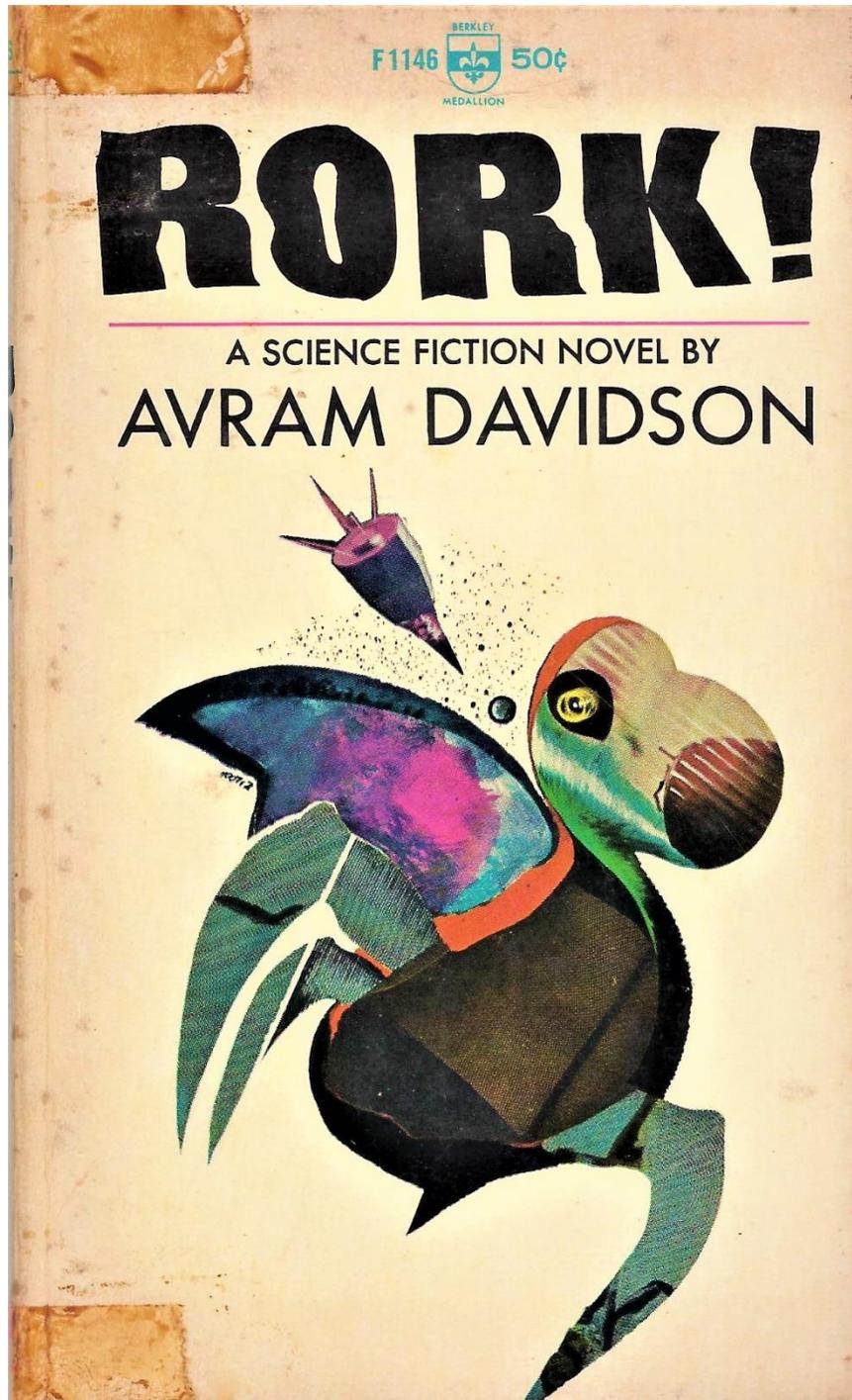


# BCSFAZINE

Clubzine of the British Columbia Science Fiction Association  
(Issue #547 – December, 2020)



(Issue #547 – December, 2020 – Vol.46 #12 WN546 – 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**

Chair: Position open

Vice Chair: Position open.

Treasurer: Kathleen Moore.

Secretary: Barb Dryer.

BCSFazine Editor: R. Graeme Cameron.

Keeper of the FRED Book: Ryan Hawe.

FRED Organizer: Michael Bertrand.

VCON Ambassador for Life: Steve Forty.

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

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

— Every Monday 3:00 PM (PST) to 9:00 PM (PST). All SF Fen welcome.

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

**SUBMISSION DEADLINE**

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

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### Cover Credit

– Cover Art for *Rork!* – by unknown artist not credited in book.

## EDITORIAL: THE GOD-EDITOR SPEAKS!

### IS FANNISH HISTORY LIKE COD LIVER OIL? GOOD FOR YOU BUT NOBODY LIKES TAKING IT?

Many of you know my principle activities back in the day were fannish in nature. Putting out *BCSFazine*, my perzine *Space Cadet*, and numerous other fanzines. I was something of a fannish historian, in fact. Did a heck of a lot of research, putting some material online, publishing some of it, building up my *Canfancylopedia* devoted to the history of Canadian SF&F fandom.

Now I'm doing BCSFazine again. However, most of my activities currently are semi-pro in nature, revolving around the book and magazine industry rather than fannish appreciation of same. I'm really too busy with my "new" interests to return to my "old" interests. Besides, the BCSFA/WCSFA archive is no longer in my possession so I no longer have that cornucopia of information to base original research on. Two good reasons why I am permanently gaffiated as a fannish historian. I did my bit. I'm on to other things.

Yet there remains my Canfancylopedia computer files. Some of it is online, but as far as I know few people access it. Some of it I published in WCSFazine (for which I won an Aurora award in 2010) and a few other places, but overall I think there's a remainder of material as yet unseen, or, if I presented it before, has since been forgotten or overlooked.

So, it occurred to me, since I can no longer do original research, why not put some of the results of my past passion for research into the pages of BCSFazine? Some readers may find it interesting, maybe even amusing or entertaining. We do have a fannish heritage, so why not reveal it?

Ghu help me, I'm even toying with the idea of self-publishing a book about Canada's fannish history. Talk about a time waster! But hey, be cool to offer a breezy history highlighting the odder and more imaginative moments. Then again, maybe not. Not exactly a potential runaway bestseller. Still ... hmmm.

About thirty years ago Vancouver fan Ed Hutchings remarked to me during a BCSFA party "Did you know there used to be a fan club in Vancouver before BCSFA? Back in the 1950s? Called the Vancouver SF Society?" He had no further info to add, but I was intrigued.

Later, on reading *A Wealth of Fable: an informal history of science fiction fandom in the 1950s* by the legendary fan Harry Warner Jr., I came across a number of references to a certain Norman G. Browne, who founded the Vancouver SF Society.

Later still, Chester Cuthbert, an old-time collector in Manitoba I was corresponding with on fan-historical matters, unexpectedly gifted me with a complete set of Browne's genzine *Vanations*. From these and other sources, I managed to compile a snap shot of Norman G. Browne's contributions to fandom. In this issue I reproduce the covers of all 6 issues of *Vanations* and present the sum of what I've

learned about Norman G. Browne. Hope you find it of interest. He deserves to be remembered.

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### OH GOD, DON'T TELL ME I'M A WRITER!

When you become an editor and a publisher you tend to pick up a fair amount of inside information on the state of the industry. And after fifty years of attending and participating in science fiction conventions, I've come to know or be acquainted with dozens of genre authors. From them, too, I have learned many interesting things. As a result, I find myself a bit conflicted. My retirement shtick is promoting Canadian writers and writing, yet I dare not tell beginners "the truth" about the industry. If I did they'd probably give up reading, never mind writing. It's a tough industry.

I find myself reducing an entire lifetime's accumulation of knowledge on the topic to "The only career choice worse than wanting to be a SF&F novelist is wanting to be a SF&F poet. Path to fame and fortune it ain't."

Of course, I exaggerate. But even if I'm not, it doesn't matter. Most people write because they want to write. It can be a thrilling, exhilarating experience, an expression of creativity that not only justifies your existence but turns out to be the sole purpose of your existence, all else being secondary. Believe me, completing a novel is a real rush of accomplishment, an exultant experience like no other. Would have been nice to get the damn things published, but... oh well.

Thing is, in today's world, you *can* get your novel published. All you have to do is publish it yourself. You can do it on the cheap, and wind up with an inferior product nobody buys.

Or you can spend a small fortune on a cover artist, multiple layers of editors and layout specialists, and wind up with a superior product nobody buys but at least you have the satisfaction of having wasted a considerable amount of money.

Either way you are guaranteed a print-on-demand trade-paperback that looks good on your bookshelf but maybe that's the only place on the entire planet where it can be found. Sound like a plan worth pursuing?

Of course, by putting your nose to the grindstone and working hard 24/7 on marketing strategies you can double or triple your financial losses and still not sell any copies of your book. Interesting hobby, what?

Self-publishing can be worse than playing a video game. The more you play and the harder you try the sooner you fail the quest. Yet millions are addicted to video games. And to writing. And last year, apparently, more than a million books were self-published in North America. Sad to say, few of them earned millions of dollars. Sorry to burst your bubble.

And yet ... and yet ... it is possible to self-publish and sell at least some copies. Maybe not enough to earn a living, but enough to help your finances and, more importantly, please hundreds or even thousands of readers who are glad they read

your book. Good source of egoboo, that. How to do it?

Let's say you like what you've written. Good. Because chances are, you're not unique. There are probably hordes of potential readers out there whose tastes are similar to yours. If you write to please yourself you are writing to please them. Never lose sight of that fact. You *are* the people who will buy your book. You are not alone. There are tons of people out there unknown to you who *will* buy your book if you can bring it to their attention. How do you stand out from the crowd of other writers seeking their readership? How do you find *your* readers?

That's the number one problem in publishing today. Especially because even the mainstream publishers insist their authors do their own marketing. Tuum est. It's up to you. So, might as well self-publish.

I, myself, haven't got a clue. But I rather like the idea of being totally in control of one's efforts. Certainly keeps things personal.

Point is, Rhea Rose successfully published *Stellar Evolutions*, her anthology based on the first 15 issues of my magazine *Polar Borealis*. It's off to a good start, what with a modest amount of critical acclaim and promising early sales. The online book launch went well, with 48 people attending. Now Rhea is turning her attention to marketing strategies to build on this early success and see how much of an impact the book can make. As time goes on, the book continuing to be available in both paperback and kindle versions, sales can only increase.

This is one of the advantages of the modern system. Years ago, authors like Isaac Asimov used to boast that one of the great things about being a science fiction writer was that books remained in print, continued to sell as new readers discovered the author, and as such books accumulated over time, so, too, did income.

Then, along came investment corporations buying out publishers and insisting no old books be published, only new ones. Suddenly an author's income was dependent solely on their latest books. Their earlier books were as good as dead.

But now, once again, an author can establish a reputation with one or two books, keep them in print, and add more and more fans as they publish more books, with their income steadily growing as each new fan wants *all* the books the author previously published. Self-publishing has restored the vitality of an author's entire corpus of writing. At least in theory. The potential is there.

Long story short, after seeing the initial success of *Stellar Evolutions*, my fantasy at the age of sixteen of producing a shelf full of SF paperbacks with lurid covers and my name on the spine has slowly begun to revive. Maybe it's not too late. After all, I'm only 69. Got plenty of time to self-publish twenty novels or so. Or less. We'll see.

Besides, worse case scenario, I may wind up being the only person on Earth with a shelf full of my books but hey, something cool to stare at.

Of course, there's plenty of fuel for self-doubt. My first attempt at a novel, completed in 1970, was described as "turgid." On perusing a later attempt, completed in 1986, it seems more readable, but still somewhat slow-paced. Thus I was a bit disconcerted to hear a regular attendee of writers workshops mention that "Judging by the criticism they offer, young writers today are impatient readers. They don't like

scenes building characters or setting background. They want action in every scene. They want things constantly happening. They want a book to rush toward the conclusion. Anything literary slows things down, needs to be cut out.”

If this is generally true it would appear to indicate that social media and action/adventure films are the primary influences on readers today. All flash and speed and no reflection. A modern Proust doesn't stand a chance of achieving popularity. Or a new James Joyce. Screw them. Not enough action.

Well, I'm no Proust. And I'm certainly not James Joyce. But it is a bit daunting to contemplate having to understand the contemporary readership in order to write material that would appeal to them. And since I'm under the impression the majority of publishers and authors are tearing their hair out over their inability to figure out exactly what it is readers want I don't think I'll bother to find out for myself.

Instead, I think I'll rely on writing to please myself. That will give me enough confidence to get the writing done. After that, it's merely the mechanics of the game and the luck of the draw. Any and all results will be quite amusing, I'm sure.

What do I write? And when do I start? I have yet to decide. But at least I know some wonderful artists who could create the lurid covers I've always dreamed about. That's grounds for confidence too.

Can I set myself the goal of writing and publishing one SF novel a year? Hmm ...

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

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

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## ODDS AND SODS ABOUT THIS ZINE

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

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

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## WHAT THE GOD-EDITOR WOULD LIKE TO PUBLISH

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

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ART PORTFOLIO: COVERS OF VANATIONS

