

While Jane is getting annoyed with Rob, Ted spots a ship approaching the island. His hullabaloo attracts Jane and Rob, and Louis, who puts on his topcoat, grabs his suitcase, and rushes off to be rescued with the others, leaving poor Des crying hysterically over being abandoned.

After prolonged scenes of the castaways leaping for joy and waving like mad, the ship passes by, leaving them feeling miserable. Louis goes back to Des, who beats him and forces him to do the cooking chores. She triumphantly puts on his feathered top hat. Now *she* is King of the island. This gender role-reversal a barrel of laughs for contemporary audiences, I'm sure.

The Prof decides it is time to bring in Jane. He instructs the ape-man on how to use a blow gun. Jane gets it in the neck and collapses. Ted discovers her, thinks she's got malaria, and after making her comfortable in her hut rushes off to demand quinine from the Professor.

Rob discovers Jane, and carries her off to where he is building his raft.

Ted examines the Prof's lab, eagerly searching for quinine. The Prof shows up and offers him a tour. "The bacteria-free atmosphere allows me to do outrageous experiments." Ted goes along.

In another section of the hut are five stalls containing the Prof's victims. One is a walrus-man with huge tusks and distorted flippers; a second is totally swathed in bandages but for one despairing eye peering at the viewer; a third is a sort of short orangutan-man jumping up and down on stumpy legs; the fourth a four-legged goat-man with curving ram's horns; and the fifth a grotesque bird-man with angry eyes and a huge beak.

"As you can see they were animals which I change into humans," enthuses the Prof. "I formed them like a sculpture does his marble. They hate me, because I make them suffer, but they are powerless against me. I'm their master!"

Ted is suitably repulsed. We see Fung-Lu fuming over the Prof taking all the credit.

"You've already seen my best specimen, the giant, but these are only sketches. The pride of my creation is over there," the Prof ads, pointing at a glass door down the hall. He leads Ted through it into another lab, revealing a human form lying under a sheet. He pulls out a human arm and hand from under the sheet and fondles it, all the while speaking continuously, but there are no title cards. He leads Ted back into the hall.

"You are creating the artificial human!" Ted blurts out.

"If you want to put it that way, yes."

There follows dialogue where I suspect title cards are missing. I assume the Prof says something like "All it needs is a heart."

Ted asks "Where do you want to get this heart?"

I guess that the Prof answers "Jane."

"You're crazy!" shouts Ted, and runs to jump out of the hut to swim away.

The Prof has the ape-man smell the blanket Jane used to use in her cell. Tells the ape-man to go fetch. We see it climb the treehouse. He sees Rob in the distance still carrying Jane through the bushes. Annoyed, he jumps down and pushes over the treehouse. We get it. He's strong.

We see Rob drop Jane on the ground by the shore where his raft is tied up. He gets to work finishing the raft. Ted shows up. Fisticuffs ensue. The ape-man carries Jane off while the battling idiots are distracted. Rob knocks Ted out with a blow to the head. He observes the ape-man in the distance waddling off with Jane. He grabs an axe and pursues.

Meanwhile, Evelyn has arrived in a yacht owned by her friend Pat Quickly played by Hans Behrendt, evidently a German slapstick comedian. They go ashore where Pat's fat physique engages in various comic exercises like scrambling up steep dunes. An odd touch of attempted humour during the melodramatic climax of the film.

Ev and Pat find Ted being cared for by Des and Louis. Ted praises Louis, "This brave man has saved me." Evidently in a scene which no longer exists. He also tells Ev about Jane. Ev decides "I want to meet this girl." Louis tries to dissuade her, saying "The Prof must have taken her to his lab. Violence wouldn't help against him. He's horrible. He creates artificial humans."

Cut to the Prof and Fung-Lu making their rounds. They pause in front of the cage holding Rob, who begs to be let out. The Prof comments "Dr. Fung-Lu, don't you think this man has the most wonderful eyes?"

Next they stop in front of a caged bear. "I want the shoulder parts on this bear."

Then they're with Jane. She begs them to tell her if Rob had killed Ted, but the Prof ignores her. He turns to Fung, saying "Let's go to work! You know what you have to do. That's what you're needed for." And leaves.

Cut to the Prof in his lab with the artificial human. "Fung-Lu! The heart! Bring me the heart!"

Jane is now tied down on an operating table. We see Fung approaching her, evidently up to no good.

Evelyn and Louis have come to the shore of the lake. Seems Ted and Pat are still with Des. Louis grabs a canoe and paddles to the Prof's facilities.

Back to Jane and Fung. He hovers over her, then smiles and walks away. He approaches a tiger in a cage, his smile broadening as he pulls out a scalpel.

Louis creeps through the complex. He discovers Rob, but instead of freeing him, on hearing Rob shout "Get help!" turns and flees for all the world like a human Lassie. He is ambushed by the ape-man on the landing. There is a struggle. Louis stabs him in the chest, jumps into a canoe, and paddles off. As he clambers on to land Evelyn tries to stop him. He cries "It's horrible over there. Let me go!" and takes off running. Evelyn gets into the canoe and heads toward the huts.

In the lab the Prof is exulting "It breathes! It lives! My work has succeeded!"