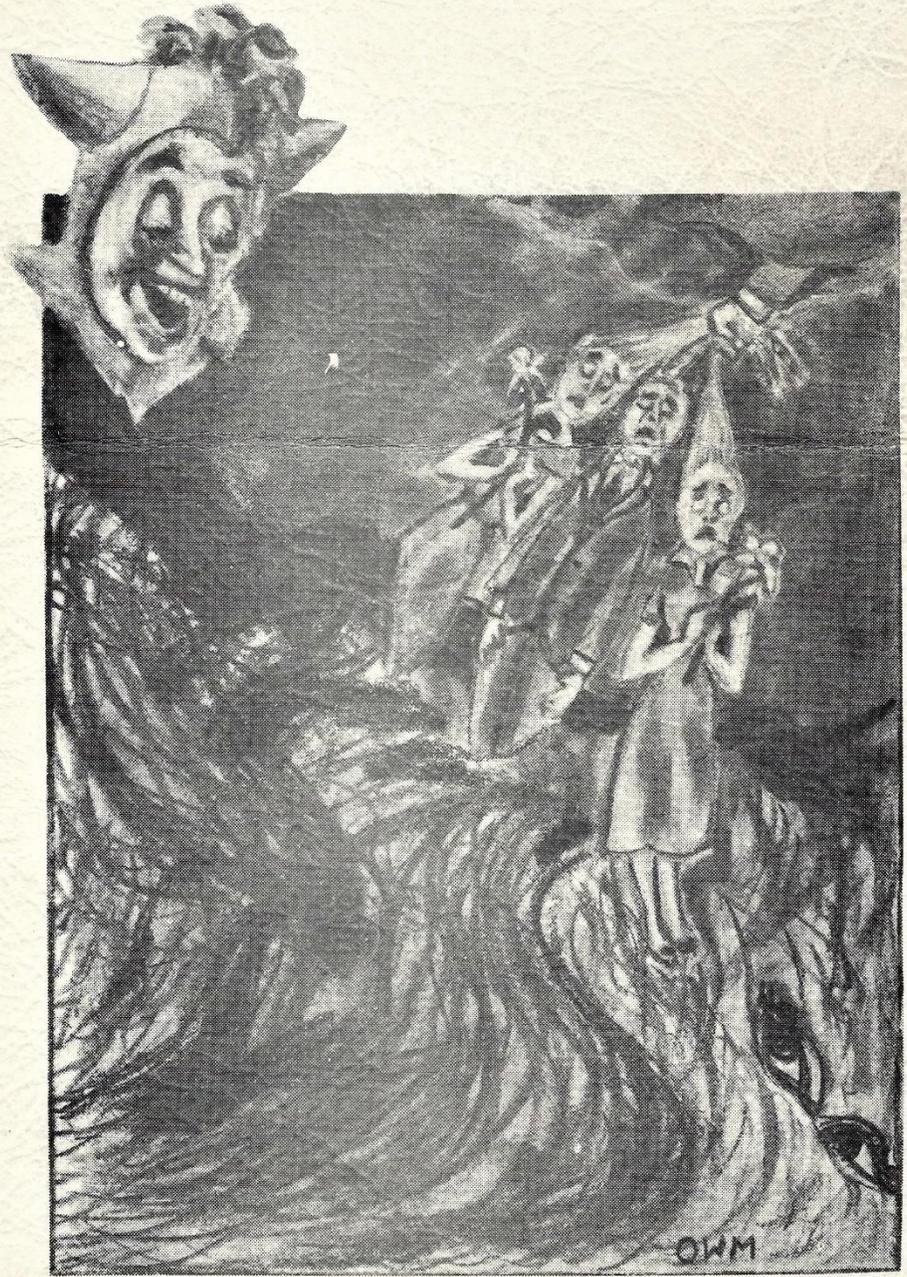
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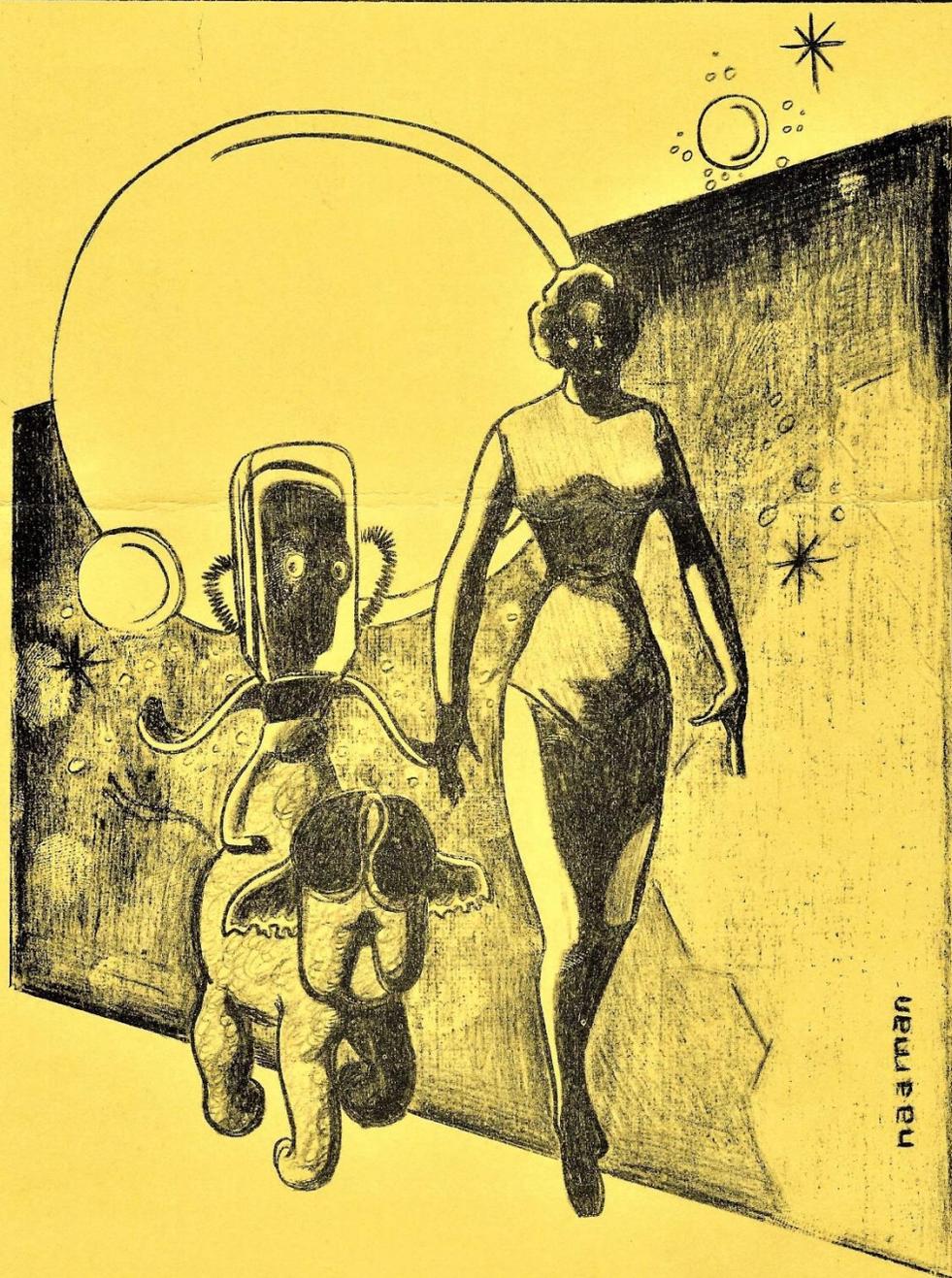
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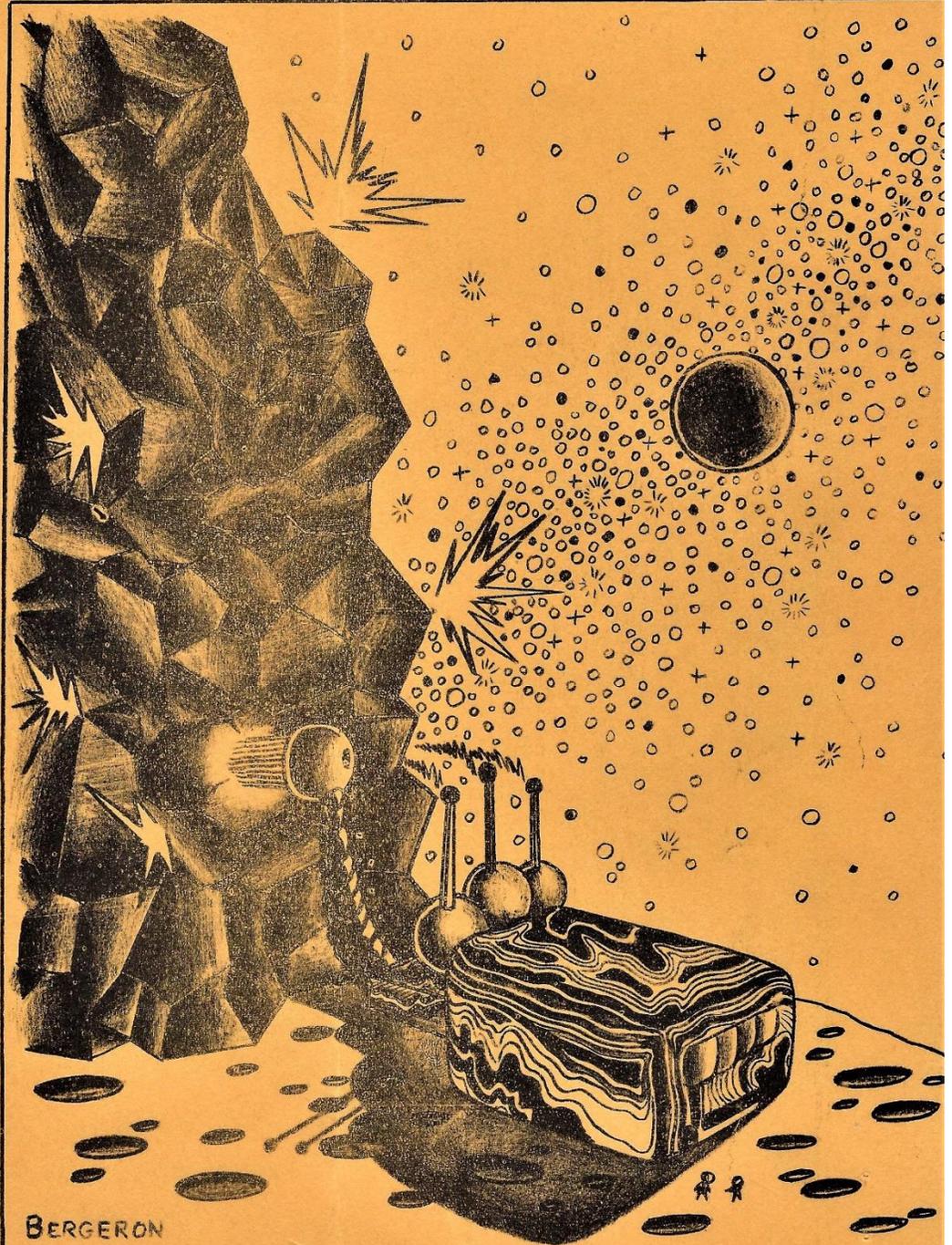
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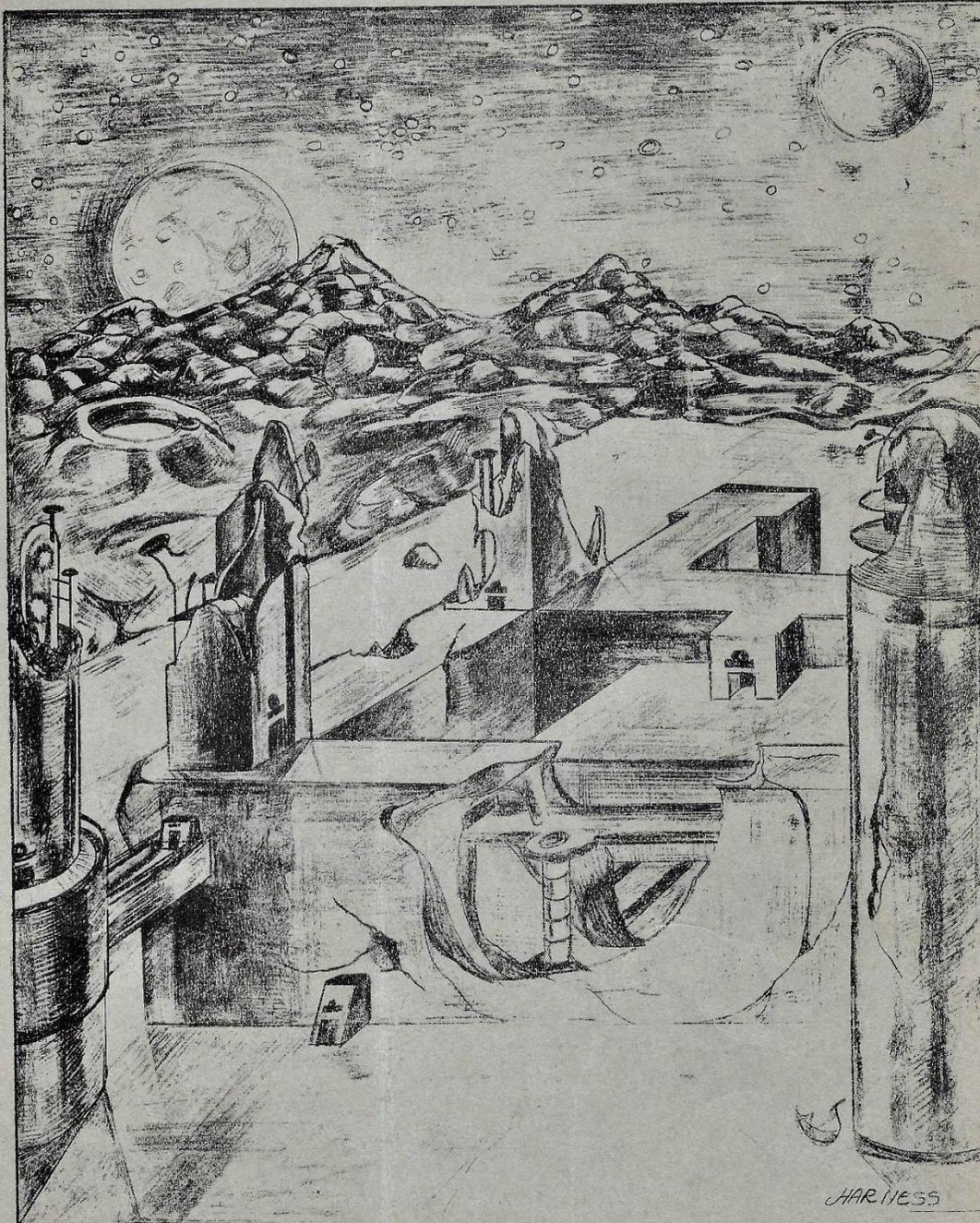
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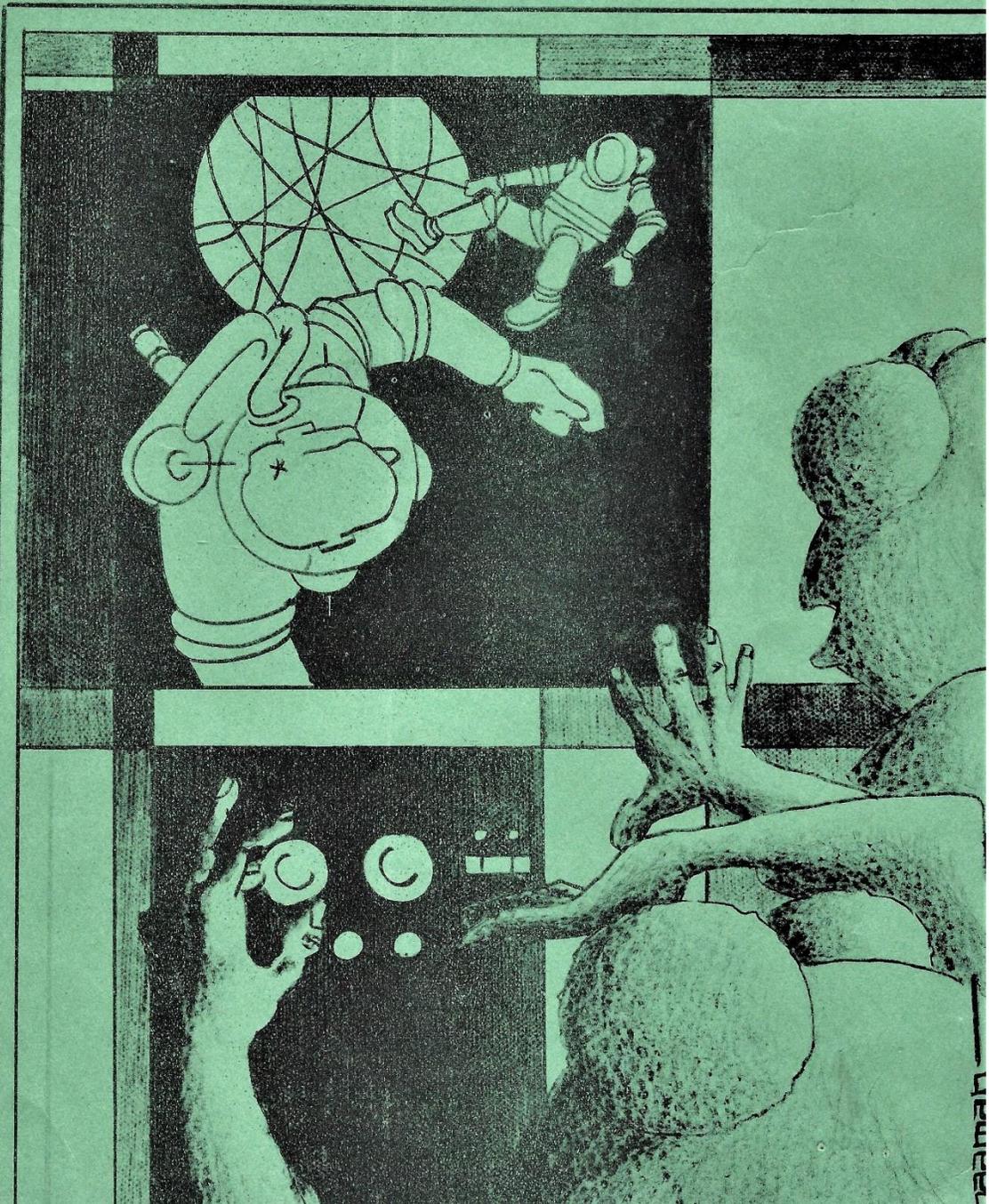
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VANATIONS Issue #1 – Cover Art by Frank Stephens.

VANATIONS Issue #2 – Cover art by Orville W. Mosher

VANATIONS Issue #3 – Cover Art by Naaman Peterson

VANATIONS Issue #4 – Cover art by Richard Bergeron

VANATIONS Issue #5 – Cover Art by Jack Harness

VANATIONS Issue #6 – Cover Art by Naaman Petersen

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## THE FUTURE OF VCON AS BEST I UNDERSTAND IT

This article is a last minute insertion in BCSFAzine prior to publication. It is all about a webinar held by Chris Sturges and Mark Seaton on Saturday, December 5<sup>th</sup>, 2020, to reveal what is happening with the upcoming VCON 43.

This article is not a transcript of what was said, nor a report on what was said. WCSFA will eventually post both a transcript and the actual meeting online for all to see.

This article is a mini-essay in which your humble God-Editor reads between the lines and attempts to make sense of what was said. It represents the gist of my understanding rather than the gist of what Chris was attempting to convey. The words are mine, not his.

This article is valuable in terms of being my attempt to get down to the nitty gritty basics of what actually happened, what is currently happening, and what will happen next, as seen by someone involved with VCON since the first one in 1971.

(Yes, I know it wasn't called VCON till the third convention but that's the kind of pedantic trivia which weakens the VCON "brand" when we're trying to "sell" it to people who've never heard of it. It has to be VCON, VCON, VCON all the way. Irrelevant trivia "footnoting" has no place in marketing. Focus is required. A crystal-clear focus.)

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The bulk of the meeting can be broken down into four messages:

- 1) The old traditional VCON is dead.
- 2) The old traditional VCON cannot be revived.
- 3) Radical change is needed if VCON is to be revived.
- 4) Radical Change is underway.

Chris began by noting VCON trends over the last twenty years or so. There has been a steady, irreversible decline in support for VCON manifest by decreasing numbers of veterans willing to return to ConCom roles, fewer volunteers stepping forward, and fewer fans buying memberships. This resulted in more and more pressure being placed on the Chairs and Department heads who had to, in effect, be their own assistants. This culminated in the 2019 collapse of VCON 43. This had nothing to do with the advent of Covid, which had not yet arrived. Hopes for a sudden onrush of volunteers and paying attendees at the last moment were defeated. It was apparent there were not enough volunteers to run the convention and not enough attendees to cover the costs of the convention. There could be no convention. So there wasn't.

It was decided to take 2020 off and not hold the next convention till 2021, if at all. Again, nothing to do with Covid. Merely an opportunity to take a breather to think about things before trying again.

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VCON has always suffered from built-in weaknesses.

For one thing, we've always sucked at advertising. Hardly ever paid for any. Instead in the past we've relied on an extremely limited fannish model making use of "free" possibilities, such as volunteers putting up posters on telephone poles, asking bookstores to put up posters in their windows, asking libraries to carry fliers, putting fliers on bulletin boards at universities and colleges, offering to do interviews for the news media, and so on. Not long ago I kept track of thirty fliers at the Surrey library near where I then lived. No one took one. By the time they were dumped their number was unchanged. Our traditional methods are ineffective, in my opinion.

In recent times we've made an effort on social media and web sites. A sporadic effort. And, as commercial entities know, the algorithms support paid ads, not freebie announcements. We reach fewer people than we think.

The truth is, as I see it, that we rely primarily on word of mouth. We rely on people who've already experienced VCON to come forward and support VCON. Hence the death spiral into oblivion. As time goes on more and more veterans disappear, either through death (we've been around for almost fifty years after all) or through gaffiation. They've done their bit. They're not coming back.

It used to be we relied on Steve Forty at FREDs and he and other VCON fen attending numerous conventions in the Pacific Northwest to drum up support for VCON. BCSFA itself, with close to 200 members in the old days, was a wide pool of potential volunteers. But BCSFA dwindled to a small social club of maybe a dozen people many years ago. FRED became a tiny restaurant gathering averaging 6 to 8 people held once a month in a restaurant in Richmond, now ended because of Covid. Fewer and fewer local fen went to other conventions, because costs.

Ah, money. The first VCON cost about \$100 and went \$5 over budget. The cost of putting on a VCON has risen exponentially since 1971. Partly because money is worth less and less as time goes by, but also because Vancouver and region became a

major convention and tourist centre, and hotels charged accordingly. Besides, SF Convention attendees are notorious cheapskates. All hotels would much rather host a professional convention than us. Ah, take over the hotel during an “off” season. Except, such was the growth of the industry that “off” season became an obsolete concept. Till Covid hit.

It’s funny. People complain about hotel room costs. Try paying the full cost. VCON always manages to get a discount. “Ah, but it’s way more than what I paid twenty years ago!” You betcha. And it’s only going to get worse. (Assuming things return to normal once Covid is defeated.) “Why don’t you pick a cheap hotel?” Cheap yet with adequate facilities? There aren’t any. “Vancouver is too expensive a city to hold cons!” Exactly. Solution? Don’t come to VCON. For older VCON veterans on fixed incomes, this has become the rule. Especially for those who live in other cities, provinces, and in the US Pacific Northwest.

We don’t have enough people. We can’t get enough money. This is quite the conundrum. Trends are against us. VCON has effectively been squeezed out of existence.

“Turn the clock back! Let’s do it the way we did forty years ago!” Impossible. Absolutely impossible. Circumstances have irrevocably changed.

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In the past, we have always been a fan-run convention, which is to say, run and operated by unpaid volunteer science fiction fans. That is our proud tradition. (You may have noticed there are fewer and fewer fan-run conventions these days. For-profit conventions like Fan Expo get far bigger crowds.)

However, we have never been strictly “fan-run.” In reality, the infrastructure of our conventions has always been operated by paid hotel staff doing hotel stuff, like cooking and serving the food for “our” banquets. This we take for granted. But we’ve always depended on SF Fen to run the actual programming and other con events. Gleeful, enthusiastic SF Fen.

However, in recent years, the number of such fen volunteering has dropped considerably. The tradition of multiple bids to put on VCON disappeared. It was all we could do to form a single committee. Then we became hard put to fill all the needful positions with genuine fans. Don’t know if you noticed, but it became the habit to reach out to professionals who weren’t SF fans to take the positions left empty by missing fans. These were people who knew little or nothing about SF fandom but became intrigued with the challenge of putting on such a weird little event. We were still “fan-run” in the sense that everyone was still a volunteer, but we were no longer truly “fan-run” in the sense that not all the volunteers were fans.

Nevertheless, the decline continued. Ultimately, even the option of recruiting both SF fen volunteers and professional non-fen volunteers proved inadequate. Can’t get enough people. We’re dead, Jim! The old VCON is gone forever. We can’t pull the old “Andy Hardy” routine of “Hey, kids! Let’s get together and put on a circus in the barn!” Them days be dead as a dodo.

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Fortunately, Chris Sturges, in consultation with the WCSFA Board, has evolved a new approach which I call “**Fan-run but no longer fan-done.**” VCON is to be put on a professional basis, or at least as professional as that industry-trade-show the Worldcon, yet still be run and directed by genuine SF fan.

I’m putting words into his mouth, but essentially Chris will be functioning as the kind of super-patron many of us have always dreamed of.

With Chris at the helm, VCON will be taken infinitely more seriously by Hollywood North, potential sponsors, and local civic governments.

Why so? For the past thirty years or so Chris has run a company called “Fired-up Events” which literally provides fires and explosions, as well as many other effects, for film productions, television productions (including, currently, “Riverdale”), community events, government projects, and so forth. He even bid on the opening and closing ceremonies for the Winter Olympics in Vancouver back in 2010. He didn’t get it, but only because another bidder was cheaper.

Point is he and his company have intimate connections with dozens of potential sponsors who would never give the old style VCON the time of day because too amateur, but would be interested in supporting VCON if we could demonstrate a level of professionalism and organization of the sort they expect from competent supporters of community interests. Outfits like the City of Burnaby and the Burnaby Tourism Board, for instance. Also corporate sponsors yet to be named because not yet approached, but Chris knows them as business partners and what they like. He has myriad contacts with IATSE, the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, whose “members work in all forms of live theatre, motion picture and television production, trade shows and exhibitions, television broadcasting, and concerts as well as the equipment and construction shops that support all these areas of the entertainment industry.” Useful people, potentially. He also knows many actors whose contractual obligations prevent them from appearing as guests of honour, but who would be delighted simply to attend and mingle with other attendees. All kinds of possibilities inherent in his contacts.

The reality is, we have no other option.

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We can choose to accept his plan, and support it whole-heartedly as best we can.

Or we, and I mean you, can oppose it. Okay, fine. All you have to do is *immediately* volunteer to be on the ConCom and put your money where your mouth is. I mean that pretty much literally. You’ll have to come up with the tens of thousands of dollars required to put on a successful VCON, much of it due in advance. And you’ve only got 11 months to do it. Can *you* do it? I don’t think so.

Besides, WCSFA has already signed a contract with the Hilton Hotel at Metrotown for 2021 and, as I understand it, has already paid the hotel with money furnished by Fired-Up Events (to be repaid when feasible). At this point, you’d be crazy not to support the new approach and help give it its best shot. Rejecting the plan would kill VCON forever, I am convinced.

So, what's the plan?

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As best I understand it, the current WCSFA Board is functioning as a basic planning committee for future VCONs. These people, as of the last AGM of October 18, 2020, are:

*Elected for two year term:*

Marie-Louise Beesley

Cameron Rowe

Joseph Whovianart Cassidy

Katherine Shadster

C.J. Jackman Zigante

*Plus, in second year of two year term:*

Chris Sturges – President

Kathleen Moore – Treasurer

Plus two or three others whose names I don't remember (possibly Mark Seaton?) and cannot find info about online. No matter. I'm under time pressure to get this article done. I'm sure someone will fill me in so I can print a complete list next issue.

The point is, there *is* a complete WCSFA Board functioning as such, and supporting Chris and his radical new ideas.

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The emphasis is on continuity. Sponsors like continuity, ideally 3 year periods at a minimum.

It is proposed that the Hilton at Metrotown becomes our permanent facility, at least for the foreseeable future. Many advantages to this, including Skytrain station for ease of transport (even from the Airport), two nearby hotels willing to function as overflow hotels, food courts and myriad stores next door. Settling down with the Hilton will make us a local "fixture" to the Burnaby government, tourism board, etc. Useful.

It is proposed to establish, as quickly as possible, a VCON planning committee in lieu of the traditional ConCom to serve for a minimum three year period, hopefully with enthusiastic fen staying on for even longer and thus a very low turnover rate. Thus the problem of "reinventing the wheel" will be avoided. In theory, as time goes by, more and more members will accrue to the committee which, overall, will consistently gain in experience and expertise. Best of all it will be seen as "professional" by potential corporate sponsors. It is intended this committee adopt organized and efficient procedures to justify this reputation. Nevertheless it will consist entirely of fen volunteers who will be in charge of running and directing the convention. Hence, it will *still* be "fan-run."

It is proposed to hire, for the sum of \$1, Fired-Up Events (FUE) to carry out the physical task of running the convention. This will greatly reduce the pressures on

committee members. Roles formerly handled by volunteers (no longer to be found in sufficient numbers) will be handled by employees of Fired-Up Events whose wages will be paid by Chris and not by VCON. This is the rear part of the concept “Fan-run but no longer fan-done.” Really, it’s just an extension of part of the infrastructure being handled by paid hotel staff, only in this case it will be paid Fired-Up Events staff. They work for Chris Sturges, but will follow the direction and commands of the VCON planning committee. So, *still* fan-run, in essence, in that it is volunteer fen who will be in control.

In a sense, VCON no longer has to worry about upfront money or lack thereof. In terms of viable credit, FUE has much deeper pockets. VCON will merely administer the money FUE provides.

Of course, the hard expenses have to be paid back. Hotel and facilities fees. GoH air fares. Materials. Promotions. Advertising. All the usual and unusual costs of holding a convention. But at least we don’t have to worry about upfront or ongoing costs. FUE will provide. We just have to ensure VCON earns enough money to pay FUE back.

Here’s the thing, we will no longer be dependent on the faded reputation of a dying VCON to attract attendees. The amount of expertise available through FUE is phenomenal. Recording and broadcasting VCON programming and events? No problem. Bringing in Hollywood North people? No problem. Mass market adverts? No problem. Pre-con events to promote VCON? No problem. Best of all, corporate sponsors offering significant donations? No problem.

FUE, with its manpower, experience, contacts, and superior credit, is literally the solution to *all* the problems we’ve been tearing our hair out in frustration. And yet genuine SF Fen *still* get to run a convention by and for fans. I call it a win/win situation.

In short, Chris has come up with the means to combine a Fan-run convention with sufficient professionalism to make VCON a huge, viable hit.

How, you ask? Here’s the answer, as best I understand it.

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As currently planned, VCON 43 will go ahead on the basis of Covid no longer being a problem, but will also plan to be a limited in-person convention with a strong virtual presence if necessity dictates. We’ll be flexible. Apparently the hotel contract has taken this into account.

The convention will take place 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, and 17<sup>th</sup> October, 2021.

The Hilton Hotel is the main venue, the one with a room discount, and adequate facilities (seems the Hilton recently expanded same). Overflow hotels, without room discounts, will be the nearby Holiday Inn and the Element Vancouver Metrotown Hotel. Some programming will take place in the Overflow hotels. For instance, Chris feels the Element’s boardrooms would be idea for writers workshops.

All programming items will be recorded, a few broadcast live (or all if the con goes virtual), and all will be available online afterwards for anyone who wants to see what they missed or learn what the “new” VCON is all about.

Incredibly, from the point of view of a twentieth century luddite kind of guy like myself, both the dealer's room and the art show will have virtual "booths" where fen online from wherever can view and purchase items that will then be shipped to them. I have no idea what kind of software can do this.

VCON doesn't have to worry about acquiring this or any other sort of software. FUE has access to professional software used by professionals and will make use of this high-tech and very expensive software as part of the service it provides to VCON. I'm guessing this applies to registration, promotion, and other realms beyond my knowledge but typical of multi-billion dollar industries. Can't hurt to have it, is all I'm saying.

One possible program we might use can convert VCON into a sort of RPG video game. You can be an avatar wandering about a virtual "lobby" and/or "hospitality suite." Anybody you bump into you can start chatting with, or, are instantly teleported, so to speak, into watching the program item that avatar represents. Really? Such a program exists? And we can use it? Hot damn! If we get something like that we'll have a flood of virtual attendees.

Apparently the potential possibilities for VCON activity go way beyond anything we have ever attempted in the past. In the 1970s VCON was cutting edge, inspiring other conventions to spring up in the Pacific Northwest. Evidently we can be the same again, pioneering new methods and techniques that other cons will want to emulate. An exciting prospect to my mind.

The above are concepts Chris mentioned as being among the possibilities FUE can potentially provide. What *has* been written in stone are the date of the convention, the fact that the hotel contract has been signed, and the fact that FUE has already paid the hotel. (Assuming I interpreted everything correctly.)

So, what else remains to be done? What do we need to do next?

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Chris commented that the Webinar was ground zero. We are starting from scratch. Not quite true, but damn near. No more circular speculation fretting over past events over and over. No time for that. Now is the time for action.

First, people need to join the proposed long-term planning committee. I've volunteered to do the Writers Workshops. What are *you* willing to do?

I'm assuming Mark Seaton is present as the overall tech guru? Perhaps functioning as the liaison with the FUE concerning what tech may or may not be applied to various departments?

I know Chris Sturges has been heavily involved in myriad ways. I assume he will connect us with appropriate contacts and sponsors when it becomes feasible to do so.

I also assume other people are already involved. Somebody wrote up the contract. Somebody negotiated with the Hilton. Consequently I like to think that a bare bones planning committee is already functioning.

What needs to happen is more people stepping forward to join the committee. They should then bear in mind two things: a) their role and function should be

clearly defined so that they know exactly what needs doing, and b) liaison with FUE needs to be established such that each department in the committee knows what is feasible and possible and knows what steps to take to accomplish it.

It would help if WCSFA posts a list of who is doing what and can show us a list of positions still open so that people can ponder which tasks they would be best suited for. The liaison aspect with FUE needs to be laid out as well. Can't exploit the potential of FUE properly unless we know what they are capable of and what precisely they can do for VCON.

There will be another webinar later this month. That would be your opportunity to learn more, express your interest, and offer to join.

If we can pass the first hurdle of organizing an effective team with new wonder tools at hand, then we can get on with the business of planning.

There are several online sites regarding VCON and WCSFA. Evidently one is going to be designated the focus for our online presence and it is to be hoped it will aid in the planning process as well, especially when it comes to recruiting.

At this moment, I don't know whom one contacts to sign up. Up to this point all VCON activity has been behind the scenes. Some kind of secretary guru needs to be put in place, I guess. Something that works. Something public. Soon.

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The way I see it, fen devoted to VCON have an opportunity not only to salvage it but to make it greater than before. If you are toying with the idea of getting involved, don't waste time pondering the overall picture. WCSFA is doing that. Forget the macro. Concentrate on the micro. What is your specific area of interest? Concentrate on that one thing and one thing only. Find your particular niche. Then volunteer.

Me? Writers workshops. That's all I can fit into my schedule. I know how to coordinate Clarion-style workshops. I know how to run them. Pretty confident I can handle both in-person or zoom as need be. I assume I can count on tech-support advice. What I currently need to know is what sort of workshops?

I believe Chris is trying to corral experienced scriptwriters he is familiar with from his industry contacts. I only need 3 to hold a scriptwriting workshop, plus 4 newbies eager to be critiqued. Likewise just 3 pros and 4 newbies for the other two workshops, one on stories and one on novels, I'm guessing. Three is as much as I can handle, at one per day running three hours each. But first I need to know what and whom Chris has in mind. I expect to find out soon.

I offer the above comments as an example of preliminary thinking regarding a specific task. The sort of thing you need to do if you volunteer for the committee. Easy enough. Just break it down into simple steps one after the other. So think on it. Please. If you need VCON, can't live without it, rest assured VCON needs you.

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And don't worry about Covid. VCON will cope as necessary. It may be the vaccine will be ready before VCON, but its salutary effects on the general population not yet established. In which case, it will probably be law that only people with proof of vaccination will be allowed to attend large events. If that happens VCON could wind

up a hybrid event, part in-person, part virtual. Good enough. Still all kinds of possibilities for fun.

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At any rate, this has been my attempt to present my impression of everything stated, implied, or hinted at during the webinar. This is how I visualize the current state of VCON. I left out a lot of minor details in order to present what I perceive is the overall picture.

If I am way off base, have misinterpreted what Chris said and gotten my facts wrong, I stand ready to be corrected. Like everyone else, I just want to know what actually is going on and how those who support VCON can get involved.

The countdown has begun. We're off and running?

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**VOID BREATHER BOMBAST**

**Chang-5 Grabbed Lunar Soil** – The Chinese launched their Chang-5 Lunar probe on November 23<sup>rd</sup>. It landed on the Oceanus Procellarum near Mons Rümker on Tuesday, December 1<sup>st</sup>, and quickly began scooping up surface material and also drilling into the Lunar regolith to grab sub-surface samples. The hope is that what the probe brings back to Earth will include volcanic ejecta from Rümker which will come deep from within the moon and also be more than a billion years younger than the samples brought back by previous American and Russian manned and unmanned missions.

The footage of the landing and that of the cute robot arm picking up and dropping samples into the sample return container is quite impressive. Even better, on Thursday, December 3<sup>rd</sup>, the upper stage of the Chang-5 probe lifted off from the landing stage and successfully achieved Lunar orbit. It is slated to dock with the Chang-5 Lunar Orbiter on Saturday, December 5<sup>th</sup>, then break out of Lunar Orbit a few days later to head home and land at a region called Siziwang Banner in Inner Mongolia. This will be the first “fresh” batch of Lunar soil to arrive on Earth in 44 years. An amazing achievement. The Chinese space program is obviously very competent.

Incidentally, the Chang-4 rover, which landed on the Moon's far side in January, 2019, is still active and doing good work. Methinks China is very serious in its Lunar ambitions. Can't wait to see how that ties in with its manned space program in the near future.

(added note: The docking with the Lunar Orbiter worked perfectly.)

**Arecibo Radio Telescope be dead** – Built 57 years ago in Puerto Rico, the world's second largest radio telescope, it's dish 1,000 feet wide and 167 feet deep, collapsed on 2020, and cannot be repaired. Initially it suffered damage during Hurricane Maria in September of 2017. Suspended 475 feet above the dish is (or was) a 900 ton

science platform supported by cables strung from three tall towers. During August and November of this year a number of cables snapped. Then, on December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020, a critical cable snapped, and the massive science platform fell into the dish in less than 17 seconds, wreaking havoc and causing the entire dish to collapse.

It's primary function in recent years had been snapping radar images of asteroids passing near Earth. Back in 1974 it transmitted a message toward the globular star cluster M13 some 25,000 light years away which, among other things, gave away our presence on the 3<sup>rd</sup> planet orbiting our sun. Possibly a bad idea.

Anyway, there are no plans to replace the Arecibo Radio Telescope as such. No need to replicate it. Technology has moved on. Should sufficient funds be provided, something more sophisticated will be constructed.

By the way, Arecibo was the largest Radio Telescope till the Chinese completed one in 2016. It's 1,665 feet wide and cost the equivalent of \$180 million USD.

**Man on Mars by 2024** – So says Elon Musk. The Starship prototypes are getting bigger and better. The latest version, SN8, with three engines, is scheduled to make a 9-mile-high hop soon, possibly by the time you read this. The ultimate version, 165 feet tall and equipped with six Raptor engines, will be hoisted into space by Superheavy, which will have 30 Raptor engines. Superheavy will return to Earth, but the Starship is designed to be a shuttle capable of multiple missions to Mars and back. Musk figures on launching an unmanned Starship to Mars by 2022. A manned mission will follow in 2026, or as early as 2024 “if we are lucky” claims Musk. More than just a shuttle, the Starship is capable of landing on Mars and taking off again.

Apparently the Starship can be configured to carry as many as 100 people. Obviously not for a Mars mission, and probably never. I think it's just a handy-dandy way of saying it can carry quite a bit of stuff that will last a few people for a long mission. I'm hoping Elon Musk's dreams come true. By the time I leave this Earth I'd like to know there are humans bopping about the surface of both the Moon and Mars. That would make me happy.

**Rover to Explore Martian Moon Phobos in 2026** – A German/French rover weighing 55 pounds will explore Phobos for about 100 days. It will be dropped off from a Japanese Space Agency Martian Orbiter mission which, in passing, will somehow grab a sample of Phobos and later bring it to Earth. All part of a mission whose major theme is to figure out how Phobos originated. A captured asteroid? A piece of ejecta from Mars brought about by a massive impact? Or, my favourite, an old Russian theory that Phobos wasn't dense enough to be natural and therefore must be a derelict Martian space station millions of years old? Photos suggest otherwise and the theory has long been abandoned, but what if underneath all that dirt accumulated by eons of micrometeorite impacts there lurks ...?

Anyway, Phobos is 14 miles in diameter and, cratered and gouged as it is, should provide plenty of data for the eager rover. I am eager to find out what the results will be. Someday they should do the same for the other Martian Moon Deimos.

**Yoda in Space** – The SpaceX Crew Dragon Capsule “Resilience” launched into space on November 14<sup>th</sup> with four crewmen aboard. (I remember when just one

astronaut in a space capsule was exciting!) Their names are Shannon Walker, Victor Glover, Mike Hopkins, and SoiChi Noguchi. On November 16<sup>th</sup> they joined NASA astronaut Kate Rubins and Russian cosmonauts Sergey Rhyhikov and Sergey Kud-Sverchkov aboard the International Space Station. Wow. 7 people aboard the ISS all at the same time. Is that a record?

Nope. The record was set back in 2009 when there were briefly 13 people on board, including a space tourist. Over 240 people have visited the ISS since its first module was placed in orbit. Maybe Elon Musk's Starship capacity for 100 people isn't so far fetched, if near future space stations are going to be even bigger than the current one which is nearing the end of its useful working life.

Anyway, a plush toy of the baby Yoda from the Disney show *The Mandalorian* was visible floating about the DragonX space capsule. Whimsical, yes, but not present solely on a whim. It is a designated "Zero Gravity Indicator" for viewers. Probably one of the less expensive instruments.

**Asteroid Material Brought to Earth** – Samples of the asteroid Ryugu landed in Womera, Australia, Sunday, December 6<sup>th</sup>. The tiny capsule was dropped off by the Japanese spacecraft Hababusa-2. The 4.6 billion year old dust grains were collected in 2019. One hopes for an interesting analysis to be revealed sometime next year.

**SpaceX Launches Drago Resupply mission to ISS** – The Dragon cargo mission, carrying 6,400 pounds of supplies, is the 100<sup>th</sup> successful launch of a Falcon 9 rocket by SpaceX. It took off December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

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## LITERARY SHENANIGANS

### **Nalo Hopkinson named the 37<sup>th</sup> Damon Knight Memorial Grand Master**

By the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America (SFWA) for her contributions to genre literature. She has been described as "An award-winning black Caribbean-Canadian feminist speculative fiction writer." She has so far published 6 novels, *Brown Girl in the Ring* being her first in 1998, followed by *Midnight Robber* (2000), *The Salt Roads* (2003), *The New Moon Arms* (2007), *The Chaos* (2012) and *Sister Mine* (2013), plus 3 short story collections *Skin Folk* (2001), *Report From Planet Midnight* (2012), and *Falling in Love with Hominoids* (2015). She has won many awards, including the Canadian Aurora and Sunburst.

She was also Author Guest of Honour at VCON 28 in 2003 chaired by Paul Carpentier. At VCON 28 she took part in such panels as "How an Editor Compiles an Anthology," "Tragedy Relief," "Culture Shock," "Whaddya Mean, You Don't Have Any Culture? (Or, how white people can be exotic too)," "Finding Your Authorial Voice," as well as the opening and closing ceremonies, an autograph session, and giving a reading. Her story *Shift* was included in the program book. She was a delightful and inspiring GoH.

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**Linda Addison named 2020 Grand Master**

By the Science Fiction and Fantasy Poetry Association (SFPA). She is the author of five collections, including “How to Recognize a Demon Has Become Your Friend.” She is the first African-American to receive the Horror Writers of America (HWA) Bram Stoker Award and has been Poetry Editor of *Space And Time Magazine* since 2000.

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**Alan Dean Foster versus Disney**

Foster write *Alien* novelizations for Titan Books, and *Star Wars* novelizations for Lucasfilms. Both companies lived up to their contractual obligations and paid royalties. When The Walt Disney Company purchased the rights in 2015, the royalties stopped even though the books continue to be sold and earn money for Disney. Contractual obligations automatically transfer with the rights defined by the contracts. Disney is legally required to pay Alan Dean Foster royalties as per the contracts. Disney says it doesn't have to. SFWA is up in arms because this could be an income killer for myriad writers if the movie industry follows Disney's lead. Potentially yet another blow to the concept of writers being able to earn a living. Expect one or more law suits to come.

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**Harlan Ellison's Last Dangerous Visions to be published**

J. Michael Straczynski, executor to Harlan Ellison's estate, has announced that after a 47 year delay the legendary anthology of ground-breaking stories selected by Harlan will finally be published. Some stories, having been sold elsewhere, or overtaken by events, will not be included. Their place will be taken by works by contemporary writers. In addition, Harlan's "last major work" will be included. Straczynski expects major publishers to start bidding for the book no later than April 2021. Anticipated royalties will go into a Trust designed to maintain Harlan's house as "The Harlan and Susan Ellison Memorial Library" where his manuscripts and correspondence will be available for scholars and the house itself for public tours.

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**RANDOM MUSINGS**

**Alter Egos**

*By Robert J. Sawyer*

I like a fringe theory as much as the next science-fiction writer. Frank J. Tipler's idea that we all live in a computer simulation, as explicated in his *The Physics of Immortality?* I'm in. Julian Jaynes's notion that self-awareness only emerged in classical times, as he wrote about in *The Origins of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind?* Sign me up!

And so I was very much looking forward to the nonfiction book *The Idea of the World* by Bernardo Kastrup, especially since (like the Jaynes book) it bills itself as an interdisciplinary work; I've often said science fiction is the genre of intriguing juxtapositions—where fields that wouldn't normally come in contact spark off each other. Kastrup's subtitle is *A Multi-Disciplinary Argument for the Mental Nature of Reality*.

But I'm abandoning the book after reading about 30%. First, it's just terribly redundant. It's supposed to be based on a series of articles that Kastrup has previously published, but he keeps using the same examples and quotes, often verbatim, sometimes multiple times in the same chapter. The science-fiction field has a long, honorable history of the "fix-up" book—a coherent whole made out of previously published parts. The "novels" of the *Foundation* trilogy, each comprised of several shorter works, is the best-known example. But Kastrup hasn't even done a single top-down pass to eliminate redundancies; it's enormously frustrating.

But all of that is trivial; I came to his book for his theory, which he claims integrates findings from across the realms of the sciences and philosophy to show that the so-called reality we perceive is not actually the way things are.

From the beginning, he kept using the word "alter" and its plural "alters" as *nouns*, not verbs. I'd never encountered that usage, and several dictionaries I consulted, plus two different specialized philosophy dictionaries, lacked any definition of "alter" as a noun. It was only when he got a quarter of the way through the book that he bothered to explain what he meant.

An alter, it turns out, is one of the individual personalities or identities in what we used to call "multiple personality disorder" (and what is now known as "dissociative identity disorder," according to the latest *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* of the American Psychological Association). Yup, that *Three Faces of Eve* stuff; that *Sybil* stuff. That very controversial—and, some would argue, mostly discredited—notion that a human brain can house multiple independent personalities, wholly or largely unaware of each other, vying for control of the physical body (sort of a dualism duel, if you'll forgive my wordplay).

Why is this relevant to the question of reality? Because Kastrup's "Idealism ontology," as he calls it, is based on his assertion that there is *one* universal mind—just one—and, well, the reason it *seems* like that there are, currently, at least seven billion human minds, and countless animal minds, and who knows how many alien minds—is that they all are simply alters within this great cosmic consciousness; the seven billion faces of Mitochondrial Eve's descendants, if you will.

Why would anybody believe this? Well, Kastrup says it's the most acceptable theory of reality because of its parsimony. Parsimony, in the philosophical sense, alludes to Occam's razor: the notion that, *all things being equal*, the simplest solution—the one that posits the fewest entities—is preferable.