Bewildered, the artificial human sits up and pushes the Prof away, then looks around wildly. “This is no human!” shouts the Prof. “It is a beast!” He races to where Fung is sunk in opium dreams, shakes him. “What did you give me?”

Fung-Lu is briefly aware. “I have given you the heart of a tiger.”

Meanwhile, Evelyn has stumbled into the stalls where the mortally wounded ape-man is releasing the other beasts. She races past them to free Jane who then releases Rob as Ev holds back the beast-men with a firebrand. Then, after she sets the hut complex on fire, the three of them escape as the monsters attack their creator.

As soon as they are on shore, Ted arrives and kisses Jane, so Rob kisses Evelyn. The huts burn, as do, one assumes, the beast-men, the Prof, and Fung-Lu.

There are no original closing credits. As there were no opening credits. The film is definitely incomplete. But as I mentioned, enough of the film survives to convey the gist of the story.

Of course, this hardly compares with the superb 1932 version starring Charles Laughton, which has never been surpassed. But it’s mildly entertaining, and has it’s moments. The beast-men are surprisingly scary and uncomfortable to look at. I believe this is probably the result of folklore festival traditions of Krampus and the like, involving traditional bizarre costumes of supernatural demons and what-not.

The bird-man in particular was oddly effective, like a nightmarish version of Big Bird from Sesame Street. A subtle touch was that all of the stall beasts were still partly bandaged from their operations, the one completely covered presumably being the most recent. They are shown but briefly, but were probably rather a shock when the print was crisp and clean back in the day.

That the plot did not adhere closely to the original is to be expected, as this was an unauthorized version H.G. Wells apparently never saw or ever heard of.

Erich Kaiser-Titz as the mad scientist was somewhat creepy and certainly egotistical, but no-where near as demented as Rotwang in *Metropolis*, or as urbanely sadistic as Laughton’s Moreau. Still, Erich did manage to convey a certain amount of callous self-absorption that is reasonably credible.

If it’s jaw-dropping lunacy you’re looking for, then Marlon Brando’s self-indulgent performance as the Pope of vivisection in the 1995 *Island of Dr. Moreau* is the one to see. Right up there with *Plan Nine From Outer Space*.

Note that the uncut 1932 version titled *The Island of Lost Souls* was banned in 12 countries, including the UK. It is a magnificently evil film, with Charles Laughton’s sublime performance the dark icing on the cake. H.G. Wells hated it, but it is a masterpiece all the same. This film you *have* to see, if you consider yourself a film aficionado. The Criterion release has the uncut version.

As for 1921 *The Island of the Lost*, it’s a curiosity, nothing more, but worth watching if you have an idle hour or two. It can be found as a bonus feature in *Lost Soul: The Doomed Journey of Richard Stanley’s Island of Dr. Moreau*, a hilarious documentary on the making of the Marlon Brando fiasco.

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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 FOUR: GENRE FILMS 1916 TO 1920.

#### 1916:

- *The Comet's Comeback* – Comet unleashes gas which slows everybody down.
- *The Crimson Stain Mystery* – Mad Doctor turns people into mutants.
- *The End of the World* – Class warfare erupts as comet nears doomed Earth.
- *The Flying Torpedo* – Comes in handy defeating Asian invasion of USA.
- *The Hand of Peril* – Detective uses myriad gizmos to track down criminals.
- *Her Invisible Husband* – Not only invisible, but drifts out of his body. A comedy.
- *Homunculus* – Serial about a soulless artificial man who becomes a tyrant.
- *The Intrigue* – Inventor of death ray offers to highest bidder. Nations compete.
- *Life Without Soul* – First full length version of Shelley's novel *Frankenstein*.
- *Through Solid Walls* – Man who can see through walls witnesses crime.
- *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* – Impressive underwater scenes.
- *Without a Soul* – Desperate inventor brings dead daughter back to life.

#### 1917:

- *Hilde Warren and Death* – Unfortunate woman gives birth to evil child.
- *Himmelskibet* – Danish film about expedition to peace-loving Martian utopia.
- *The Inspiration of Harry Larrabas* – Playwright brings lover back from dead.
- *The Mystery Ship* – Serial involving treasure, automated ship, death ray, etc.
- *The Picture of Dorian Gray* – German version noted for excellent set design.
- *The Prehistoric Man* – Monkey given a conscience, becomes head of state.
- *The Triton* – Sea monster falls in love with girl, becomes human to woo her.

#### 1918:

- *Alraune* – Beautiful woman, product of artificial insemination, turns violent.
- *The Master Mystery* – Serial in which Harry Houdini fights robot mastermind.
- *The Mind-Detecting Ray* – Mad scientist steals mind-reading machine.

- *Victory and Peace* – Plucky Nurse resists German invasion of England.

1919:

- *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* – Wonderfully weird tale of a somnambulist.
- *The Carter Case* – Serial with gizmos like radio-missiles and invisibility fluid.
- *Dance of Death* – A misanthrope uses a beautiful dancer to lure men to kill.
- *Lilith and Ly* – A female Vampire is trapped in a TV screen with deadly results.
- *Madness* – Conrad Veidt plays a banker obsessed with impending death.
- *The Plague in Florence* – Poe’s *Masque of the Red death* with a woman as death.
- *The Spiders* – Fritz Lang two-part action adventure with spectacular sets.
- *Tales of the Uncanny* – Five stories, including Poe’s *Black Cat*.