Well, yeah, that's a good rule of thumb, but it's not a universal law. And all things are definitely *not* equal. To reduce the universe to a single mind, Kastrup has to rely on the shaky, debatable analogy that you (the person reading these words)

and I (Rob Sawyer, writing them), and, y’know, Cleopatra, and whatever member of *Homo sapiens* first developed necklaces, and Donald Trump, and Marie Curie, and a newborn baby just opening her eyes for the first time *are all the same “person,”* a person Kastrup dubs “TWE”—“that which experiences,” because, I guess “God” was already taken.

Kastrup says on his own site and in his “about the author” that he has two PhDs, but nowhere could I find what institution had awarded them. There’s no Wikipedia entry on him. And all his books are from the same oddball publisher (Iff Books), one I’d never heard of. Buried on their website is the fact publication of many of their books is subsidized by the author.

If Bernardo Kastrup and I really are alters of the same vast consciousness, I wonder what explanation his alter comes up with for the fact that my alter thinks he’s full of crap.

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**Robert J. Sawyer’s** latest novel is the #1 *Locus* bestseller *The Oppenheimer Alternative*.

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Robert J. Sawyer is a Member of the Order of Canada. He’s been Guest of Honour, Special Guest, or Toastmaster at over 100 conventions worldwide. His 24th novel, the #1 *Locus* Bestseller *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: RORK!— by Avram Davidson

The cover of this first edition pocket book is rather striking and modernistic, or so it seemed to me as a young teenager when I bought it off the drugstore rack in 1965. The back cover shouts “Rork” four times and its blurb refers to “mysterious, legendary ‘rorks’ that everyone feared ...”

I figured it had to be some sort of futuristic take on the Sinbad tales and the legend of the mighty birdie Roc. I had not yet read *One Thousand and One Nights* but was familiar with the Roc in the 1957 Ray Harryhausen film *Sinbad*. Evidently the cover artist was of similar mind. The spare, white background and mechanistic interpretation of a bird, possibly a photo collage, struck me as quite wonderful and futuristic, hinting of imaginative marvels within its pages.

Alas, the Rorks turn out to be larger-than-human spider-like creatures maybe

roughly the size of Bison. Their actual size is never spelled out. Anyway, everybody is afraid of them. They like to eat people, especially babies, or so popular belief has it.

On one level this can be viewed as a standard human colonists versus alien menace piece of pulp fiction where the threat is a bit vague but the quest to find out the true nature of the planet's flora and fauna drives the story and turns out to be rather entertaining.

But the dry, cynical wit underlying the description of the colonist's society adds an extra dimension that elevates the book to a higher level and makes it even more entertaining.

The planet Pia 2 is the ass-end of the galaxy. It has but one exportable resource, a plant called Redwing from which a "medical fixative" is derived. The "The Hundred Worlds" polity, reduced after the Third Great Galactic War to a mere 74 worlds, has limited resources. A single transport ship drops by Pia 2 once every five years to pick up the accumulated dried Redwing leaves and offload a few goodies for the few thousand hapless colonists stuck on the planet.

Ah, the colonists. A complex lot. The original set were abandoned for several hundred years while the Great War raged. One group, the Wild Tocks (short for autochtone or native-born) went ... well ... wild, living off the virtually non-existent resources of a harsh, unfriendly planet. A second bunch, the Tame Tocks, clung to a few remnants of civilization, and today form the workforce and sexual partners of the Station Personnel running the Guild trade centre built forty years ago when The Hundred Worlds finally returned. Both groups of Tocks are despised by the outsiders as inferior savages, the Wild Tocks in particular.

The Station personnel, all two hundred of them, are essentially colonial administrators with nothing to administer. All that happens is Wild Tocks occasionally drag in bales of Redwing seeking to exchange them for food, booze, and scrap metal. That's it. Apart from having sex with the natives and getting drunk on a daily basis, there's literally nothing for the station personnel to do. Bored doesn't even begin to describe their state of mind.

What is depicted is a minor colonial outpost where every colonial administrator considers himself an exile serving time till they can go into comfortable retirement on a decent planet, meanwhile accomplishing as little as possible because what's the point? Nobody bothers to explore anymore. Nobody bothers to study the Wild Tocks, let alone the native critters. The Station Commander habitually goes out of his way to avoid making decisions of any kind. And the chap in charge of the few "skimmer" flying machines never lets anyone use one because he's obsessed with the maintenance schedule and doesn't want to risk them getting dirty or damaged.

Indeed, the most common approach to solving problems is to offer a drink and discuss rather than decide, every drink involving a toast consisting of the two words "Dead Rorks."

Why did Davidson choose to depict colonial administrators in this fashion? He fought in the US Navy during WWII, then on the Israeli side in the 1948 / 1949 war. I suspect he lived for a time in British-Mandated Palestine before the partition, when

the English were an “enemy” who were subject to terrorism from both sides, tended to despise both sides in the growing dispute, and generally hated being assigned to one of the most problematic and therefore undesirable outposts of the British Empire. They didn’t want to be there, and the “natives” didn’t want them there either. It sucked to be stationed in Palestine. Or so I understand from what I’ve read in assorted histories of that place and time.

I don’t want to belabour the point with unnecessary and probably totally incorrect comparisons, but I think it reasonable to assume Davidson was familiar with the ennui-ridden colonial administrator type and derived inspiration from his experience to present an amusing take on one of the inevitable consequences of empire building. Definitely adds to the entertainment value.

The one wild card in the novel is Ran Lomar, a naïve lad who asked to be stationed on Pia 2 because he thought it would be a refreshing, invigorating contrast to overcrowded Earth. It isn’t. Incidentally, the Wild Tocks hate Earth-born, because they blame Earth for abandoning their ancestors back in the day. So Lomar has to keep his mouth shut about his origins. This irks him. He finds even the meagre population of the station too crowded. He wants to explore. After all, his instructions were to find out why Redwing production is declining, and since no one at the station cares, he figures his best bet is to live among the gatherers, the Wild Tocks.

Turns out all the Wild Tocks want to do is eat, fornicate, get drunk, and sleep. Much like people back on Earth, actually. But they have one extra annoying habit, they love to feud. Hence their desire for scrap metal, out of which they fashion flintlock muskets, the height of their technology. A wealthy and powerful clan leader has at least 6 flintlock men and 12 pike men in his service. They like nothing better than to hide behind rocks in the fog and ambush other clans. They dream of capturing the Station and looting it. They’re kind of hard to get along with.

Nevertheless Lomar manages to acquire a young girl Wild Tock to take as his mistress, in addition to the Tame Tock mistress he has back at the station. He is nothing if not practical when attending to his needs. But one thing leads to another and soon the pair of them are forced to flee deep into the wild Rork Land to evade their Wild Tock Pursuers. This really opens up the quest aspect of the tale.

First, Lomar gets to discover hitherto unknown plants and animals, and to learn some important new facts about the animals the colonists are already familiar with. He also learns the answers to some of the rumours no one has ever bothered to investigate. Why is everyone so lethargic and motiveless? Are the Rorks really so hostile? Why do they eat people, or do they? Is it true they can speak like a human? Is it true they have a city of their own? What the heck is wrong with the Wild Tocks? With the Tame Tocks? With the Station Staff? With everybody? What’s really going on? Can Lomar find the answers without getting killed? Will the answers do any good? Is everybody doomed? You know, the typical sorts of conundrums every junior clerk in a colonial administration has to face.

Davidson handles the process of revelation rather deftly. Every answer leads to new questions. Every step forward complicates and confounds the relations between

the four social groups (if one includes the Rorks). The whole thing is a clever sendup of the essential problems a backwater colonial outpost always faces. How do you deal with the natives? How do you deal with the colonials who've gone native? How do you deal with the camp followers dependant on the colonial administration for their livelihood? And most difficult of all, how do you deal with less-than-first-class administrators assigned to the colony against their career hopes who let themselves rot into alcoholism and ennui because they hate everything about their posting and resent anyone who accomplishes anything?

This is why empires are doomed to fail. Sooner or later everyone gets tired of the routine, especially the people in charge. Oh, it's all very well to conquer, what with the thrill of slaughter and loot and all. Some people find that a tonic. But once it gets down to paper shuffling and keeping records and trying to solve all the petty problems hindering this or that grand scheme, all the while dealing with conquered people who don't want to stay conquered and who hate your guts every waking moment and most of the time while they're asleep, or at least while they're dreaming, it gets wearisome after a while. A sure sign of collapse is the proverbial insistence on gin and tonic as the highlight of the day. The efficient and dedicated administrator is largely a myth. The vast bulk of the colonial administrators just want to raise their glasses high and say "Dead Rorks." Such is the sad reality of empire.

In short, this is NOT just another potboiler formulaic pulp fiction adventure. It is actually a wry and clever satire on what empires are really all about and, I think, the British Empire in particular, probably because of Davidson's personal experience with same. A lot of thought and perception went into this book. I fear it is underrated by those who read it without noting the satiric intent.

Then again, maybe not. I'm positive most readers find it highly entertaining. The final chapters are a tour de force of human shenanigans as Lomar frantically tries to outwit all the forces and groups conspiring against each other. He basically tricks everybody into a happy compromise, and even then he would have failed if it were not for his phenomenally good luck and help from unexpected sources. Which is another way of saying Davidson maintains a high level of suspense as to the outcome of Lomar's "crusade" right up to the end of the book.

What on the surface appears to be a relatively simple plot is in fact quite complex and enlivened by numerous characters whose realistic imperfections are delightfully entertaining. Despite their shoddy lives and a real shoddy planet, their plight and situation is enough to stir the reader's sense of wonder. And that's what it's all about, isn't it? That's why we read science fiction.

More than half a century ago I enjoyed this book as a ripping good yarn. Now I read it as that AND as a brilliant piece of satire. Avram Davidson was a master of his craft fully deserving of his excellent reputation.

I like this book. Pretty sure you will too.

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

Unnerving Magazine #14.

I reviewed every story, poem, and article in this Magazine for Amazing Stories (online) Magazine. Here is a sample portion of my review:

**Home is Where You Sink Your Teeth** – by Ann Gresham

*Premise:*

Citadel Bluff is the town where Sarah grew up. She's returned only because her grandmother is dying. Sarah hates Citadel Bluff. Turns out the town hates her.

*Review:*

The dead are important in this story. Equally so the "spell" the town holds over Sarah. Can she escape? She knows she should make the effort, but she doesn't want to. On the other hand, she doesn't want to die either.

I have the feeling this is a Stephen King-style plot waiting to be fleshed out into something longer. At its current size it strikes me as too crowded with incidents, especially past incidents. Perhaps a tad too many characters. On the other hand, it's not a failure as a story. I think it could make a good movie, in fact, suitably expanded. It's a pastiche in homage to Stephen King and works as such. Just a little bit breathless and fast-paced, given the theme and subject matter. That be my personal taste in fiction technique speaking, methinks. Stephen King fans may well find this story comfortably familiar and rather appealing.

I particularly like the title, by the way.

See the full review here < [Unnerving Magazine #14](#) >

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## THE LIGHT-HEARTED VITUPERATOR AND JOLLY REVILER: Fandom as Halloween

*By Stan G. Hyde*

No column this month. Stan is heavily involved with the International Baccalaureate program currently and has no time to spare. He anticipates being free to return next month, though.

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## MILLION WORD YEAR BLOG

A LOOK BACK AT *THE DIRTY DUCK*.

*By Michael Bertrand*

Tonight's movie is *The Dirty Duck* and seeing as most people who do not know me personally will have never heard of the movie, I will give you a bit of an introduction first, and I will try to be brief.

*Dirty Duck* is an animated feature from way back in the 1970s, and part of what I love about it is just how amazingly of that era it is. From the musical style (all music done by Flo & Eddie, founders of the *Turtles* and former members of the *Mothers of Invention*, and all of it gorgeously arranged and most of it funky), to its down and dirty underground-comic DIY look, with backgrounds made of photos from magazines and everything looking kind of like a picture from a well used porno magazine, to its overall psychedelic ethos embracing the dirty, the cheap, the low quality, the unloved, unlovely, unwashed, unappreciated, underground world that exists way below the middle class bourgeois radar, and so offering an escape, a safe haven where you can get away from absolutely everything middle class and actively engage in your own corruption.

Watching this movie is, for me at least, like rolling the entire seventies into one big fat joint and smoking it in the light of a cheap black and white television in the motel room where you lie, basking in the afterglow of the most amazing sex you have ever had with some prostitute from a country you had never even heard of before tonight.

It's the story of Willard Eisenbaum, a nebbishy nerdy drone at an insurance company with a very vivid fantasy life and a very pathetic real life who sort of inherits the title character, and said duck takes him on a tripped out surreal psychedelic trip of self-discovery, looking all over the world trying to free Willard of his inhibitions and his virginity.

It freaking rocks my world.

Enough talking about it, now I am gonna watch it. Yes, I have been sitting here with the movie on pause and my popcorn getting cold while I type all this for you good people. Feel free to bask in the glow of my hard working ethos and dedication to craft.

OK, you can stop basking now.

How seventies can you get? The first two images are of lips, and a hot dog. And by the way, this movie is made by Murakami Wolf, an obscure little animation company known mostly for a little show called *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*.

The first one, from the '80s, that launched the whole thing.  
Pretty cool huh?

The framing device for the movie is that it is being shown as a late night movie on one of those late night movie shows that are sponsored by some used car lot that they used to have back in the seventies. And the host is this awesome drunken used car salesman who just progressively loses his mind more and more as the picture proper proceeds. He is such an awesome satire of that kind of show, that kind of thinking, that kind of world and the existential hell that is the life of a salesman that I just can't help loving him for it.

To give you a taste of the film's oeuvre, here are the lyrics to the opening theme song that plays over the credits. Imagine these sung over incredibly rich, melodic orchestral-rock style music.

Now this is a cheap little movie  
And I am a cheap little guy  
I'm going to abuse your eardrums  
I'm going to make fun of your eyes

This whole movie is a great big hunk of ... shit!  
But I'm glad to be working and I'm proud to be a part of it ...  
Oh yeah, oh yeah, oh yeah ...

It's great to have work in a movie  
It's great to have something to eat  
I could just be off doing sessions  
Like all of the ducks in the street

It's true you may never understand what this film's a ... BOUT  
But I'm the one singing and you're the dope who paid to find out

Oh yeah, oh yeah, oh yeah ...

Yeah ... yeah ... yeah ... it's so cheap!  
Yeah ... yeah... yeah ... it's so cheap!

Willard's main problem is that he takes reality too seriously. This might be my problem too.

I swear, it is spiritually necessary for me to watch this movie every five years or so. It is amazing how much of what goes on inside of me goes on in this movie. Did I someone incorporate the seventies into my DNA as a child born in '73? The movie came out in '74, so perhaps I breathed it in in my crib. And it takes something like this to reach back and touch it, make it live again? So much of this movie makes so

much SENSE to me, in a way that goes deeper than language, deeper than thought ... just seems RIGHT.

And Lord knows, I could use a duck right about now.

Now there is a scene, where Willard and the Duck are in prison and encounter some gays, that could be seen as homophobic out of context. But these are some very pushy and presumptuous and rude fags, and not meant, I think, to be representative of the whole. And if you watch the whole movie, you will get that this movie is far from anything-phobic at all.

Oh right, this is the movie that got me saying "Far fucking out, man!"

Women just do not grasp why men visit prostitutes. They think it's just for sex, but that is like saying people only go to restaurant to eat. It is true and at the same time it is such a vast understanding of the whole truth as to be almost a lie. It is a lot more about a wonderful world in which sex comes easy, the women all treat him with kindness and respect, and even talk to him and pretend to like him.

Men need female approval. They need it desperately. They need it so bad that they will pay a women to just pretend to approve of them in the most simple and intimate way possible, sex. For men, if she does not sleep with you, she does not really approve of you. It could all be a lie up until that point. It could all disappear with a word, or a look, or even just the way she says your name. Does she say it like she wants you to come back to her place, or like she wants to put you in your place? It can be as simple as that.

Sleeping with a guy tells him he is good enough for you. That can mean a lot, and has a big impact on what men will do to try to be good enough for you.

There is a kind of existential aggression, an urge to do violence to reality, from this era that really appeals to me. I am not sure why. I could be glib and say I was just getting revenge on reality for all it has done to ME, but that would not be anything but a superficial evasion, a tiny partial half truth to give the scent of truth without the reality.

If you are worried that you are going crazy, odds are you are not. Crazy people don't worry about it. They are too busy dealing with messages from God in their Wheaties. What you are feeling is the strain of your brain trying to hold its shit together. That is not something to ignore completely but most serious mental illness is organic. It is a literally broken brain, not something that happens to a normal person from strain but something like cancer that just happens to people.

That said, if you really are getting messages from God in your breakfast cereal, you might consider the odds of that being true versus the odds of you being crazy in the grand scheme of things. I know the first one is the fun and exciting answer, but is it likely?

Just take your meds and deal with reality like the rest of us, OK? I swear it is possible to find the magic in the real world. And if you are lucky, you find someone else to share it with, too.

The world is full of magic in effect. It's just not magic in appearance.

An amusing thing to note in this movie: the stylistic overlap, in a few places, with the classic *Peanuts* animated specials. It is subtle, but if you are paying attention, you can see how they are the same era of animation but not, obviously, anything alike in any other way.

I'd like to think we creative and neurotic types have to go through all this existential crisis bullshit because we are just so smart, we just have so much more reality to deal with and meaning to handle. But we are probably just fucked up in the head and there is no more meaning to our inner struggle than that of a retarded man trying to figure out why the water stopped coming out when he is standing with both feet right on the hose.

Ignoring reality does not make it ignore you back.

For the record, this DVD does have some appropriately cheap extras and a well made menu where they took some of the best, catchiest music from the movie and even looped it roughly right.

To me, this just proves that the people who take obscure, unknown non-studio movies and put them on DVD for sale care more about what they do than great big movie studios who own a zillion movies and to whom they are just more product to shovel into a box and present to the public with all the love and affection of a high school lunch lady ladling mashed potatoes like substance into a tray compartment on her last day on the job.

I can't help but feel that a lot of the seventies underground dirty comix culture will be meaningless in the future for the same reason that a lot of things become meaningless over time, because these things are created as reactions to things that are no longer around. The dirty magazine world of the seventies was a violent reaction to the saccharine, sanitized, lobotomized world of the middle class reality of the day. The forces of society had followed the hippies, eventually, into peace love and understanding, or at least into it as far as it took to make money off them, so they had to retreat further from their false and stifling middle class lives into the places the mainstream could not follow, the world of porno theaters and low rent apartments over drug stores and cheap liquor and even cheaper drugs, where life was lived for cheap thrills because those were the ones you could always afford, no matter how in or out of the system you felt like being at the time.

The only refuge left was the very world that the middle class world defines itself against, the world of the urban poor, the one they had always lived in, the one the white middle class world both rails against and tries to pretend doesn't exist, doesn't matter, or is not real.

It was a time of great freedom to do your own thang, or if you preferred, get it done by whoever and however you liked. It was a dirty, stinking, roach-filled, garbage smelling era, but it was also a place where no matter how weird the people back home think you are, around here, you just blend in with the other freaks, and meet a lot of people worse off than you have ever been, or ever will be, and they seem to be getting along somehow.

And around here, life happens right before your eyes, instead of locked away to keep us all from losing our precious illusion of normalcy.

I can see the appeal.

So watch this movie if you can ... and uh ... say hi to the Duck for me.

Oh, and just for the record, I typed all this on a cheap laptop, and typed it into a cheap (in fact, free) blogging program running on cheap web hosting while eating cheap microwave popcorn with added cheap generic margarine and drinking nice, cheap tap water.

Oh, and the original title for the movie was *Cheap*.

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## MESSED-UP MOVIE MOPES

### The Devil's Rain (1975)

#### Credits:

- *Ernest Borgnine* as Jonathan Corbis
- *William Shatner* as Mark Preston
- *Ida Lupino* as Mrs. Preston
- *George Sawaya* as Mr. Preston
- *Tom Skerritt* as Tom Preston
- *Joan Prather* as Joan Preston
- *Eddie Albert* as Dr. Sam Richards
- *Keenan Wynn* as Sheriff Owens
- *John Travolta* as Danny
- *Woody Chambliss* as John
- *Anton LaVey* as High Priest
- *Diane LaVey* as Priscilla Corbis
- Director: Robert Fuest
- Producers: Michel S. Glick, Gerald Hopman, Sandy Howard, & Louis Peraino
- Cinematography: Alex Phillips Jr.
- Film Editor: Michael Kahn
- Makeup effects: Ellis Burman Jr.
- Script: Gabe Essoe, James Ashton, & Gerald Hopman

Finally crossed this film off my bucket list. Had wanted to see it for decades. My impression? Wonderfully entertaining, but for all the wrong reasons.

As an example of filmmaking ... well, famed critic Roger Ebert once described it as one of the ten films he hated the most. Note: Not among the 10 *worst* films of all

time. No, sir, that be a different list. This be among the films he *hated* the most. Why? Because it's an insult to moviemaking. It's as great a non-movie as can possibly be filmed.