1920:

- *Algol* – Greedy man gifted with advanced technology by alien being.
- *The Branded Four* – Serial involving hidden gold and a death ray.
- *The Devil to Pay* – An innocent executed convict is brought back to life.
- *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* – John Barrymore stars in most famous silent version.
- *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* – Minor version set in contemporary New York City.
- *The Empire of Diamonds* – Two men blamed for inventing artificial diamonds.
- *Frankenstein’s Monster* – Umberto Guarracino as Monster (See Movie Mopes)
- *The Flaming Disk* – Serial starring Elmo Lincoln (first Tarzan) & death ray.
- *Go and Get It* – Mad scientist transplants convict’s brain into ape.
- *The Golem* – The best and most atmospheric version, hugely influential.
- *The Invisible Ray* – Serial about “Crime Creators” seeking a death ray.
- *The Janus Head* – Conrad Veidt and Bela Lugosi in a Jekyll/Hyde variant.
- *Nachgestalten* – Ghost story with Conrad Veidt and Paul Wegener.
- *The Penalty* – Lon Chaney Sr. as evil gangster with legs cut off below knees.
- *The Phantom Carriage* – A ghostly carriage driven by death haunts alcoholic.
- *The Screaming Shadow* – Serial about rejuvenating use of monkey glands.
- *Terror Island* – Harry Houdini invents a deep-sea submarine.

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*

## *Ideas Whose Time Has Passed*

If you have read science fiction and fantasy for as many decades as I have, you begin to see some repeated themes, and even stereotypes and clichés, over and over again. You may begin to wonder why science fiction and fantasy seems to recycle old ideas more and more, rather than explore new imaginative possibilities—which is one of the things we came in for.

What classic SF themes appear a bit antiquated now? The themes that come to my mind immediately are:

- Earth is menaced by aliens from space. Only a plucky band of misfits realize the threat and combat the aliens effectively.
- Earth is contacted by aliens from space, who are a) going to conquer us, b) going to save us, c) coming to warn us of a dire impending threat, d) threatened by the authorities, who need a plucky band of misfits to save them.
- Earth is menaced by programmed war machines from space. Only a handful can survive Earth.
- A young man/woman discovers that some shadowy organization is threatening his/her life, and another party approaches and hails them as a lost prince/princess from another world.
- All civilization is menaced by a machine intelligence that we created. Only a plucky band of misfits realize the threat and combat the Machine effectively.
- A young man/woman discovers that he/she has unique, even supernatural powers, and he/she has to fight to survive, to master their powers, and to combat evil.
- A suburban couple discovers a colony of aliens, who have been living quite unnoticed in Yorkton, Saskatchewan.
- An ancient threat to humanity—virus, Elder Ghods, frozen/submerged dinosaurs, etc.—is uncovered by an archaeological dig/oil drilling/ submarine research/melting permafrost. Only a few mavericks and “crackpots” can realize the threat and take steps in time.
- A journalist/doctor/beat cop from New Jersey discovers a surviving tribe of Neanderthals, who have been living quite unnoticed in Newark.
- All humanity is menaced by a plague from outer space. Only a plucky band of misfits realize the threat and combat the plague effectively.
- A fringe scientist/archeologist discovers signs of a lost civilization in one of the remaining unpopulated places on Earth, or on another planet, or in space. Then they uncover either a priceless technology for our benefit, or an unimaginable threat to all humanity, or both.

- A few scientists/technology developers discover a cure for cancer, or a fusion energy technology, or a cheap space drive, but are discredited and spied upon and hounded—some to death—by Powers That Be. Only a plucky band of misfits realize the threat to themselves in time, and combat the Powers That Be effectively.
- All humanity is menaced by an alien organism that can mimic and replace us. Only a plucky band of misfits realize the threat and combat the Pod People effectively.
- Civilization, or humanity, is menaced by a technology/ideology for manipulating human behaviour, which we invented. Only a plucky band of misfits realize the threat and combat the ideologues effectively.
- Civilization, or humanity, or all life on Earth is menaced by time travelers who want to change our history. Only a plucky band of misfits realize the threat and combat the time travelers effectively.
- All humanity is eliminated from civilization in the near future by rabid transnational corporations, but a small plucky band of outcasts, criminals, and other misfits may combat them effectively.

Of course, twice-told tales are nothing new in fantasy, any more than they are in mythology, fable and legend. It is remarkable how many times a few myths and legends from Egypt, Greece, medieval Europe, and the Arthurian cycle are remade in film, as well as rewritten for publication.

### *Story over Science*

What began to get to me was the sense that salable stories had to cast the Startling Amazing Science-Like Maguffin as something unknown that most people dismissed with complacent ridicule, or as a dramatic threat to anyone who comes across it, or set it/them on a pedestal as Noble Aliens/Savages/ Ancient Beings with a mission. It was also remarkable how few recent science discoveries were actually understood and explored, except to force them into one of the stereotyped plots.

You would almost think that detective stories were only accessible to the public in the Sherlock Holmes/continental op/ international spy contexts, and SF or fantasy *had* to be cast in the form of action-adventure thrillers, often with a straight boy-girl romance and a bit of comedy thrown in.