Director Robert Fuest is on record as stating that before he agreed to make the movie he found portions of the script confusing. Told the producers there were too many plot holes. They told him not to worry about it. The special effects would be the star of the show. Melting people were more important than the plot.

Ah yes, the melting people. The first time it happens, the camera lingers too long on the effect. This is one of the things in the final version that annoys Fuest. The camera *always* lingers too long on the goopy effects shots. He said "If I had had my way, I would have called 'cut!' much faster than the Film Editor did. Of course, the finished version would have been shortened by about twenty minutes."

What did the members of the cast think?

Eddie Albert said to Ellis Burman Jr. "This production is crap! I can't believe I got talked into doing this."

To which Ellis replied "Must be a real comedown from *Green Acres*, huh?"

Shatner was a bit miffed throughout the production. It was filmed in Durango, Mexico, using a Spanish crew and Mexican extras, and none of them, including the Mexican Press, had ever seen *Star Trek* and could care less about Shatner. Meanwhile, everyone, especially the Mexican Press, fawned all over Anton LaVey who, apart from being hypnotically charismatic, was also the High Priest of the California Church of Satan and as such, credited as "Technical Advisor" to the film. In a Catholic country like Mexico he was the subject of endless fascination, whereas Shatner was ignored. Seems Shatner was jealous of LaVey.

John Travolta, playing one of the possessed, soulless followers of Corbis, and therefore wearing a facemask which included black, featureless eyes, worried his acting ability would be "hidden" and the film not do his career any good. (Possibly true.) On the other hand, he became great buddies with LaVey because LaVey had known Marilyn Monroe and Travolta was a huge fan of Marilyn Monroe and wanted to hear all of LaVey's stories about her.

Meanwhile, LaVey was a huge fan of Ida Lupino as an accomplished actress and director, and was pleased to hang out with her during the five weeks of shooting. He also enjoyed most of the rest of the cast, and particularly enjoyed being Technical Advisor, designing the stained glass window in the Satanic Church, the outfit Borgnine wore, and just generally providing ritual incantations and practices for use in the film. He considered the filming experience to be one of the highlights of his life, both pleasurable and inspiring.

LaVey's verdict on the film as finally released?

"A piece of shit. An insult to Satanists everywhere." Ah, the miracle of post-production editing, methinks.

Tom Skerritt, who had been in *Mash* and many other good movies, thought filming was going to be a hoot. He knew the Director had been hired on the basis of the two *Abominable Dr. Phibes* movies he had made with Vincent Price and that *The*

*Devil's Rain* would be equally campy. The first two days of shooting were a blast. Everyone improvised like crazy under Fuest's direction and competed with each other to outdo Vincent Price at his most entertaining.

Then a slight pause as the Producers in Hollywood assessed the rushes. Back came their response. "There's something wrong. The scenes made us laugh. They were funny. Stop it." This was a huge letdown. The cast was aghast to discover the film was supposed to be a *serious* horror film. With the inadequate script that simply wasn't possible. Morale suffered. The first two day's shooting was scrapped and they started over again.

Add to this the crew were Spanish. Most spoke little English. Including the Cinematographer who doubled as the Cameraman. "They didn't know what the Hell I was talking about," complained Fuest in later years.

Furthermore, uncertain financing led to fits and starts to a schedule that was fixed at five weeks. Fuest relied on his television experience to adjust the shooting schedule on the fly. He commented "I would have liked to have had the time to shoot the scenes properly but ..."

According to Makeup Effects Ellis the movie was one of several during that period financed by the Mafia. They had a liaison on set, a big, burly guy by name of "Vinnie" who was rather adept at solving problems with the locals. Must have been interesting.

And Shatner had it written in his contract he could take time off to attend a Star Trek convention in New York City. That caused Fuest to improvise another work-around in the schedule.

To sum up, the filming was one big migraine headache for Fuest. He not only directed, he devoted all the rest of the time improvising the schedule and logistics of each shoot so that he *could* direct. As a result, he could never take the time to get to know the cast, most of whom he liked and wanted to kibitz with. But he was under too much pressure to get things done the way he *didn't* want to do it. A Director's worst nightmare.

As for Ernest Borgnine's opinion? One quote says it all. "You've got to be kidding."

Now I'll describe the opening scenes to give you some idea of the treat you are in for should you decide to watch *The Devil's Rain*.

An isolated ranch-house somewhere in the American SouthWest. It's pouring cats and dogs. Ida Lupino's character Mrs. Preston is worried. Mightily worried. She spills coffee all over her somewhat dim-witted helper John.

Her son Mark (William Shatner) comes home. Takes off his coat and a straw Cowboy hat (is that really the best headgear in driving rain?). Says words to the effect "Don't worry, mom. Can't find Dad anywhere. Bridge is washed out. Everything swept away. He's probably okay."

For some reason she is not reassured. In fact, she's hysterical. Seems this is fulfillment of a reoccurring dream. "Corbis got him! We've got to give Corbis the book!"

Shatner is equally adamant. "It's just a silly dream. Dad is okay!"

Moaning is heard above the storm. Mark, John, and Mrs. Preston run outside. Dear old dead-eyed Dad is staggering in the rain. "Corbis wants the book. Give it to him. He's waiting at the abandoned town." Then he melts into plastic goo.

The family is a bit nonplussed. "I don't think that was Dad," says Mark. He insists on going out to confront Corbis and find Dad. His mother pulls back the carpet, lifts out a big book, then a velvet pouch with a big amulet and chain which she tells Mark to wear. He puts it on, but takes a pistol out of a drawer saying "I put more faith in this."

The headlamps of a truck light up a window. I think Mark shouts something like "That's Dad!" and rushes outside. No one is in the truck. Just a voodoo doll pinned to the steering wheel. He hears a commotion. Lots of screaming. Lights in the upper story of the house flash on and off. Mark stares for several long seconds, then slowly ambles toward the house, not picking up any speed till he gets close to the door.

In the living room Mark finds John dangling by his heels from the ceiling courtesy of two strands of thick rope. Mark cuts him down, cradles John in his arms and mutters things like "Corbis! Damn you!" Meanwhile John goes on about "People with no faces."

Eventually Mark remembers his mother, drops John like a hot potato, and rushes upstairs. Everything is a mess. No sign of mother. Mark resolves to go to the abandoned town and rescue his parents. End of opening scenes.

All this happens in the first five minutes of the film. Not exactly a slow build-up preamble. Enough clues to inform the audience what the basic set-up is? Fuest didn't think so. "The script never gave enough clues to allow the audience to know what the hell is going on."

Who is Corbis? Why does he want the book? What is the book, exactly? Why did Dad melt? Did Dad melt? Or just a messenger from Corbis? Is Dad held hostage at the abandoned town? Can he be rescued? And since the "faceless people" ransacked the entire house, why didn't they think to pull back the carpet and discover the glaringly obvious loose-brick hiding place and thus recover the book? WTF?

That's one way to intrigue an audience, I suppose. Confuse the heck out of them.

Mark decides to go rescue his parents. He gets into a white station wagon with a big "P" on the side (never did find out what "P" stands for). The fact that it's stopped raining, the sun bounced up, and the desert dried up in the few minutes Mark was inside he appears to take for granted, as must the audience.

The abandoned town is dry and dusty. Mark tries to get a handpump to bring up a bit of water. Doesn't work. Along comes Ernest Borgnine in blue jeans and straw Cowboy hat. He gets the water to gush out. Proves he's evil, or something.

After a bit of banter alluding to whatever they both know and the audience doesn't, Corbis (Borgnine) invites Mark to go with him into a nearby boarded-up church. Mark swears "My faith is stronger than whatever is inside that Church." Corbis' eyes light up. "A challenge?" They make a wager. If Mark wins, he keeps his book and gets back his parents. If Corbis wins, he gets the book, and keeps Mark's

soul.

Long story short, despite uttering the Lord's Prayer in the midst of a Satanic ritual, Mark is discombobulated by the sight of Corbis in red pants, red shirt, red cape, red hood, and black jack boots. Or, maybe by his mother's dead, staring eyes when she turns out to be one of the black-robed worshippers. He pulls out his pistol and pumps a couple of followers full of holes which ooze green and pink plastic goo as they fall down. Mark turns and runs from the church, chased by a mob of worshippers, till he collapses beside his car, his fists clenched in helplessness. That's the last we see of him for quite a while.

Now, throughout this sequence Ernest Borgnine is quite impressive. He exudes a malevolent mischievousness with an invincible confidence, as well he might, since he is the only genuine character in the film. Not only that, he has the best lines. For example, sweeping his arm to bring Mark's attention to the interior of his Satanic church, he states "There is no evil here, only purity."

I had heard Borgnine played the role over the top, but on seeing the film I recognize he genuinely acts the role, often with subtlety and nuance. It's a great performance, suitable for a well-written character. Pity *all* the other characters are non-entities, mere ciphers spouting inane and often pointless dialogue apparently designed to prove how clueless and stupid they are.

Kennan Wynn as the Sheriff is a case in point. The few times he appears it is only to say he doesn't have the manpower to search the abandoned town and besides everybody knows nobody lives there. "What about my missing family?" asks Tom Preston (Tom Jerritt) as he takes over Shatner's role as the movie's protagonist.

The Sheriff shrugs. "They'll show up. I'm too busy to look." Furthermore, he dismisses John's tale of "Faceless People" (They've got faces!) as worthless, is convinced the damage in the house was caused by the storm, and doesn't believe any of whatever Tom told him about his first encounter with Corbis and the Devil Worshippers (we never find out what Tom revealed). Seems the only purpose of Wynn's character is to justify the local police not getting involved. Pretty lame.

Every character excels at not passing information on to other characters. Tom's wife Joan, for instance, who saw the church in a vision. On actually seeing it for the first time, she doesn't tell Tom she's seen it before, she just says "That's a New England church. It doesn't belong here." She makes no mention of the Devil worshippers that were also part of her vision.

Later, when Tom knocks Danny (John Travolta) unconscious and is trying to tie him up, Joan stares into Danny's non-eyes and sees flames that pull her into a flashback in which we see Corbis leading his cult in New England 300 years earlier, but an ancestor of M. Preston, played by Shatner, steals the book in which Corbis was keeping track of the souls he'd collected (or rather Preston's wife took it, a needless complication) and everybody, including the Prestons, winds up being burned at the stake, with Corbis vowing vengeance.

Cut to Tom still struggling to tie up an unconscious Danny. "What are you talking about?" demands Tom. "*Who* are you talking about?"

Joan shrugs and says nothing. Nothing important enough to pass on to Tom. Maybe he knows the family history already. Maybe he doesn't. The audience doesn't know. Why should they? We all know details aren't important, right?

We first meet Joan when she's on a gurney in an operating theatre in front of a bunch of medical students. Eddie Albert as Dr. Sam Richards is conducting an experiment in measuring brain waves while Joan wigs out on ESP adventures involving visions of the Corbis cult. Tom sits nearby kicking his heels as if bored. He wakes up a bit when his wife screams, ending her trance.

Later, after Joan has disappeared, we unexpectedly see Tom consulting with Dr. Richards on the porch of the ranch house. Called in for consultation? We are not told. We can only assume.

Tom is super gung-ho to grab his rifle and rescue Joan (even though the cult has driven him out of the town twice already). Richards holds him back. "We've got to think this through." (About bloody time.)

"Why did Corbis wait 300 years to get his revenge?" asks Tom.

"I don't know," replies the Doctor. "Maybe because it's the right moment?"

Tom snorts in disgust and strides off.

"Wait! Look at the book!" says Dr. Richards who has been leafing through *the* book which John gave him.

Tom examines it, evidently for the first time ever. "It's about Satanism!"

Here's the thing. The good Doctor is not only a brain expert, he has no problem believing Corbis has been alive for over 300 years and is in league with the Devil, possibly *is* the Devil. How come? A little background would have been nice. His matter-of-fact acceptance of the situation comes out of nowhere, as does much of the plot.

Lest you think the film has plenty of dialogue, in fact it doesn't. There are long stretches where the camera lingers on torchlight processions and worshippers gathering to the point where you get the impression you are watching a silent film. And there's no dialogue during the extensive melting sequences. Dialogue is supremely unimportant in this movie.

No wonder Ebert hated it. No worthwhile dialogue (apart from Corbis' comments), and no actual characters (apart from the delightful Corbis). And no real plot. Corbis lost the book. Corbis wants it back. That's it.

Granted, Tom is determined to rescue his family. That's virtually all he does, but in a strictly NAR fashion (no action required). He prowls buildings. He opens a lot of doors. He infiltrates meetings. (Where did he get the robe to disguise himself?) For long periods of time he's a dumb witness, till sniffed out as a "blasphemer" by Danny. Then Tom goes into action, kills a dead person or two, gets beat up, then runs away. Then decides to come back and repeat the process. Quite a useless twit he is.

Occasionally we see Shatner. Tied to an upside-down cross. Getting wax dribbled on him. Must be hot, because he screams a lot. Eventually he turns into one of the possessed, which Tom finds a bit disconcerting, but not much. Shatner's main function at the "exciting" climax of the film is to look reproachful as he melts. This he

manages quite well, though I suspect he was imagining the critical reviews to come as his motivation.

There is no build-up of tension or suspense in the film. It is just one moronic failed rescue attempt after another. In fact, so little happens that the ending comes as a surprise, not the nature of the ending, but the fact that it happens at all. The film hasn't really been set-up yet, let alone come to a climax. "Is that it?" be the final audience reaction, I'm certain.

I haven't even begun to list the times the characters say or do something monumentally stupid. Audience suspension of disbelief and the credibility of the script are thrown out the window time and time again. The film is a lesson in every conceivable mistake a film student can make. Ed Wood Jr. on a big budget. (Actually, *his* dialogue-writing skills were better!)

I don't think it was the Director's fault. He was handicapped by the Script Writers, the Producers, the film's Editor, and the fact the cast had nothing to work with. His was a doomed mission.

So, why do I think *The Devil's Rain* is wonderfully entertaining?

First, the jaw-dropping ineptitude of the production. Loads of fun keeping track.

Second, Ernest Borgnine's performance as Corbis. Really well done. Every second of it is worth paying attention to. I had heard that at one point he turns into a goat-legged demon. Not quite. Nothing so ambitious. Merely that his face is buried in a bestial mask and he sprouts ram horns. He could have played it for laughs, but of course he wasn't allowed to. Instead he relies on his eyes to convey real menace, and even manages to wrinkle his snout now and then. Somehow it works. The man has real talent. He, alone, makes the film worth watching.

Third, the visuals. Oh, not the effects, one quickly gets used to green and red goo, puffs of smoke, and melting wax spurting out of hidden pipes in the actor's face masks. Rather boring, actually, because it goes on and on.

Shatner described the days of shooting these effects as a painful experience for all concerned. Much like the film as a whole. Actually, that's not true. Most of them enjoyed making the film, enjoyed the frustrated camaraderie. They just didn't like the final result.

What matters is the lush look of the film. I don't know how they managed it, but the browns and tans of the ratty abandoned town (a set built for previous movies filmed in Durango, by the way) come across as rich and colourful in the tradition of the best Hammer productions (which this is not). The interior Satanic church set is pretty to look at, especially the stained glass window depicting the face of a ram-horned Devil in a pentagram, and the outdoor ritual site is equally striking. Plus the background scenery looks great. Visually, a very attractive and impressive film. As is Borgnine's performance. Everything else sucks big time.

Why do the Devil worshippers melt, you ask? Corbis has been keeping his possessed souls in a jar where they are drenched in a constant rain. Eddie Albert threatens to smash the jar at the end of the film but it gets grabbed out of his hands. Then it gets fumbled by the Devil cultists and smashes. This blows a hole in the roof

and lets in the Devil's Rain. They rush outside but it's raining outside, too. So everybody melts. Except for Tom, Jane, and Dr. Richards. They get away, to confront a surprise ending. Let's just say Corbis gets to snarl with delight.

Stupid film? You betcha!

But a visual feast and Ernest Borgnine is absolutely delightful.

I'll watch it again someday. I like it.

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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 FIVE: GENRE FILMS 1926 TO 1930.

1926:

- *The Bat* – Lost film based on 1920 Broadway hit comedy about fake vampire.
- *The Bells* – Boris Karloff is magnificent as a mesmerist similar to Dr. Caligari.
- *The Magician* – From a novel by Somerset Maugham based on Aleister Crowley.
- *Metropolis* – Stunning Fritz Lang film with magnificent mad scientist Rotwang.
- *The Student of Prague* – Conrad Veidt sells his mirror image to an evil stranger.
- *Unknown Treasures* – Old dark house mystery with killer ape.
- *While London Sleeps.* – Wonder dog battles ape-like monster owned by criminal.

1927:

- *Blake of Scotland Yard* – Serial about genius criminal turning metal into gold.
- *Charleston Parade* – Jazz fantasy by Jean Renoir taking place in year 2028.
- *The Cat and the Canary* – Classic haunted house spoof with eerie atmosphere.
- *The Gorilla* – Slapstick old dark house spoof with annoying comic detectives.
- *London After Midnight* – Legendary lost film with Lon Chaney Sr. fake vampire.
- *The Show* – Lionel Barrymore in freak-show love-triangle with horror elements.
- *The Unknown* – Lon Chaney Sr, as Alonzo the jealous, armless knife-thrower.
- *The Wizard* – Killer ape controlled by monkey-gland mad scientist Dr. Coriolos.

1928:

- *Alrune* – Most sensuous version, Bridgette Helm from artificial insemination.
- *The Black Pearl* – Old dark house mystery played straight and dull.
- *Code of the Air* – Wonder Dog battles villain using ray gun against airplanes.
- *The Fall of the House of Usher* – Poor version of Poe's tale but great visuals.
- *The Kid's Clever* – Country hick invents amphibious car in lame comedy.
- *The Leopard Lady* – Killer ape mystery solved by animal trainer of title.
- *The Man Who Laughs* – Conrad Veidt superb as torture victim with fixed grin.
- *Ransom* – Evil Wu Fang is after deadly nerve gas invented by the film's hero.
- *The Spy* – Surreal Fritz Lang masterpiece involving genius master-criminals.
- *The Terror* – Second all-talkie film, about maniac at loose in country mansion.
- *West of Zanzibar* – Lon Chaney Sr. as Deadlegs, a vengeful father in wheelchair.

1929:

- *Black Waters* – Murder mystery aboard drifting ship with Noble Johnson.
- *High Treason* – Poor British rip-off of *Metropolis*, set in the year 1940.
- *The Hound of the Baskervilles* – German version with a poor reputation.
- *The Last Performance* – Conrad Veidt excellent as evil hypnotist murderer.
- *The Last Warning* – Vaguely comic murder mystery in stage play theatre.
- *Midstream* – Old man (of 50) "cheats" with rejuvenation therapy to marry.
- *The Mysterious Island* – Silent/sound hybrid with nifty undersea fishmen.
- *Seven Footprints to Satan* – Bizarre, visually brilliant horror-comedy in castle.
- *Stark Mad* – Murder mystery with ape set in ruined Mayan temple.
- *Woman in the Moon* – Classic Fritz Lang vision of first mission to Moon.

1930:

- *Alrune* – Remake with Bridgette Helm no-where near as good as original.
- *The Bat Whispers* – Routine old dark house mystery with remarkable effects.
- *The Cat Creeps* – First sound remake of *The Cat and the Canary*. Too talkie.
- *Elstree Calling* – Review film, includes skit where neighbourhood reacts to TV.
- *The End of the World* – Comet threatens Earth as people turn to God and sex.
- *The Gorilla* – Remake starring Walter Pidgeon and two lame comic detectives.
- *Just Imagine* – Lame comedy but great sets of New York and Mars in 1980.
- *The Last Hour* – Yet another death ray threatens airplanes.
- *The Unholy Three* – Excellent remake that is Lon Chaney Sr.'s only sound film.
- *Voice From the Sky* – Lost serial with mad scientist with loud voice projector.

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

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The number of genre movies per year increases dramatically soon. This will undoubtedly result in fewer years being covered in each article. In turn this will prolong the series. Doesn't bother me in the slightest.

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## IT IS WHAT IT IS

(Mansplaining the State of Fandom)

*By Garth Spencer*

William McCabe recently asked in Eapa: *“Is written science fiction really a shared experience?”* Well, no, it isn't.

So far from everyone knowing the same Big Names in written science fiction, only a minority of people are into reading, at all. Even fandom as we knew it is not a universally recognized milieu, *even within contemporary fandom*.

It took me a long time to understand this. Partly I wasn't even aware that most people didn't read for pleasure, and partly because I was slow to accept that fandom had divided into many narrow-interest fandoms, few of which serve readers rather than screen watchers, performers, gamers and entrepreneurs.

It took longer still—until this year—to realize that I made the same mistake as other fans make. The greatest folly I witnessed in my first five years in fandom was really the result of some fans who believed their first impressions, based on Star Wars fandom, represented *all* of fandom ... the same way I took my own first impressions, based on a stack of fanzines.