### *Assumption over Reason*

You can poke holes in several assumptions behind these stories, with only five minutes' thought; but that five minutes keeps on not happening. For example, why would aliens, or Elder Ghods, or a machine intelligence (whether alien or home-made) be hostile to humans? Or driven to seek power?

(Of course, all this goes back to the classic novel *Frankenstein*, and the usual misunderstanding of the story. It is clearly a story about a progenitor creating a new being, but taking no responsibility for its upbringing. The setting in which it was written makes it clear who inspired the story.)

Obviously these motivations are *possible*—we ourselves are an intelligent species that is often hostile or power-hungry—but these are *alien* intelligences we’re talking about. Many other motivations are possible, or even more probable. Aliens or Elder Ghods showing up here and now could merely mean a mission of exploration, or a search for resources (probably from anywhere in the solar system *except* our planet), or a commercial venture looking for markets, or a colonizing expedition, or the flight of refugees in search of a homeland, or grad students skylarking around. Given the many possible random alternative paths that alien biochemistry may take, invasion or colonization may be the *least* probable motivations.

Similarly, a machine intelligence probably has the drives that are programmed into it. I wrote elsewhere that, so far, artificial intelligence is not intelligent enough to go “Duh” and drool a bit, on its own initiative. Recent news items seem to show that AI-driven cars are only intelligent enough to get into traffic accidents, like us carbon-based units. So, I put it to you that any machine intelligence that maneuvers people into fatal situations, or maliciously manipulates their information and attitudes, has to have been programmed for the purpose. Any learning system that ends up harming people, while trying to help them, clearly is misprogrammed by the last humans to speak to it.

I keep having this image of ancient pre-human intelligences awoken from eons of slumber, or sasquatches or aliens or androids, standing around watching humans running around in panic, meanwhile scratching their upper vertical protuberances, and wondering what the performance is all about.

### *Conclusions*

The obvious reason for old ideas resurfacing in new stories, movies and TV series is that new readers and viewers are coming to them afresh.

A less obvious reason is that publishers and studios are under pressure to produce tried-and-true stories.

The least obvious reason why such stories can appear stereotyped and clichéd is that the viewer’s sense of wonder was formed at or around puberty, and the viewer has grown up.

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## FANNISH FAILURES AND FOLLIES

### **2023 Westercon Bid**

The Western Science Fiction Association and Central Arizona Speculative Fiction Society have filed a bid to hold Westercon 75 in Tempe, Arizona in 2023.

Linda Deneroff, Westercon 73 Site Selection Administrator, has posted all their required paperwork [here](#).

They propose to hold the con at the DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Phoenix Tempe from July 1-4, 2023, with a preview night on June 30.

Bid Chairs are Hal C. F. Astell and Mark Boniece, with Treasurers Stephanie Bannon and Kevin McAlonan.

The bid is currently unopposed.

Source: File 770

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## **2025 Eurocon Bid**

Finland is bidding to host the 2025 Eurocon in Mariehamn in the Åland Islands. Saila Kyllönen, speaking for Maa ja Ilma Ry, formally announced the bid at the [European Science Fiction Society](#) meeting that took place in the online space of the ongoing, Croatian-hosted 2020 Eurocon, [Futuricon](#).

The Finnish Eurocon bid, if successful, will run as Archipelacon II and take place ten years after the [original Archipelacon](#). Though dates cannot yet be confirmed it will likely take place during the summer. [Maa ja Ilma Ry](#) is the Finnish fan-run legal entity which ran both that Archipelacon and the Helsinki Worldcon in 2017.

The Finnish bid for 2025 goes alongside proposals for Eurocon to take place in [Luxembourg in 2022](#), [Uppsala, Sweden in 2023](#) and [Rotterdam in the Netherlands in 2024](#). The location of the 2022 Eurocon will be formally decided as the ESFS business meeting continues tomorrow.

The Åland Islands are a Swedish-speaking part of Finland. Demilitarized by international treaty, the islands have also played host to the nearly-annual Åcon convention since 2007.

Source: File 770

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## **2020 Montreal SMOFcon Postponed**

Due to the increasing impracticality of holding Smofcon 38 in Montreal as originally scheduled in 2020, SMOFCon 38 has been postponed until December 2-4, 2022. The only known bid for SMOFCon 39, SMOFCon Europe, will host SMOFCon in Lisboa, Portugal on December 3-5, 2021. The two committees are in discussions for jointly organizing a limited series of online-only events on the weekend of December 4-6, 2020.

Conditions with the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic are such that CanSMOF (the parent non-profit corporation of the Montreal SMOFCon 38 committee) concluded that holding an in-person SMOFCon in December 2020 was unsafe. CanSMOF felt (and still feels) that the in-person element of a SMOFCon is essential to the nature of the convention and the event would be non-viable without it. Accordingly, they began to explore options for postponing the convention.

The SMOFCon Europe committee was the only group to express interest in hosting the 2021 SMOFCon. They did say, however, that it would be impossible for them to postpone their convention any later than 2021, due to many committee members being involved in the Glasgow 2024 Worldcon bid. Under the circumstances, and after extensive discussions on the SMOFCon email list, all parties reached a consensus that if Montreal could renegotiate its hotel agreement to 2022, Lisboa could proceed with their plans for 2021.

The Montreal committee was able to reach an agreement with the Le Centre Sheraton Montreal to postpone the event until December 2-4, 2022 at no additional facilities cost and with the same hotel room rates previously agreed for the original 2020 dates. Membership rates for the Montreal SMOFCon will remain frozen at the current level (CAD\$80 / USD\$60) until after the Lisboa SMOFCon in 2021.

In July, the Montreal SMOFCon committee contacted the previously announced SMOFCon bidders for 2022. Those bidders mutually agreed that if Montreal was able to postpone their convention, that they would postpone their bids as well. After agreements were reached, Montreal's committee contacted the SMOFCon bids for 2022 and 2023 in early September to advise them that "Operation Leapfrog" was a go. The Montreal committee thanks all future SMOFCon bidders for their cooperation and understanding under the current worldwide pandemic conditions.

The Lisboa SMOFCon in 2021 will conduct the site selection for the 2023 SMOFCon. The Montreal SMOFCon in 2022 will not conduct a site selection for a future SMOFCon. Site Selection will once again return to one year in advance rotation starting with the 2023 SMOFCon.

The committees of SMOFCon 38 (Montreal 2022) and SMOFCon 39 (Lisboa 2021) have mutually agreed to jointly organize a limited online-only "mini-SMOFCon" event on the weekend of December 4-6, 2020. Dubbed "SMOFCon 37 ¼," the initial plan is to have online sessions to allow current Worldcons, bids for future Worldcons, and bids for future SMOFCons to make their presentations and answer questions. The joint SMOFCon 37 ¼ committee will announce further details of their plans shortly, including contact details and participation information.

SMOFCon Europe will launch their convention, making rates, hotel rooms, their online proposition and further information all available in time for SMOFCon 37 ¼.

Source: File 770

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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.)

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From: **Graham J. Darling** – (September 5<sup>th</sup>, 2020)

Graeme, my comments on BCSFazine #544 2020-09:

### **(page 5, Graeme Cameron) Studying the Weird Oceans of Uranus and Neptune**

*"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.'"*

(Chem prof hat on) Water already spontaneously dissociates into H<sub>3</sub>O<sup>+</sup> and HO<sup>-</sup> to a concentration of 10<sup>e-14</sup> moles per litre at Earth-normal temperature and pressure. Superionic "water" or Ice XVIII, first prepared in 1990, has all its atoms ionized and arranged in a crystal lattice, like other ionic solids such as table salt-- but, it turns out, black.

Common water ice is mostly Ice Ih, with some Ice XI in very old glaciers; Kurt Vonnegut's "Cat's Cradle" 1963 featured Ice IX, which when first created for real in 1967 fortunately didn't have the world-ending properties of the novel's. A similar idea was "polywater", supposedly discovered in 1961 but found in 1970 to be an experimental artefact. Such an "infectious water" was also featured in Star Trek "The Naked Time" 1966-09-29 and Star Trek: The Next Generation "The Naked Now" 1987-10-05.

In my molecular imprinting experiments in the 90's, I used to spray aqueous solutions from an artist's airbrush into liquid-nitrogen-cooled liquid propane to make hyperquenched amorphous ice particles with no crystal structure at all, like window glass. Then exposed them to ultraviolet light to polymerize the nanoparticle complexes trapped within. Fun times.

See also Martin Chaplin "Water Structure and Science",  
<http://www1.lsbu.ac.uk/water/> .

### **(page 6, Graeme Cameron) Solid gold asteroid?**

"Element 79" 1967, first published in a collection by that name, was Fred Hoyle's suggestion of a solid-gold meteorite wrecking the world's economy. It would make sense for gold, a very dense element not very soluble in molten rock, in general to be a lot more common in planetary cores than crusts.

**(page 24, Robert J. Sawyer) The Auroras are Just Fine**

*"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".*

May I offer a plug for Vancouver's Creative Ink conference, modeled on Calgary's When Words Collide, and similarly multigenre and directed to writers. If WWC and Can-Con can do it, one day Creative Ink too could conceivably host Canvention and the Aurora Awards.

**(page 42, Graeme Cameron) Catseye— by Andre Norton**

*"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."*

The ruins of Kingsmere are open to the public in Gatineau Park north of Ottawa. See also the "follies" of 18th-century England, descended from plundered and ruined monasteries; and the modern equivalent of old industrial sites abandoned when technologies changed or manufacturing moved to other countries.

**(page 66, Lloyd Penney) Dear Graeme**

*"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."*

The N3F awarded me second prize in its 2018 Amateur Short Story Contest: a great free contest with fine feedback (alas that I no longer qualify!), and a great group with fine publications. And, dare I say, excellent taste.

**(page 71, Graeme Cameron) Afterwords**

*"One thing I would like to see is more letters of comment."*

To that I reply, your wish is my command, at least for this ish. And, be careful what you wish for.