Sure, it's a nuisance and a disappointment when we find ourselves outsiders even in fan gatherings, even at science fiction conventions, and we still have to seek out other readers or fanzine fans with as much effort as it takes in a mundane setting. But this is reality.

It is even insulting and aggravating, to fans like me and Graeme, when we busted our butts to conserve fanzine archives and convention records and carefully compile fanhistories, but the fans for whom we provided the service don't seem to want these materials. Witness Graeme's contribution to the last mailing. More likely, contemporary fans don't even realize the materials are available, much less what practical value they have. Guess it has to be spelled out.

Anyway, readers and fanzine fans and fannish fans are still out there; older models of fandom haven't disappeared, any more than mimeography or letterpress or even calligraphy have disappeared. I guess that room parties for Elder Fandom are called for, and notice boards at the Hospitality room.

All of the foregoing supports my developing General Theory of Fandom. While science fiction and fantasy have become more popular and normalized in popular culture, fandom has expanded (like the expanding universe), and special interests in fandom have diverged while they have grown, receding from each other at an accelerating rate (like galaxies speeding away from each other); their diminishing communication with each other parallels the spectrographic “red shift” in the light from distant objects. This will keep up until different fandoms are mutually unintelligible, like foreign languages, or the legal and bureaucratic forms we have to fill out at work. Thus, fandom recapitulates mundania!

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## NORMAN G. BROWNE, VANATIONS, AND THE VANCOUVER SF SOCIETY.

**BROWNE, NORMAN G.** – One of the most prominent Canadian fans of the first half of the 1950s.

In 1951, at the age of 18, having been advised by Ted Sturgeon to do so, he attended Nolacon, the 9th World Convention held in New Orleans. He had hitchhiked to the con, a feat which impressed everyone greatly. As Harry B. Moore, Chairman of Nolacon put it: *“It is an exceedingly rare thing to find a fan with guts, self-respect, tenacity, responsibility, dependability, or honour. Your feat of hitchhiking... stands out astonishingly amidst such a morass of pseudo-persons ...”* (It's a wonder the rest of the congoers didn't take this as an insult!)

Feted and celebrated beyond all reasonable expectations, Browne later wrote: *“For 5 years I had read STF, but had no knowledge that fandom existed, and had never met anyone who even read STF. On Aug 31st at 3:00 PM, 1951, I walked into the lobby of the St. Charles hotel in New Orleans and met my first fan. I consider that date & time as my entrance into fandom.”*

All the same, he experienced some difficulty: *“At the Nolacon, I was an outsider, an onlooker; I knew nobody and nothing. I felt strangely set apart from these people who were fans. They talked and acted beyond the powers of my comprehension and understanding. They talked about people, places, and events of which I had no knowledge. To me they seemed to be talking on a higher plane; a plane far, far beyond my reach. Knowing so much about what they discussed, they seemed to be combining telepathy and speech in their conversation. It was interesting—in a tantalizing sort of way.”*

*“I left the Nolacon with an overwhelming desire to become a fan; to become one of them, to talk with them in their own language, to understand what they understood, to enjoy what they enjoyed.”*

As soon as he returned to Vancouver, B.C., he feverishly set about single-handedly creating a club, formally titled “The Vancouver SF Society” (though often

referred to as “The Hibited Men”). This was in existence by December of 1951. It was the first organized fandom on the West coast of Canada. Browne served as its first President and also its first clubzine editor. He made sure it affiliated with the Canadian SF Association. There were at least a dozen members, maybe more.

Then by summer of 1952 he had moved to Edmonton, Alberta. From there he produced 6 issues of his well-regarded fanzine VANATIONS (Jun 1952 to Jul 1953). Highlights included articles by Robert Bloch, Harlan Ellison, & Marion Zimmer Bradley. VANATIONS was noted for Browne's innovative PAR system of payment.

The Fall 1952 Fan Directory of the Canadian Science Fiction Association listed Browne at his Edmonton address.

While in Edmonton, sometime in 1953, he co-edited (with Art Wesley, actually Dean Grennell, of Fond Du Lac, Wisconsin) a one-shot titled FILLER, consisting of 527 numbered “filler” items, most of them interlineations, the idea being that faneds, in order to save space, would type in the appropriate number and leave it to the readers to look up the actual “filler” in FILLER. This concept proved very popular.

In May 1953 he attended HEcon (Harlan Ellison con) in the Cleveland home of Harlan Ellison, a gathering whose purpose was to establish 7th Fandom.

I do not know if Browne was part of the Seventh Fandomite contingent invading the fourth Midwestcon where Seventh Fandom (and the red birdbath—their “sacred” symbol) was first unveiled to a disbelieving fannish world, but Browne did attend Philcon II, the 11th Worldcon, held in Philadelphia in Sept 1953. There he was photographed with Harlan Ellison, a drawing based on this photo appearing in CANADIAN FANDOM #19 (Dec 1953). No doubt he took part in any and all merry pranks, as he was, according to Rich Brown “one of the leading lights of Seventh Fandom.”

However, Browne soon got on Ellison’s nerves. While Ellison took Seventh Fandom somewhat seriously, believing it had great potential, Browne seems to have been possessed by a crusading zeal which Ellison found too confrontational (hard to believe, given Ellison’s reputation, but apparently true). That Browne wanted the 7th Fandomites to deify Dean Grennell was harmless enough, but his plot to infiltrate FAPA with 7th Fandomites to the point of taking over through sheer numbers struck Ellison as likely to give 7th Fandom a bad reputation. Harlan also didn’t like some of the 7th Fandom broadsheets Browne had written and distributed. At some point, in reaction to all the flak he was getting, Browne quit the movement in anger.

By December 1953 Browne had moved to Wilson Heights in or near Toronto, Ontario. Throughout 1954 he remained active, writing for CANADIAN FANDOM, attempting to put out a second issue of FILLER, and contributing his APAzine DAMN! to FAPA, where he got into a bit of trouble regarding his CONCUPISCENT TALES/PAPA hoax.

Then Browne dropped off the fandom map, apparently gafiated. I can find no references to him subsequent to February 1956.

A key to the reasons for his gafiation may possibly be found in some comments he made in VANATIONS #4 (Feb 1953):

*“With the issuance of VANATIONS, I pushed myself considerably higher up the ladder of fandom and at the same time forced the fact of my existence before a considerable number of fans, I had arrived.”*

*“My original ambition was to become a fan—a relatively simple goal. But, although that ambition has been realized, my final ambition has not. For as I progressed into fandom, as I studied and learned, as I matured, my final goal raised accordingly.”*

*“In my first year I progressed from a non-fan to a fringe-fan, to a neophan, and finally to a master-fan. Who knows how far I will go in my second year? Would anyone deny me the ambition of becoming a BNF or a super-fan?”*

Browne would appear to have possessed a healthy dose of ego. Perhaps he did not realize that the status of BNF is an accolade, and not just some sort of prize you reach out and grab. It may be significant that one of his loccers in the same issue chided him, saying: *“You say your interest in STF is 10%, and your interest in fandom is 90%. Translation: interest in STF & fandom 10%, interest in egoboo 90%.”*

It may be that Browne ultimately was bitterly disappointed that his long term effort “to force the fact” of his existence generated resistance and negative reaction, and so he decided to chuck it in.

In 2005 I was contacted by Norman's sister Wenda. She informed me Norman had continued to live in Toronto, editing some community newspapers and a weekly newspaper. Eventually he sank into poverty. She recalls seeing a half page article about him in the Edmonton Journal (perhaps it was syndicated Canada wide? Or was he now in Edmonton?) in which he revealed how he managed to live on just \$10.00 a day. (Dire necessity or lifestyle choice?) The last time she saw him, in Toronto circa 1990, he had been unemployed for quite some time. She suspects he has since passed away.

Early BC fandom seems to be unlucky. The identity of the Vancouver fan who in 1936 produced THE CANADIAN SCIENCE FICTION FAN, Canada's first Science Fiction fanzine, remains a mystery. Nils Helmer Frome of Fraser Mills who produced Canada's second SF fanzine SUPRAMUNDANE STORIES in early 1937, died penniless in Wales in 1962. And now it seems that Norman's youthful enthusiasm and promise just faded away as time went on, as happens to so many of us fans.

But I will let Wenda have the last word:

*“I do know that the Vancouver club was the best of all his endeavours. He was so happy then and his mind was so active and imaginative. He knew so many people and so many knew him or of him ...”*

**CONCUPISCENT TALES** – Faned: Norman G. Browne. APAzine Browne claimed to produce for PAPA, the pornographic APA, circa 1952/1953. But in actual fact a moderately successful hoax, promoted primarily through his membership in FAPA.

**DAMN!** – Faned: Norman G. Browne. APAzine for FAPA, pubbed out of Edmonton starting in August 1953, and ending in February 1956 when he was living at Wilson Heights, near Toronto. He and Les Crutch were two Canadian members of FAPA at this time (other contemporary Canadian members were P. Howard Lyons and Boyd

Raeburn), and like Croutch he got into trouble over matters sexual. Specifically, he frequently included mailing comments, not on FAPA, but on PAPA, the “Pornographic Amateur Press Association.” The fact that PAPA turned out to be a hoax by Browne did not endear him to his fellow FAPAns. Their response may have been one of the factors contributing to his gafiation in early 1956.

**DOCTOR OF FANOLOGY** – A title by which Norman G. Browne, faned of VANATIONS, was sometimes known in the early 1950s.

**DOCTOR OF FANTASTOLOGY** – Degree conferred on Alastair Cameron, author of the FANTASY CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM, by Norman G. Browne, faned of VANATIONS.

**FILLER** – Faneds: Norman G. Browne and “Art Wesley” Dean A. Grennell. A famous one-shot by N.G. Browne of Edmonton and D.A. Grennell of Fond Du Lac, Wisconsin (also known for his fapazine GRUE). Pubbed 1n 1953.

*“FILLER is wanted for FILLER, the fanzine that will contain nothing but FILLER.”*

FILLER consisted entirely of 527 numbered “filler” items such as tongue-in-cheek one-line statements (sort of a lino compilation), jokes, deft definitions, cute comments, etc., from various sources such as famous fans like Lee Hoffman, Joe Nydahl, Harlan Ellison, Robert Bloch, David Kyle, Walt Willis, Charles Burbee, & Redd Boggs, and also from Pros like Oscar Wilde, Walt Kelly, Milton Berle, Ambrose Bierce, Willey Ley, Wally Balloo & such.

The idea was for faneds, in order to conserve space, to just type in the appropriate number (like FILLER #75) and the readers would then turn to their own copy of FILLER to look up the witty quote being referenced. In order for this to work, both faneds and readers would need copies. It proved surprisingly successful and remains fondly remembered by many.

As Ted White commented in 1999: *“FILLER was a brilliant collection, primarily of interlineations.”*

FILLER is also of vital interest because it was the first zine to make reference to an important fannish food, to whit Filler #378: *“But if you don’t like crottled greeps, why did you order them?”*

Browne openly invited contributions. In his VANATIONS #5 (Apr 1953) he stated the criteria: *“Items must be less than six lines in length ... must be accompanied by the Author’s name and source ... Contributors sending twelve items or more will receive a free copy of the magazine when it is issued.”*

Elsewhere in the issue he notes that local Edmonton fan Bill Stavdal was helping him work on the project.

In IZZARD #7 (Sep 1983) Harry Warner Jr. wrote: *“It was a thick publication consisting of hundreds of bright remarks, each numbered. Apparently it was meant as an elaborate commentary on the excesses which fans were then committing on the craze for fillers ...”*

FILLER had to be ordered from “Art Wesley” in Wisconsin, or purchased directly from Norman G. Browne or Jack Harness when they were flogging them at Philcon II, the 1953 World Convention in Philadelphia. Jack Harness was the artist who created

the photo-offset cover made up of a mosaic of little (filler) drawings. FILLER consisted of 42 standard sized pages and cost 25¢.

In CANADIAN FANDOM #21 (Jun 1954) a single page insert designed to be mailed back to Browne (then living in Wilson Heights, Ontario) stated: *"FILLER is wanted for the second issue of FILLER ... Who said FILLER was only a one-shot? FILLER is an annual! But we need material ..."*

The criteria had been revised: *"Items must be either original or second-hand ... need not be humorous or fannish in nature though these types are preferred ... should not exceed five lines in length ... Twelve or more ACCEPTED items and you receive a free copy ... fifty or more items makes you an associate editor..."*

Listed in CANADIAN FANDOM #22 (Sept 1954) as a CAFP (Canadian Amateur Fan Publishers) publication, which strongly indicates that Browne was doing the second issue on his own. But, the mere fact of it being listed does not mean it was ever published. ESCAPE is also on the same list, and it never appeared. FILLER #2 was a project of Browne's which likely was abandoned when he gafiated later in March of 1956.

The insert gives the following example as the kind of filler he was looking for:

*"NOW AS IN 1943 ...?—Things are happening so fast in the NFF that this may be out of date when it sees print. I'll take my chance, though, and state here my reasons for believing that liquidation of the organization is the only thing to do."* - Harry Warner Jr: LE ZOMBIE #54.

**HIBITED HAPPENINGS** – Faneds: Norman G. Browne & Frank Stephens. Clubzine of the Vancouver SF Society, pubbed out of Vancouver B.C. in the early 1950s. Title refers to the informal nickname of the club, "The Hibited Men."

1952 - (#1 - Mar) - Edited by Browne. Single sheet offset printed. 2 pages, probably club natter dealing with minutes, election results, upcoming meetings, and possibly containing references to other clubs and proposed affiliation with the Canadian SF Association.

(#2 - Apr) (#3 - May) - Both edited by Browne, & both expanded to 4 mimeographed pages. This may possibly indicate the presence of locs by such as Chester Cuthbert who was active in the CSFA at the time.

(#4 - ?) - Edited by Frank Stephens, taking over after Browne moved to Edmonton. Also 4 pages, probably mimeographed. The club continued into 1953 at least, so there may have been further issues

That the clubzine was so small indicates it was intended strictly as a club newsletter, all evidence of greater fannish ambition consisting entirely of member's contributions to Browne's perzine VANATIONS. He seems to have been the only one in the club interested in fan publishing as such.

Highly unlikely any copies of HIBITED HAPPENINGS survive now, but there was sufficient widespread awareness of its existence in the 1950s to guarantee its inclusion in the "H" section of the Pavlat/Evans Fanzine Index published in February 1958. Browne was proud of the contacts he had established with other clubs, and it

is undoubtedly the act of trading HIBITED HAPPENINGS for other clubzines that brought it to the attention of Pavlat and Evans.

**THE HIBITED MEN** – When Norman G. Browne founded the Vancouver SF Society in 1951, “The Hibited Men” became the informal name of the club. “Hibited” is the opposite of “inhibited,” so I guess this was a declaration that the Vancouver SF Society was not composed of introverts such as are usually found in SF clubs.

On the other hand, the term may well derive from a short story by L. Sprague de Camp, titled *The Hibited Man*, which appeared in THRILLING WONDER STORIES in Oct 1949. I've not read the story, but an illustration from it appears on pages 214/215 of THE VISUAL ENCYCLOPEDIA OF SCIENCE FICTION (Harmony Books 1977). It depicts 14 bare-breasted women, possibly showgirls in their dressing room, recoiling in horror from a man wielding a paint brush. This smacks of excessive prudery rather than lack of inhibition, so I'm at a loss to see how it relates to the Vancouver SF Society.

If anyone knows why the club picked that nickname, or what the de Camp story was actually about, please let me know.

**PAR** – All the earliest fanzines were subzines, i.e. fanzines available by subscription. This in imitation of the prozines. By the 1940s fanzines began to be available for “The Usual,” i.e. in trade with other zines, in trade for art contributions, for letters of comment, etc. Harry Warner Jr. stated that Canada's Leslie A. Crutch was one of the pioneers in promoting “The Usual,” maybe even the first to try it.

In Nov of 1952 Norman G. Browne, fanned of VANATIONS out of Edmonton, came up with a new concept, which he called P.A.R., or “Pay After Reading.” He explained with a hypothetical example in which the reader sends 75¢ for a 5 issue subscription:

*“The first issue you receive is good; well worth the 15¢ it cost you. In fact you think it is worth 20¢. The second issue is even, it is just worth the 15¢ you paid for it. The third issue is fairly poor, only worth 10¢. The fourth issue is really bad, only worth 5¢. The fifth issue is pure crud, only worth 2¢. Add that up, and you find the cost of your five issues is 75¢, while the pleasure you received from reading them was only 52¢. A loss of 23¢!”*

He therefore asked his readers to send payment for his zine after they had read it, a payment of their own choosing, based on a) the amount of pleasure they derived, b) the amount of work they think he put in to it, and c) the more money they send, the bigger and better future issues will be. For a while this highly subjective concept was all the rage in fanzine circles, till it became apparent that human nature and fannish apathy tended to push payments toward the lower end of the scale, or off the scale as in no payment. Nothing hurts a fanned more than a lack of response. Faneds everywhere quickly reverted to “The Usual.”

How well did P.A.R. work for Browne? In issue #2 of VANATIONS he wrote: *“The PAR system was favoured by 48%, disliked by 35%, and 17% had no opinion. 22% sent in a dime, 42% sent in 15¢, 11% sent in 20¢, 14% sent in 25¢, and 11% sent in over 25¢.”*

But what do these figures mean? How many of his readers actually responded with PAR payments? In issue #3 he revealed that only 10% of the first issue's readers sent money in, and for #2, only 23%. Consequently P.A.R. was not paying for his zine publishing, merely helping defray the costs a little.

In #4 of VANATIONS reader Paul Mittelbuscher asked: *“Why don't you discard the PAR system and charge a regular price?”*

Browne replied: *“Hah! And be the same as everyone else? Do you realize how much publicity I and VANATIONS get through the PAR system? It pays to be different.”*

**SEVENTH FANDOM** – Created by Harlan Ellison, Norman G. Browne, and others at Ellison's home in May of 1953 shortly after Lee Hoffman folded QUANDRY, the flagship of Sixth Fandom. The antics of the Seventh Fandomites at various conventions, plus the belief that a numbered fandom cannot be “created,” only defined in retrospect, led to the general rejection of Seventh Fandom by fandom at large, such that the furor and tumult of its adherents died down by late 1954. It is today more remembered as an aberration of fannish behaviour than as a numbered era.

**TORATIONS** – Fanned: Norman G. Browne. Pubbed out of Wilson Heights, Ontario, circa 1954.

P. Howard Lyons describes Browne in CANFAN #22 (Sep 1954) as the *“Editor of TORATIONS.”* At this time Browne was still active in Fandom, contributing to CANADIAN FANDOM & to Richard Geis' PSYCHOTIC, and still to FAPA, so not unreasonable to assume TORATIONS was his last attempt at a perzine before gafiating. Odd that CANFAN #22 does not include it in its list of CAFPA (Canadian Amateur Fan Publishers) publications.

**VANCOUVER SF SOCIETY** – Founded by Norman G. Browne in December of 1951. According to Harry Warner Jr., *“Vancouver got a local fan club for an odd reason. The unknown Norman G. Browne of that city had gone all the way to Nolacon,”* (the 1951 Worldcon in New Orleans) *“where he saw nobody he knew. This sense of being an outsider left him upon his return with a determination to become a real part of fandom. So he organized the Vancouver Science Fiction Society before he learned about the existence of CSFA”*—the latter being the Canadian Science Fiction Association, which the Vancouver SF Society joined in 1952 and was still affiliated with in early 1953, so we know the club lasted at least that long.

Here is what Browne himself wrote about the founding of the club, excerpted from his “NORMAN G. BROWNE: FAN” article in VANATIONS #4:

*“I left the Nolacon with an overwhelming desire to become a fan ... My first act when I got home from the Nolacon was to organize a S-F club. This took considerable time due to the fact that I had no knowledge or experience in fandom or stf and knew nothing about organizing clubs. But by dint of sheer work and luck, the club was organized and had its first meeting in December of that same year (1951). At a later meeting I was installed as President of the club.”*

*“As President of the Vancouver SF Society I pushed stf (Scientifiction) and my club as hard and strong as I could in my immediate area. Thus, from an utter unknown, I had made myself known and had created a sphere of influence to cover the Vancouver area. Gradually, I extended this sphere of influence to cover the whole of British Columbia.”*

*“As President of this club, I became contact man with outside fandom. Through a prozine letter-column, I learned of the existence of the Canadian S-F Association and contacted them. Also, through the same medium, I learned of the existence of the Seattle SF Society 100 miles to the South of us and got in touch with them ...”*

Browne informally called the club “THE HIBITED MEN,” presumably based on a short story of the same title by L. Sprague de Camp. Members met in Browne’s home, and presumably in each other’s as well. At one club meeting Browne and Curt Lang “got into quite an argument over the relative merits of certain comic books. Curt has taken fencing lessons and I own two swords ...”