—GrayJay

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From: **Greg Slade** – (September 5<sup>th</sup>, 2020)

Dear Graeme, about BCSFAzine #544,

A comment in your editorial, *"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.)"* struck an unexpectedly high-voltage guilty nerve for me. After attending my first-ever con at VCON 28 (and having a blast), I foolishly volunteered on the concom for VCON 29. Somebody really should have told me that attending one con is not sufficient background for being on a concom, but I volunteered to be webmaster, assuming that all I'd need to do was HTMLify whatever the rest of the concom told me to. As the con drew closer, more and more concom members went MIA, so I ended up doing three jobs (I think: the last few weeks before the con—and the con itself—are kind of a blur), none of which I had any experience with (except the web stuff).

Then, the next year, my Dad died in January, and while I tried to fulfil my commitment (webmaster again), I was a mess, and ended up having to drop out. So I should really take back all the nasty things that I thought about the people who had dropped out the year before. Like you said, sometimes, some mundane disaster intervenes. The following year, I thought I was past it and volunteered again, but it turned out that I was wrong, and I ended up dropping out again. It's strange how guilty I feel about that after all these years.

I found it funny to read that Garth is dreaming about having a BCSFA clubhouse. I've had a similar sort of fantasy for years, only my version would be closer to gentlemen's clubs of the sort haunted by Bertie Wooster, only not restricted to men, of course, and with a positively cavernous reading library containing every science fiction book, magazine, VHS, and DVD ever published (or at least as close to that as possible), SF memorabilia on the walls in place of assorted body parts of exotic animals, plus of course the stiff-upper-lip, English accented staff, fine dining, rooms to rent for those fans who can't be bothered to go home at the end of the evening, and whatever else happens or used to happen at those sorts of places. Except that for that to happen, we'd all have to live in an alternate universe where fans, instead of being perpetually broke, are all independently wealthy so they could afford to pay the kind of membership fee such a club would need to levy in order to survive. So the whole idea, besides being related to science fiction, actually belongs in a science fiction story, which is probably appropriate on some level.

Lloyd's friend's comment about Zoom is somewhat ironic to me. Video calls have been part of science fiction stories for ages (probably ever since the invention of the telephone, and maybe longer), and even though they've technically been possible for years, they just haven't been a regular part of most people's lives until this year. And now that most people are spending at least some of their time on Zoom (or similar services), I'm seeing a regular parade of stories about "Zoom fatigue". If people are so unhappy with video calling now that it's finally a thing, it makes me wonder if so many people should be putting so much effort into developing things like jet packs, flying cars, and other SFnal props. Although cell phones are popular enough, so

maybe there's something about video calling that makes so many people unhappy with it. (Or maybe people are unhappy with video calling, even though it's better than voice calling, because what they really want—seeing people in person—is denied to them.)

You and Garth had some back-and-forth going on about recruiting volunteers, con budgets, and so on. It reminded me of something that I kept banging my head against during my brief time(s) on the VCON concon: at least at the time, there was an extremely strong, albeit usually not explicitly acknowledged, resistance to any measure (even low-cost or free) that might possibly increase attendance at VCON beyond the usual gang. I, being new to the whole con scene, and thoroughly enthusiastic about it, couldn't understand why so many people were so bound and determined to avoid the slightest possibility that people who were long-time SF fans, but had never actually been to a con, might show up and discover how much fun a con could be. Nobody ever actually said anything like "We've got to keep the riff-raff out", but it definitely seemed to be an "us and them" kind of a thing. Even when the con was losing money (which it seemed to do every year in those days), anything which might possibly attract more fans to the con somehow never got approved.

grga

*[ The Graeme – I too, experienced frustration with the decline of VCON over recent years. I have no definitive explanation for the trends or any idea how to turn them around. And I've gotten old and tired. Thus I have stepped down from any responsibility for planning VCON. Up to the new generation to revive VCON in 2021. I wish those involved the best of luck and every success. ]*

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From: **Garth Spencer** – (September 6<sup>th</sup>, 2020)

Comments on BCSFAzine issue #544

Dear Graeme,

Congratulations again on your Aurora win!

Re your comments on “stakeholders” ... gradually it has become clear that people who have a stake in something, such as a science fiction convention (or a sports arena, or for that matter an amateur theatre), have a right to comment on the conduct of the enterprise; everybody exercises that. But does everyone with a stake in the enterprise have an obligation to participate in the enterprise? Some people assume so, and others do not, and there is room for argument. Personally, I think comments carry more weight if one participates in supporting an enterprise—within his or her abilities.

You and I have both seen people who do not participate. We have also seen people try to take part, well beyond their abilities. We could name names.

*[ Bear in mind I've retired from con-running, having chosen not to participate. In theory my experience entitles me to comment from time to time. On the other hand, my ignorance of contemporary routine, practice, and technical requirements suggests very little of what I have to contribute would be of any practical use whatsoever. The secret of being an elderly curmudgeon is to imitate the Sphinx. People mistake silence for wisdom. The second I speak my cover is blown. I mean, really, contemporary conrunners have no reason to listen to me. I'm so obsolete I have nothing constructive to offer. All I can do is criticize people for not doing things the way things were done decades ago. I'm old enough to have become irrelevant. All part of my second childhood scheme. I think I'll just lie down and play with my toys instead. Much more relaxing. ]*

Re conventions ... at this point it is clear that whatever conventions will be like after the plague has receded, they cannot be held much like conventions up until 2019. And the subject has been covered thoroughly by now.

Re William Rotsler's art portfolio ... I have a collection of Rotsler's illos myself. It's an art, finding topical text and setting the right illo beside it, especially his obscure and intriguing alien figures.

Re the awards at this year's Worldcon ... I was half chagrined and half amused to read of the way the Vogel Awards were treated as an afterthought, shoehorned in after the Retro Hugos. But I was not surprised. We ran into something like this a few times ourselves at times when Canadian fan-run conventions hosted the Aurora Awards but barely afforded space and time in the program for covering Canadian science fiction. I guess those were times when people did not know how to handle the awards, the business meeting, or the Canadian-SF background.

Robert Sawyer's column last issue was relevant in this respect. It seems that now, the Aurora Awards are given the attention and integrated into the program, at the writers' conferences and "literary" conventions that host them.

So, I guess New Zealand's Vogel Awards are going through a similar stage. Their national convention is not likely to combine successfully with a Worldcon.

Onward.

I have a question about your review of Norton's novel *Catseye* – why is the review column titled "Books to Be Ignored"? Did I miss an explanation somewhere?

*[ Typical of my fannish humour. Not meant to be taken literally or seriously. ]*

Re your movie review of *The Keep*—I think I ran across a TV rerun of this movie, once. And I recall hearing that *The 13<sup>th</sup> Warrior*—the film version of Michael Crichton's novel *Eaters of the Dead*, starring Antonio Banderas—was similarly butchered by inept editing. You have to wonder how to evaluate this sort of story—as a circus of ineptitude, maybe?

*[ Self-indulgent artistic vision meets panic-stricken bean-counters would be one way of putting it. Plus much bad luck. ]*

Thank you for your extended comments on my column last issue. I am glad to get a response and flattered by the amount of response you gave.

Maybe you should rename your letter column. What say?

*[ No. Origins in fannish tradition. ]*

In your remarks appended to my letter, you observe my continued queries about what people want as a request for permission. Well, it's less a matter of permission than a continuing quest to figure out where people's interests lie, and whether there is any readership for what I can offer. But as you say, fans at large do not know what they want, and that isn't really the point anyway. It is principally for lack of interest or much response that I kept giving up on a digest of several conventions' conrunning procedures, until changing hotel costs and the plague made it entirely moot.

Closing thought: Is contemporary humanity ill-adapted to survival? What changes do we need to make: merely changing our mode of subsistence, our population level, our values and industrial processes, to maintain our habitats? Or actually changing ourselves, our reproductive cycles, and our drives? Dare we tinker with our body plan, especially the imbalance between the many well-established neural connections in the limbic system, where our fundamental drives and urges are coordinated, and the woefully few neural connections between the limbic system and the prefrontal lobes, where observation and reason and formal calculation are coordinated? Is anyone competent to plan such alterations?

*[ Maybe. Don't know. Bad idea. Absolutely not. Absolutely not. ]*

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From: **Lloyd Penney** – (September 17<sup>th</sup>, 2020)

Dear Graeme:

Many thanks for issue 544 of BCSFAzine, and this is a big issue at 72 pages. Let's see what I can say about the contents.

There's one Andre Norton book I have, but not that cover art. Those are truly the good old days, finding SF or fantasy at used book stores or garage sales. We can't do this anymore. I can't afford much these days, but a couple of new secondhand stores have opened in Mississauga, and we had a look at both, and found some good books.

Again, congrats on the Aurora and Hall of Fame! I honestly thought that the Hall of Fame would be for professional; writers only, in spite of its original mission

statement. The local fannish community for me may consist of few more than those in my large address book. Ad Astra is still around, but who knows what may happen once this pandemic is done? Who will want to work the con, who will want to attend it? Every convention chairman and committee must be thinking of these things.

I never met Bill Rotsler, but I remember years ago being given an envelope of Rotsler cartoons, with the idea of using them in fanzines. I relayed my cartoons to other faneds, but kept one I have yet to distribute, and perhaps it's time. It has a typical Rotsler character sitting in a cloud, with a fistful of lightning bolts, saying, "I work in ways so mysterious, even I don't know what I'm doing." I want that on a t-shirt.

The New Zealand Hugos ... I kinda know what they mean. When Yvonne and I started off the Hugos at the Montreal Worldcon, handing out the first of the fan Hugos, I did feel that we were part of the Canadian content of the ceremony, but while it's great to have it at the big event, it had to be mostly the world at the world awards. I think we set the right balance in Montreal.

Various comments on Amazing Stories ... Good to see the word about the magazine is getting out into the general reading public, even after it's been on the go for a year or more, even after the website has been going for some years now. It's allowing me to combine my editorial experience with my interest in the magazine, and I am pleased with what's been happening. Amazing has some short novels coming out soon, and I can say I edited and proofed them all, so far. I hope that will continue.

The state of fandom ... I see little of it, and only part of that is because of this pandemic. For me, fandom was about gatherings and parties, conventions and projects together, like con committees. Agreed, we walked away from the con committees, after being there for 30 years, but we had hopes that we'd see the rest of things, and that didn't happen. There was the assumption that we'd gafiated, but no, we just moved on to other things. Six months of pandemic has cancelled just about everything, steampunk is fading as an interest, and while I can still chat with some folks (talked with fans in South Africa earlier today), I guess I want to talk to people one on one, instead of on the other side of the webcam. Zoom will do the job ... I guess ....