Because members referred to themselves as “THE HIBITED MEN,” the Vancouver SF Society newsletter was titled HIBITED HAPPENINGS. In explaining how the first nine months of his fan activity after Nolacon brought him to the point of feeling qualified enough to start work on his perzine VANATIONS, Browne wrote: *“I had spent nine months studying and learning about fandom. I had learned about fan publishing and editing by studying fanzines and by editing a club newsletter ...”* Thus he was both President AND Newsletter Editor for the Vancouver SF Society. However, after issue #3 of HIBITED HAPPENINGS he moved to Edmonton, and Frank Stephens took over as club newsletter editor.

What is clear about the Vancouver SF Society's involvement with VANATIONS is that the members of the club early on devoted their resources to helping Browne produce his first issue. They contributed art, articles, and a cover which was printed in Vancouver. The issue was actually mailed from Edmonton, where Browne had moved, in June of 1952. In #2 he commented: *“The planning for the first issue of VANATIONS covered a period of four months. The actual construction and work was done over a period of another three months.”* This would appear to indicate he started planning the zine the very month he formed the club, and that fellow members contributed by April, if not earlier.

As to who belonged to the club, Norman G. Browne, Alfred W. Purdy (later a famous poet), Victor Samoila, Frank Stephens, Jim (James) Wills, and Curt Lang are known members. Close reading of issues of VANATIONS suggests other prospects, some probable, others merely possible. Of the probable members I include 2 Vancouver fans in touch with Browne: Vic Miller and Bill Galliene, 3 Vancouver fans known across Canada: Alan Child, Gordon Peck, and Shirley K. Peck, and 2 fans located outside Vancouver but who contributed to VANATIONS & may well have belonged to the club: Terence Barker (of Westview, B.C.), and L. Lockhart Layton (of Prince Rupert, B.C.).

Of the possible club members, I quote from the CANADIAN FAN DIRECTORY (donated to the B.C.S.F.A. archive by Chester D. Cuthbert) published by the

Canadian Science Fiction Association in Fall of 1952. This includes the names and addresses of Vancouver fans who were members of the Vancouver SF Society which was affiliated with the CSFA, single members of CSFA not involved with the VSFS, and well-known fans not members of either organization. Unfortunately the directory does not indicate their status.

Consequently the following list merely consists of Vancouver fans contemporary with the VSFS, but since the basic source material used to compile the CANADIAN FAN DIRECTORY was undoubtedly the membership of the affiliated organizations, it is highly likely that most of the following persons named belonged to the Vancouver Science Fiction Society. Especially since Norman G. Browne himself was the primary source of information for the B.C. listings. He must have known, or known of, all of the following fans:

Allen Baratelli, M.S. Barnett, P.L. Booke, Robert H. Bowman, Edward Bowser, Mary Brock, E.J. Broome, H.O. Clarke, Yvonne Cooper, B. Creer, Roy Davidson, Peter Duncan, Donald Foster, Rose Frew, Gordon Fatcher, Gordon Gibson Jr., Terry Graham, Peter Grant, Gordon Hackett, Rose Hafley, Arthur Harris, Terence W. Hibbert, James Hill, James C. Hinds, Brian Hurst, George M. Kerr, C.R. Mackenzie, Don Maclaren, Claude Mayes, S. McIntyre, Tom McKitch, G. McPherson, Barry Nelson, J.W. O'Connell, Otto Pfeifer, Jim Polson, S.R. Price, Ralph Redden, Gordon W. Rix, Eric Rogerson, Tom Rosenburg, Helen Smith, Charles Stephens, George Stephens, Peter Whalley, R. White, and Bob Wilson.

(Note; the names I listed as "known" and "probable" members of the VSFS are also listed in the CANADIAN FAN DIRECTORY, with the exceptions of Victor Samoila & Shirley K. Peck.)

In sum, I have listed 60 fans who, if not all members of the VSFS, were known active fans, most of them from Vancouver. I haven't even mentioned the fans living in Victoria, Squamish, Penticton, Kelowna & elsewhere in B. C., some of whom may also have been members, given Browne's statement he "*extended this sphere of influence to cover the whole of British Columbia.*" From the numbers it appears Science Fiction fandom was alive and thriving in B.C. in 1952!

**VANATIONS** – Faned: Norman G. Browne. Personal/genzine ("VANATIONS: The fanzine for tendrillless fans") pubbed out of Edmonton, Alberta, circa 1952/1953. An EGOBOOB publication, affiliated with FAN VARIETY ENTERPRISES, there were six issues in all, with a standard print run of 500.

Because Browne founded the Vancouver SF Society in Dec of 1951, I thought VANATIONS was its clubzine. Turns out Browne had moved to Edmonton by summer of 1952 and, with the exception of #1, the entire run of VANATIONS was produced in that city. In #1 Browne thanks "*The Vancouver SF Society for showing me the truth in the statement; 'Blood, sweat, toil and tears go into bringing out a fanzine.'*" #1 was prepared in Vancouver, at least it's cover printed there, but mailed from Edmonton with an Edmonton return address. So it seems Browne moved from Vancouver to Edmonton midway through producing the first issue of VANATIONS.

Ted White describes it *“as a good fanzine of its times.”* Harry Warner Jr. called it *“one of the few bulky Canadian fanzines of this era.”* And in CANADIAN FANDOM #33a (Feb 1957), William D. Grant commented: *“Another fanzine appeared from the West called VANATIONS in 1952, showing remarkable promise, but after a few issues it vanished.”*

In general, VANATIONS could be described as a humourzine with fiction, sercon articles and poetry, the quality of material ranging from pretty good to unbelievably bad (see “War Stinks” in #3 for truly bad fiction). Art varied from good to mediocre, with the best contributions from Richard Bergeron, Naaman Peterson and Jack Harness. Ongoing features included Browne’s obsessive analysis of response to the questionnaire included with nearly every issue, “What The Censor Missed”—a listing of lines in promags which hinted at sex, and “Borothy Bix, Fan Counselor”—a “joke” gossip column.

Ongoing references to POGO make VANATIONS very much a product of 6th Fandom. Astonishingly, Norman was present at the 1953 meeting in Harlan Ellison’s Cleveland home which saw the origin of the Seventh Fandomites. Consequently his last issue (#6) declared itself “A 7th Fandom Fanzine.”

Every issue included a one-sheet questionnaire with questions like: *“What would you suggest as the theme of future writing contests?”* *“List a question you would like to see asked,”* *“What is your percentage of interest in STF? In fandom?”* and *“Of the material published in this issue what do you think was the worst?”* Seems Browne was adamant about getting feedback.

What does VANATIONS Mean? According to Browne: *“In choosing a fanzine name, I set up the following requirements: 1) It must be a completely coined word, unique and having no meaning, 2) It must be a completely static word, implying no meaning, 3) It must be easily spelled, 4) It must be easily pronounced, and 5) It must be one word of not more than three syllables. The simplest way to go about this, then, is to take two or three words, break them down into syllables and keep juggling the syllables around until the requirements are met. I took the words; CANADA, VANCOUVER, FANZINE and PUBLICATION and from them derived about eight possible titles of which VANATIONS was my final choice.”*

**1952 - (Issue #1 - Jun)** - This has a very striking cover: a photograph collage showing the original Flash Gordon-style spaceship sculpture which used to be on display at the Vancouver Airport (till discarded in a city dump—a 1986 duplicate made for expo 86 now stands on a pedestal at the south end of Cambie bridge) “flying” over the Vancouver skyline above the Marine building, harbour and North Shore mountains in the background. Beautiful. Both photos were taken by Frank Stephens, and the cover printed at *“the extension dept of the University of B.C. All I did was rough out the format, pick the ripple-tone cover stock and lend them the negative.”*

Interior art: none.

On the inside cover is a poem “About The Cover” by Alfred W. Purdy, a member of the Vancouver SF Society, and in later life one of Canada’s most famous poets. Worth quoting in full:

*“Nobody saw it come or go, and that was the peculiar thing.  
Bells started to ring  
In everyone’s ears at once; and all looked up  
Into the inverted cup  
Of Blue sky. It filled a quarter of sky with a dull shine,  
The centre of a single line  
Of light that filled the head, took over the brain.  
A thought of high disdain,  
And heads popped out of the Marine building like pips  
From portholes of ships  
In the harbour men started upward, subtly held  
In a stiff invisible weld.  
Streetcars stopped on Granville St., and motorcars  
Stood like stars;  
And expensive women in fur coats stared out  
For the space of a shout.  
And when it was gone—like a face leaning over a wall—  
No one remembered it at all.”*

As Browne explained in #2: *“The inside (cover) poem was written with no connection in mind and originally titled ‘Mirage’. I saw a very noticeable tie-up between the poem and the cover and used it in that connection.”* In #2 Doug Mitchell of Winnipeg commented: *“Cover fair to good. Rocket ship a bit Buck Rogerish tho.”*

Browne states: *“This issue is not free or a complimentary copy.”* Instead he offers his PAR scheme, or “Pay After Reading.” In other words, send in what you think the zine is worth. Perhaps this is why it lasted but 6 issues?

Among 3 zines reviewed, V1#1 of the DIANETICS NEWSLETTER. *“A little more publicity and this fanzine will really go places.”* But as Browne revealed in #2, this was a spoof article, the zines reviewed did not exist.

Graham Stone writes about “Crud,” a *“word rather new to fannish language”* and goes on to describe derivations like “crudistically” and “intercrudable.” Oddly, he comes up with nearly 40 crud terms, yet “crudzine” is not one of them. Predates the term?

A number of spoof articles deal with writing, titles like: “The Big Idea,” “Types of Fan Letters,” and “Rejected Manuscripts.”

Under the heading “Recommended reading” Browne contributes some doggerel couplets of his own:

*“Want some complicated plots?”*

*Read about the Weapon Shops.  
Think my choices are all wet?  
What about Space Cadet?  
For a story that will make you drool  
Read the Moon Pool.  
And for a story about a dame  
Try The Black Flame.” (etc.)*

The best article is “Fantasy Censorship In Canada” by Alastair Cameron. He explains how the Minister of National Revenue, Dr. McCann is accountable to no one for his decisions. He does not even have to give a reason for banning a book! Talk about absolute power! Typical of the era.

At 500 copies, #1 cost \$54.77 to produce, a huge sum in 1952! Walt Willis asked him: “*What are you doing with those 500 copies?*” And Browne responded in #4: “*I keep about 25 for later requests ... and distribute the rest in fandom. As a matter of fact, my distribution list looks like a directory of fandom. All BNFs get it, many pros get VANATIONS, and most members of NFFF, BSAW & FAPA get VNATIONS. Besides this, about 50 are distributed in Canada and another 100 are sent to miscellaneous fen in the States, England, and Australia.*” Even today this is impressive! And, considering modern printing & mailing costs, impossible!

Responses to #1 printed in #2 included: G.M. Carr – “*The mimeography and reproduction was excellent, so was the art-work. A fine looking job all around.*” Chester D Cuthbert – “*I think you did a tremendous amount of work, but that aside from Alastair Cameron's article which I considered to be excellent, your work was wasted.*” Gerald Steward – “*I think that the art in this zine is the best fanzine art I have ever seen.*” Orville Mosher – “*I think your zine beats QUANDRY & SLANT by a mile.*” (Personally, I think Steward & Mosher were putting him on.)

**(Issue #2 - Sept)** - 22 pages, 300 copies, cover alone cost \$15 to reproduce. The cover, as with all issues, has art offset to the right, the date is hand drawn down the left side, the title up top. Both possibly produced with stencils. The cover art, by Orville W. Mosher, depicts 3 people, a man formally dressed in jacket & tie flanked by two women in long dresses, both of whom are holding a flower, all three being pulled into the sky by the hair courtesy of an arm reaching down from what appears to be a passing rocket ship (rocket tubes and exhaust vaguely visible). Disturbing elements include a Jester's head in the upper left corner laughing at their terrified expressions, and the two huge eyes open in the hillside from which they are being plucked. Very surreal.

Interior art: by Gordon Hunter.

In his editorial Browne states that he intended VANATIONS to be a generalzine which anyone, including novice fans, could read and understand. For it was his experience that many zines were full of insider references unfamiliar to newcomers, such as fannish slang, Big Name Fans, famous fannish events, etc.

As he put it: “*I formulated a policy of the exact opposite for Vn. #1 ... a policy for*

*a fanzine that I would like to read; that I would enjoy reading; that I could understand.*" Now he intended: *"The policy of complete and utter generalness will be toned down considerably, but not to the point of complete and utter personalism which I tried originally to get away from."*

The rest of the issue is frankly not as interesting as the first. Browne devotes three pages to analysis of the first issue along with a page of mailing comments. This is followed by "To Crud Or Not To Crud," in which a Prof. R.W. Clarkson, Ph.D., P.H.A.N. (yeah, right) purports to derive a Latin origin for the word "Crud." ... Alastair Cameron comments further on censorship in Canada, and on the etymology of "Fantastology," a word he coined. ... More Borothy Bix - Fan Counselor advice: *"..during a lapse in conversation at a club meeting, come out with the statement you hate Pogo."* (A raging controversy at the time) ... "What The Censor Missed" contains more prurient quotes from prozines, such as *"I loved the flat-brained animal, enough to lead him into the bedroom if that's what he wanted."* ... And speaking of prurience, Paul Wszzkowski of Toronto has an ad for a *"dry watercolour stf painting. Well executed. Symbolic. Semi-pornographic???? Title: 'Moonmaidens.' For a snapshot and more information, write ..."* ... L.L. Layton contributes an interesting article on the difficulties (read slowness) of interstellar communication. He seems to hold out hope for utilizing gravity waves as a means of transmitting sound faster than light.

There are several poems, and three pieces of fiction. The first story, "The Question" by Tod Cavanaugh, hinges on the difficulty of addressing an inhabitant of Venus. What do you call it? Venoozian? Venusite? Vonuser? etc. Mildly amusing ... The second, "Construction of a story," is more of a writing exercise. Browne offers the beginning of a story where in the SF writer Henry Kuttner comes to the door. It's up to the reader to finish it. Is it really Kuttner? Someone with the same name? Etc. An interesting experiment, but a tad lame and lazy ... The third story "The Decline of Fantopia," by John Gold Bixby Jr, assumes Miami Beach will become the centre of World Fandom, but will ultimately destroy itself through the splintering of fandom into rival cliques. A not so subtle spoof of fandom in general.

By far the most entertaining piece is a letter from Robert Bloch (who has not yet written "Psycho"), in which he purports to be his own secretary: *"It is my duty to read his mail aloud to him at such times as I deem him sober enough to comprehend. During one of those rare intervals I went though VANATIONS in great detail, even going so far as to spell out and define many of the longer words ... ran across a reference to one Jim Wills, described as "Canada's answer to Robert Bloch"... Mr. Bloch wishes me to tell you that in future he would prefer to be compared to such men as Albert Einstein, William Shakespeare, Abraham Lincoln and Bill Morse. Compared favorably, too."*

**(Issue #3 - Nov)** - 28 pages. Cover by Naaman Peterson depicts a head-in-a-jar alien perched atop an elephant-like doggie trotting along behind a long-legged woman in a tight-fitting one-piece "bathing suit." The mood of the artwork is very calm and placid.

Interior art: Peterson also contributes 3 well-done interior illustrations, one of

which depicts a tentacled alien, seen from behind, intently watching 3 classic 1950s rocket ships launch into space as he manipulates a remote control device. And Richard Bergeron, well known American fan, contributes a drawing of the head of a long-faced alien with a very sharp nose and piercing eyes. Art Husboe accompanies his poem "The Coming" with illos. It's about the last surviving monument of an ancient, vanished alien race being torn down to make tourist trinkets.

Fiction content consists of "The Answer" by Dick Clarkson, a continuation of "The Question" from the previous issue. Sort of funny, mildly so ... "My Adventures on the Moon," a short-short by "Uncle Ronald" which is an amusing spoof condensation of many a pulp plot ... "The Visitor" by Wally Weber, which answers questions posed by "Construction of a Story" from the previous issue in an unexpected, highly amusing (if scarcely credible) manner.

And finally, "War Stinks!" by Norbet Hirschorn, a painfully sincere condemnation of war. Basically, a replacement soldier experiences his first (and last!) battle on the Western front. Told from his point of view, it magically encapsulates every WWII movie cliché you can think of. Not written by a veteran. Sample prose: *"They didn't tell you what to do when the enemy is charging down on you, with a snarl on his lips, a maniacal gleam in his eye ..."* The underlying philosophy? *"Man is in a transitional stage. He is experiencing growing pains ... In a millennium man may have matured and will have realized his childish folly. War will cease to exist. Man will conquer all his adversaries by sheer intelligence and kindness ..."* Yeah, right. Charmingly naive.

By far the best section in this issue are several essays written for Browne's "What Science Fiction means to Me" contest. Contributors are George E. Dold, Larry Touzinsky, Neil Blum ... and Harlan Ellison! Harlan explains why he is such a scrapper and what discovering fandom meant to him:

*"I've always been a frustrated little kid ... I was just about the only Jewish fellow in town of my age and had to fight for my blighted life darn near every day ... I was piling up inhibitions and complexes by the carton-full ... I came upon science fiction ... I found a literature wherein the ideas I had long upheld, held sway. It spoke in grandiose terms of the equality of men, of the casual intermingling of races ... It opened unto me the portals of worlds I had long dreamed about .... Then came fandom ... a group of people whose only cohesive force was a general liking for S-F and a concerted liking for other people who were individual albeit off-their-rockers. And I felt a kinship immediately with these crazy, wonderful people ..."*

**1953 - (Issue #4 - Feb)** – 28 pages. Cover by Richard Bergeron. Depicts a house-sized machine using an energy beam to convert a coal-like cliff-face into energy on an alien moon while two tiny space-suited figures look on. Seems inspired by imagery from the movie Things to Come.

Interior art: illos provided by Richard Bergeron, Jack Harness, Orville Mosher, and Naaman Peterson.

A questionnaire is tucked into the issue. It begins *"One of my reasons for publishing a fanzine is companionship; the companionship of you through your letters, cards and statements. Visualize if you can the possibility of a person putting*

*two months time, work, and money into a large issue fanzine and then not having a single solitary soul write him and comment on it. This is a possibility only you can circumvent. Do it now! Fill out and return this questionnaire to Norman G. Browne, 13906 – 101A Ave., Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.”*

Questions dwelt on reader's opinions of VANATIONS, what sort of fan and prozines they read, and the topic of religion, about which Browne wrote: *“There has always been a considerable discussion in fandom and science fiction about religion; and many statements have been made as to the religious belief of fandom. I would like to get a cross-index of fandom's stand on the subject through the following question. I assure you the information you give will not be used against you in any way.”*

Browne comments on the previous issue's questionnaire: *“The response to the last issue of VANATIONS, as near as I can figure it, was 87! This is large, the largest yet, and somewhat of a record. Unfortunately, it is not the highest on record; Harlan Ellison of SCIENCE FANTASY BULLETIN claims a response of over 90 to one of his issues. Oh, well. Better luck next time.”*

In his editorial Browne mentions that he is planning to go to Chicago *“to attend a technical school and will have no outside job or source.”* For this reason he expects to stop publishing VANATIONS. As a result he doesn't want to accept subscriptions, just PAR payments. I have no idea if in fact he moved to Chicago for a while, or went straight to Wilson Heights, Toronto, but I suspect the extra expense of moving to a new city is indeed what killed VANATIONS.

Browne answers a number of questions.

Marion Zimmer Bradley asks *“How old are you?”* Answer: *“I was born on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of June, 1932. That, of course, is my physical age. No one, unfortunately, has yet asked me what my mental age is.”*

Larry Forsace, in reference to the PAR system, asks *“What makes you so generous?”* Answer: *“Generosity is when you put more into a thing than you get out of it. I get a lot out of fandom—possibly even more than I put into it. I don't think I am generous; I think I am lucky—lucky to belong to a hobby group that is one of the most inexpensive there is.”*

Larry Balint asks: *“What does the “G” in your name stand for?”* Answer: *“George.”*

Phil Rasch contributes a serious essay quoting from sociological studies with titles like HUMAN BREEDING AND SURVIVAL, GEOGRAPHY OF HUNGER, and THE PLUNDERED PLANET. He warns that by the year 2000 there may well be 3 billion people on Earth, an unsustainable figure claim many. (Current population is 7.8 billion.) However, Rasch also quotes “experts” who claim our planet can support as many as 200 billion people without any problems, providing that science is properly and rationally utilized. Hah! Fat chance. Rasch concludes that mass man, a neurotic by-product of civilization itself, has already ruined the science prospects, preferring *instead “civil unrest, strikes, civil wars, revolutions, destruction and preparations for destruction. This is mass man caught in a vicious circle; insecurity and near starvation driving him into chaos, which, in turn, destroys science and production*

*which alone can save him from the very fate that his increase in numbers portend.”* Seems we are doomed.