*[ Steampunk is fading? Sad to hear. Is there any role playing fandom that is catching on and expanding these days? Or is the concept becoming obsolete? ]*

My loc ... We went to larger gatherings, but have been held back to indoors gatherings of 10 people maximum. This coming Monday is our regular Third Monday fannish pubnight, so we shall see how things go. I need to talk further to Paula Johansen about her manuscripts. The steampunk event was held in the small town of Coldwater, Ontario, up the 400 where it meets with Highway 12, and we had some fun providing online content for the steampunk event organizers.

There's how's that? A loc that goes over the single page. I didn't write a lot of those any more, but that's fine. I am not sure if I can join you for the Monday chat, but send me the link, just in case. If not Monday, see you next issue.

Yours, Lloyd Penney.

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

Letter of Comment for *BCSFazine* #544

*Cover:* The cover has a cute black cat on it, which is good.

*Editorial:* Congrats again on the Aurora!

Our media consumption doesn't have to be viewed as an indulgence or a waste of time; it can also be a form of meditation. I was talking about this with my therapist, since I was concerned that some of my hobbies are insidious "productivity simulators." Some people tend their zen rock gardens or water their flowers. Some people read or game. If it's therapeutic, it's not a waste.

*Void Breather Bombast:* "Uranus is cool!" "Hey, thanks!"

*Art Portfolio: William Rotsler:* I like the minimalist ones with the blob people the best. Years after the fact, I realised that a friend of mine brought some William Rotsler cartoons to school in the eighties. I liked them, but I didn't know what I was looking at then.

*When Words Collide: A "Virtual" Triumph!:* As an added bonus, when attending a convention via Zoom, you can go lie down within earshot of your computer and still listen to panels!

It does sound like there's a lot of overlap between burnout and depression. I have four of the six symptoms you listed.

"Or to put it another way, don't waste time thinking about writing, just do it!"  
Like Participaction!

I miss paper zines too.

All throughout grade school we were forced to read depressing and dystopian fiction. I wonder if they were actively trying to destroy our generation's hopes and dreams.

Good acceptance speech, Graeme!

*Churchill Edited, Too:* My theory is that the reason professional comedians are so good at ad libs and comebacks to hecklers is that when they write jokes, that skill gets internalised so it can be called upon in real-time.

*The Light-Hearted Vituperator and Jolly Reviler: How the Gathering Places Have Changed ...:* Joe Devoy, Michael Bertrand, Julian Castle and I watch TV series together via Zoom. With Zoom's screen-sharing ability we can also watch a YouTube video (Joe will share his screen of it), although Zoom's audio quality is often not up to

the task of producing understandable speech in a YouTube video, and we have to go to the URL separately and then meet back up afterwards.

Actually, Zoom's audio quality is sometimes not up to the task of producing understandable speech from a live human, either. I usually have to get people to repeat themselves, especially if more than one person is talking, or there's any other sound happening in the meeting. However, it's not bad considering it's free, and I expect it will improve over time. Then again, new bugs have also developed that weren't there before, such as the audio stuttering, or the shared screen being weirdly pixelated.

*Messed-Up Movie Mopes: The Keep (1983):* This was on my wish list for decades. Back in the eighties I saw a few minutes of it on TV while my father was channel-surfing but never got to see the rest of it. Every time I would try to find it I would end up with a similarly-premised 1960s horror movie instead. I finally found the one I'd been looking for at Value Village during the golden age of used VHS movies about ten years ago. I loved that the opening combined World War II tanks and 1980s new wave synth music (Tangerine Dream!). It does indeed have a good cast which also includes William Morgan Sheppard as Alexandru the keeper.

*Films to See Before You Die: A Checklist for Obsessive Completists:* A descendant of the magnet that attracts various things showed up in a *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (1987) episode, "The Maltese Hamster," in which the bad guys have a "superconducting magnet" that can attract many things depending on what the dial is set to. Options include: "banks," "toys," "home furnishings," "men's underwear," and "antiques." The trope of all the machines going crazy was also endlessly recycled in cartoons, even to the point of impossible aspects like appliances developing prehensile power cords and "walking" forward on their little stubby feet.

*Recent SF Fen Confab Meeting by Felicity Walker:* Credit where credit is due: text at end ("I think you can see from this bald list of topics that the main themes were early influences and fond memories ...") is by Graeme.

*[Yes, I messed up. Meant to say the article was based on information you had provided as summarized by me but pressure of time caused me to forget to do it. ]*

*Ook! Ook! Slobber! Drool! (Letters of Comment):* Felicity Walker: You wrote: "... Difficult to know what not to say. Self-censorship is the rule to avoid confrontation ... avoid the obvious triggers, and stay clear of humour dependent on laughing at others. In today's climate self-deprecating humour works best ... Above all, avoid Vaudeville-style ethnic humour." Naturally, I always err on the side of caution, and I would never punch down or use shock or offensive humour. Sometimes there are misunderstandings, though. Misunderstandings eat away at me. Come to think of it, misunderstandings are one of my least favourite things in situation comedies.

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