By way of contrast, Tod Cavanaugh’s essay “Gosh Wow Boy O Boy” is a mildly humorous attempt to trace the origins of that phrase to the ancient Greek “Goshius” which means “Gee Whiz” and the Ancient Egyptian “W.O.W.” which we now substitute S.O.S. The upshot is that the title phrase is the new motto for children who had formerly uttered the immortal words “Bang, bang, you’re dead.” Tod considers this an improvement.

Art Husboe, the “regional organizer for the Greater South Dakota S-F Society,” has a poem titled “The Half-Welcome Guest.” Basically, a small child kills ants with rocks as galactic civilization rises and falls. The last two lines are certainly vivid:

*“A billion round, mud balls  
Wait like women with barren wombs ....”*

Several people contribute essays in response to Browne’s request for same on the subject of “What STF means to me.”

For Charles Gregory *“it offers escape from the daily grind ... fandom should have no purpose—if it did it would no longer be fandom. It was born as a means of further enjoyment [to reading], not to bring any great message to the world.”*

Neil Wood states: *“Fandom was made up of people like me; people who wanted to pull up in a shell of their own, and there jeer at the outer world and all the other idiots. What I mean is, fandom is made up of neurotics ... that is my idea of a fan.”*

Most intriguing of all, Marion Zimmer Bradley notes *“It sounds like a foolish fannish cliché to say “Fandom is a way of life,” but I could say it, and mean it sincerely—if there was nobody around to laugh, that is. For that is the one thing Science Fiction does to most readers; it fosters a sensitivity, a feeling of being on the defensive; of needing to explain one’s thoughts and attitudes. What change has science fiction made in my life? I could say honestly that it taught me to think. Why? Because it was different.*

*I grew up in a milieu dominated by reactionary Republicanism, respect for the almighty dollar, superstitious belief in a God who was just a bigger and less admirable Grandpa, prudishness, and belief in innocence as the best gift of God. It was a smug little world, and the carefully chosen books entering into that world were delicately censored to prevent anything ever shaking that rigid and bitterly held conviction that the status quo in life was real.*

*Perhaps I read into those science fiction magazines something that wasn’t there, for I made them a symbol of rebellion against the entire rigid mechanism of my constrained society. They acted as a scapegoat, too, for my family—unwilling to believe that any daughter could so betray her upbringing—blamed ‘those terrible magazines’ for giving me such heretic ideas. Namely; that there could be more than one honestly-held political viewpoint, and that all non-Republicans were not Reds and Bolsheviks, but simply people who happened to disagree honestly. That there*

*was a standard of life which had nothing to say to a man's occupation or college degree, or his income bracket, but merely with his native intelligence. That the concept of God could be wider than a stern parent. That "innocence" was a transitory superstition left over from the Victorian days, having no relevant relationship to decency."*

Sound familiar? Maga supporters are as old as the hills.

At the end of the issue Browne mentions: *"My name is presently on the waiting list for FAPA—Fantasy Amateur Press Association (he joined in August 1953)—and it would please me no end if those in charge of PAPA—Pornographic Amateur Press Association—would also place my name on their waiting list."* Aha! The hoax begins!

**(Issue #5 - April)** – 26 pages. Cover art by Jack Harness featuring a somewhat ruined labyrinthian city on a mountainous planet under two moons. Broken buildings expose futuristic machinery.

Interior art: by Paul Wyszkowski, Art Husboe, Richard Bergeron, Naaman Peterson and Jack Harness.

Brown comments *"The next and last issue will be out around the middle of July. The delay is due to the fact that I am going to GAFIA for a month and I will also have to put in work on CONCUPISCENT TALES for PAPA; DAMN! For FAPA, and Filler for general circulation."*

He then goes on to explain that CriFanAc—Critical Fan Activity—has three phases, namely: the idea, developing the idea, and dropping the idea. He figures VANATIONS was fully developed by issue #3 and has now become a trap which is consuming him.

*"By continuing VANATIONS I threw my whole schedule out of kilter and tied up three weeks out of four of my time. By publishing a fanzine such as VANATIONS I am not a free agent—and yet, by definition CriFanAc requires that the individual be a free agent.*

*"I must get out of the sub-zine business and become a free agent with time to work on any and all ideas that interest me ... So you people who are sorry to see VANATIONS go needn't be sad. I'll still be around entertaining you in some form or another."*

Several correspondents ask questions about Canadian fandom. For instance, Robert Bloch inquires *"What has happened to the rest of Canadian fandom?"* Answer: *"The answers to these and many other questions of a like tone will be found in an article titled 'Canada: Why Isn't It a Force in World Fandom?' to be published in the April issue of SPACESHIP by Robert Silverberg."* Alas, not even Fanac.org has a copy of that issue. I would definitely be interested in reading that article.

Canadian fan Arthur Hayes writes about the time he and his mother were surprised by a wolf in the woods but it was scared off by his father coincidentally firing a gun for the fun of it while paddling a canoe a mile distant beyond the forest. Divine intervention or not? Arthur wants people's opinions.

Garth Bentley has a poem titled "Song for Robots" celebrating the fact that as robots become more efficient humans will become obsolete. Hmmm ...

Fred Chappell contributes a one-act play in which a small boy is killed and eaten by a tree (off-stage no less).

Lye Kessler of the upcoming PhilCon III Worldcon (which Browne did attend to help reveal 7<sup>th</sup> Fandom) chides Browne by writing *“The first and foremost duty of a fan-ed is to plug the world convention in his or her fanzine. This is the duty of every fanzine editor bar none. Enclosed is a PHILCON slip with all the data that you would need ... Try to have a nice plug for the convention in the next issue of VANATIONS.”*

To which Browne rather testily replied *“The basis of fandom is its individualism, non-conformity and freedom. I do not recognize that any fan or fan-editor is under obligation to any other person in fandom. Nor do I recognize that any individual or group in fandom has the right to dictate or issue orders to any other individual or group in fandom.”*

*It is common knowledge that World Conventions are big business. It is also common knowledge that they make a profit. It is also a well-known fact that the Chicago Convention grossed in the neighbourhood of \$5,735. In effect, then, you are asking me to advertise free the fact that you are selling membership cards; the profit from which you will use to line your own pockets. As if this were not bad enough, your letter also carries a veiled threat that I either help the convention make a profit or else. I don't like veiled threats.”*

This may be a subtle indication of Browne's tendency to go a bit overboard in judging other people's points of view. Too much the idealist?

Douglas Graves contributes a three page article advising fen how to write to the editors of both fanzines and prozines. He offers tidbits like *“Try to use enough paper to run the weight to two or three ounces. Put a single three-cent stamp on the envelope with no return address. This will enable him to shell out for postage due and thus feel that he has made a contribution to the affair. Little details like this are important.”* And *“Poetry is also well-received. Editors love to read the lousy stuff for their own amusement and they aren't a bit fussy. Oh, go ahead—sure you can!”* Mildly amusing.

There are two pieces of fiction. One, by Australian fan Lyell Crane and titled “How Ruttid Can You Get?” is about a bus driver, complaining about his dull job and dreaming of being a deep spacer, who turns out to be the driver of a shuttlecraft between the Moon and New York City. The second story, somewhat better, by Martha N. Cox and titled “Kiss Me Sweet, Kiss Me Simple,” is about two women passengers on a space liner trying to figure out which of the four male crewmembers is a Venusian spy. The youngest woman decides that, since Venusians are mostly male drones spawned by a queen, the average Venusian would have no reaction whatsoever to a passionate kiss. She has fun tracking down the culprit.

Here and there are little ads inserted as filler at the bottom of pages. For instance, Browne has one reading *“Wanted—all issues of Mad, Weird Science and Weird Fantasy comics. Will pay top prices or trade stf.”* Nice to see he had the same taste in comic books as I do.

More problematic is an ad from Paul Wyszowski of Toronto *"First Year College Student would like to correspond with Roman Catholic girl around 15 to 18 years of age. No triflers please."* Ah, hmmm. Might be a harmless intent to get to know a good, proper girl with sound religious values, to use an old-fashioned term, but ... but ...

In his article on fandom Wyszowski wrote *"When Norman Browne asked the question; 'So you think it is a proud and lonely thing to be a fan?', I answered; no, though perhaps I had more right to claim to be a lonely fan than others."* After which Browne inserted his comment *"You shouldn't be lonely after the results of your ad start pouring in."*

Elsewhere Wyszowski made it clear he considered most SF fen to be *"shallow non-conformists because they refuse to recognize or know the Supreme Being."* From this I conclude he may have been a nice Catholic boy looking for a nice Catholic girl. Methinks the pages of VANATIONS may not have been quite the appropriate zine to place his ad.

Just goes to show, you never know what will show up in SF fanzines.

**(Issue #6 - July)** – 24 pages. Delightful cover by Naaman Peterson depicts mottle-skinned aliens with huge eyes watching a telescreen image of two space-suited humans floating in space, possibly approaching the alien's spaceship?

Interior art, some of it good, by Jack Harness, Paul Wyszowski, and Naaman Peterson.

Browne states *"VANATIONS is an EGOBOOB publication; affiliated with Fan Variety Enterprises; and is a 7<sup>th</sup> Fandom fanzine."* On the same page he adds *"This issue is dedicated to Harlan Ellison; who conceived, sponsored and invited me to the HEcon. Ironically, he is also responsible for the month delay in this issue ...."*

Elsewhere Browne explains *"About 6 weeks ago, I received a story by Harlan Ellison to go in this issue. But, about that time, I wrote an article myself that I badly wanted to put in this issue. But in order to put my article in, I needed an accompanying article to go with it. So I sent down my article to Ellison and asked him to do the accompanying article. In due time, he returned my article, asked for the return of his story, and promised to do the report I needed. That was five weeks ago."*

*Two weeks passed and the mss still hadn't arrived so I phoned long distance to Cleveland and asked Harlan what the score was. I told him that at the time I was a month behind in publishing this issue. He promised to have the article in my hands within a week. So I waited, and waited and waited and still the mss did not arrive."*

*Other than the fact that VANATIONS is supposedly bi-monthly and the cover is dated July, there is still another deadline. For you see, on August 18<sup>th</sup> I am making the move (to Chicago?) that was the original reason for the suspension of this magazine; the date of this mailing is August 9<sup>th</sup>; and it takes me a good week to assemble and mail an issue. You're not reading two good articles; and VANATIONS #6 is six weeks late; and I'm disgusted with fandom in general; and now you know why ...."*

Still, evidently Browne was not disgusted with Harlan or 7<sup>th</sup> fandom. He had yet

to reach the apex of his enthusiasm for same. He recommends 9 fanzines 7 of which are apparently part of the 7<sup>th</sup> fandom movement. Unfortunately it's not clear which 7. They are:

VEGA by Joal Nydahl of Marquette, Michigan.

SCIENCE FANTASY BULLETIN by Harlan Ellison of Cleveland, Ohio.

SF by John L. Magnus of Silver Springs Md.

COSMAG by Ian T. Macauley of Cleveland, Ohio.

STF & NONSENSE by Jack Harness of Pittsburgh, PA.

MOTE by Bob Peatrowsky of Norfolk, Nebraska.

PENDULUM by Bill Venable of Pittsburgh, PA.

FANTASIAS by David English of Dunkirk, N.Y.

TYRANN by Norbert Hirschorn of New York, N.Y.

CHIGGER PATCH OF FANDOM by Nan Gerding, Roseville Ill.

An interesting set of fanzine titles, to the fan history-minded anyway.

Even more interesting, an article by Norman titled "Confessions of a Fan Editor" in which he states *"Let us not say that I haven't done a good job editing VANATIONS, but rather let us say that I haven't done the best job possible. I have certain assets and facilities; I have knowledge, experience and contacts that I have used and could have used in editing VANATIONS. I could have made VANATIONS my whole world, my sole interest, my ultimate ambition—but I didn't. That is why I am not a good fan editor."*

He attributes the success of his zine, its popularity, to luck, creative imagination, and an open and friendly editorial policy. Further, he attributes the visual attraction of the zine to printing the covers and the larger of the interior art pieces on multilith rather than the mimeo method used for the text. I gather the multilith reproduces grain, texture, shading, and fine lines better than mimeo, but don't know enough about the process to understand why. At any rate the results justified a consistent policy, to his way of thinking.

Roger Dee (actually Roger D. Aycock) has a critical article "Of BEMs and Benefits" suggesting Stanley G. Weinbaum's introduction of the benevolent BEM in MARTIAN ODYSSEY ultimately inspired contemporary (circa 1953) improvements in SF writing:

*"A final observation which may bring still more irate criticism from those readers who judge their stories by weight of plot ... rather than by accurate characterization and soundness of development, is this: personally, I am moved to cheer from the housetops the better quality of writing that has made itself felt in recent years. The trend away from stereotyped plotting ... is responsible here, giving real talent room to try its wings, and as a consequence the quality has gone up sharply—and will continue to go up. Without implying any criticism of older writers, many of whom kept science fiction alive during its doldrums and who are still among today's best, I find it a downright pleasure to read the work of such talented latter-day entrants to the field as Richard Matheson, Robert Sheckley, Philip K. Dick and Allan E. Nourse. Here, I think, is a circumstance which will help science fiction to establish itself on a basis of acceptance as wide and as stable as any other form of popular literature ..."*

The rest of the issue is mostly poems, art, and letters from various fan. The stand-out piece is an article, in the form of Q&A, by Robert Bloch describing how he collaborated with Edgar Allan Poe in the writing of "The Lighthouse" for the prozine FANTASTIC. It contains such gems as:

*"Q) In general, how did you like collaborating with Mr. Poe on a story?*

*A) Fine. He didn't ask for a split on the check.*

*Q) During your collaboration, did you find Mr. Poe to be temperamental?*

*A) Quite the contrary. He was so quiet that at times I scarcely knew he was around.*

*Q) Did you take a liking to Mr. Poe?*

*A) Of course. The kid shows promise of developing into a real writer. A sort of Edgar Allan Pro."*

Sigh, It is to groan. I met Robert Bloch. Wonderful man. Wonderful wit. Routinely capable of much better humour than the above pun indicates. But then, I hate puns, so am not a fair judge of such things.

Anyway, to sum up. VANATIONS was a popular and well-respected fanzine for its day. Attracting the likes of Harlan Ellison, Marion Zimmer Bradley, and Robert Bloch is proof enough of that. All the more remarkable given that Norman G. Browne discovered fandom only a couple of years earlier. He certainly aimed high, but was ultimately disillusioned within five years of his initial fanatic and gaffed, never to return. A great pity.

Still, he left quite a legacy in his wake; namely a club, a fanzine, and a bit of notoriety. Full marks for enthusiasm. A bright flame which burned but briefly. He deserves to be remembered. One thing about him in particular. He knew how to have fun, fannish fun. That makes him a role model in my eyes.

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## FANNISH FAILURES AND FOLLIES

### 2021 Worldcon Questioning Date

The DisCon III committee is wondering whether or not to switch the date for the 78<sup>th</sup> Worldcon in Washington D.C. from August 25-29, 2021, to December 15-19, 2021. They have in mind that the August date would have to be mostly a virtual convention, whereas the December date could, depending on how the Covid crisis evolves, be mostly in-person like the good old days. The same conundrum pretty much faces all 2021 conventions. Note that DisCon III Author Guest of Honour will be Nancy Kress and the Fan GoH will be Ben Yalow.

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### DisCon III Worldcon Adds New Hugo Award Category

On November 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2020, the Con Committee announced they will be adding a new category to the Hugo Awards, namely “Best Video Game.” Their reasoning?

“Since early 2020, many of us have spent more time gaming than we ever expected. This award will offer fans an opportunity to celebrate the games that have been meaningful, joyful, and exceptional over this past year,” DisCon III co-chair Colette Fozard said. “Video games draw from the same deeply creative well that has fed science fiction and fantasy writing and art for so many years. This innovative and interactive genre has brought us new ways of story-telling as well as new stories to tell and we are glad to honor them.”

In case it isn’t clear, this is a one-shot award category not meant to be permanent. However, a case can be made that video games are at least as relevant as any other Hugo category, given that the video game industry earns more money per year in North America than genre books and movies combined. Science Fiction and Fantasy games, both RPGs and first-person shooters, are among the most popular. I suspect, however, that video games aren’t quite “respectable” as examples of genre creativity in the minds of the Worldcon SMOFs (whose opinions were formed decades ago) so I suspect a permanent Video Game category is still a long way off.

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### Upcoming Worldcon bids

DisCon III will take place in Washington D.C. in 2021.

ChiCon 8 will take place in Chicago in 2022.

The 2023 bidders are Chengdu, China, and Memphis, Tennessee.

The 2024 sole bid so far is Glasgow, Scotland.

The 2025 bidders are Brisbane, Australia and Seattle, Washington.

The 2026 bidders are Jeddah, Saudi Arabia; Los Angeles, California; Nice, France; and Orlando, Florida.

The 2027 sole bid so far is Tel Aviv, Israel.

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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.

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From: **Felicity Walker** – (November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2020)

Letter of Comment for *BCSFAzine* #545 (October 2020)

**Void Breather Bombast:**

**Mars Is Very Weird:** Proof that space does have an “up” and a “down” and all the crustiness on Mars settled to the bottom! The atmosphere probably fell off the bottom too.

**Bennu Got Vesta Dandruff:** It would be neat to see Bennu capture the Vestoids, or a simulation of it.

**Books to Be Ignored: *Slave Ship* by Frederik Pohl:** I think my cat is trying to communicate with me, both through meows and telepathically, by staring intently at me. Sometimes I get the message; when he walks into my room and sits on the floor and stares at me I can sense the words “Feed me” forming in my mind.

There’s a book I keep forgetting the title and author of, which is *When They Come from Space* by Mark Clifton. My memory keeps accidentally conflating it with *Search the Sky* by Frederik Pohl and Cyril M. Kornbluth, which I read around the same time and which is similar in tone and vintage (1954 and 1962 seem close from today’s vantage point!).

**Million Word Year Blog: *I’m Here—A Film* by Spike Jonez:** I can relate to the millennial experience of a controlled upbringing followed by being unprepared for the real world.

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From: **Lloyd Penney** – (November 21<sup>st</sup>, 2020)

Dear Graeme:

I am hitting the zines once again, for they do have a tendency to pile up while you’re not looking. In the pile is *BCSFAzine* 546, and it is, as always, worthy of some comment. Great cover art, and too bad there can’t be a VCON this year. Nothing is looking like it is going to happen any time soon, Toronto goes into lockdown on Monday morning.

Fan-run cons are definitely the best, but of course, there are no such cons happening, and Zoom cons seem to be our only hope right now. I have been to a couple of pro-run cons, and to be totally honest, I was bored out of my mind, and made the promise not to return. The US election has come and gone, and we know the winner, and the sore loser preventing the winner from getting ready ahead of time to take over. I think the upcoming occupant will need to evict the outgoing occupant with an armed guard. And, that’s all I will say.

I miss Terry Jeeves’ artwork, and the fact it could be found in a large number of fannish publications. I still remember getting issues of *Erg*. There are now a number of fan artists who have passed, like Arthur Thompson, and their fun artwork could always use more of an appreciative audience.

Rob Sawyer is right ... fans aren't slans, and they never were. After our initial years of being shunned by the masses for our weird interests, finding kindred souls with that interest was a welcome relief, and it was all too easy to get your revenge on those who shunned you by doing some of the shunning. A burst of ego made us as bad as those who were initially against us. The geeks have inherited the earth, but have we done anything better with our inheritance? Nope. Many of us are still poorly socialized, if socialized at all. We used to debate, as Rob said, but we unfortunately reflect the divided political atmosphere all around us.

I still consider myself a fan, but because of reduced income, I cannot buy new books or CDs, or subscribe to any TV steaming services, and our local libraries here often do not have new SF books available. So, do I consume any modern SF? Except for what I can see on the TV we already pay for, no. Do I participate in anything fannish anymore? Well, the pandemic kinda killed everything, but once it's done, I will probably hit the Third Monday pubnights every month, and that will probably be it. Every generation creates fandom, and I think at some point, if I go to our local con, and don't recognize anyone there, that will be my signal for gafiation.

Hallowe'en? Do we mark it? No, and haven't for years. Yes, we do our share of costuming, but Hallowe'en parties are a thing of the past, and if we do hear of them, we hear after they've happened. I live in an apartment building full of people from cultures where Hallowe'en is unknown, and management doesn't care to ask people for candy donations for the front door. I would say for the past decade or so, Hallowe'en has just been a quiet night to get things done, like sewing and writing. I do not recall a knock at the door for many years, and most can't get in here, anyway.

The local ... thank you for that list of Canadian SF magazines. Seeing Neo-Opsis has gone digital, I suspect there are few, if any paper magazines left.

To wind up ... you probably know that as of one minute past midnight tonight, the City of Toronto and the Region of Peel (Mississauga, Brampton, Caledon) go into a four-week lockdown to try to slow down the rise of COVID-19 in this area. Also, we are currently having our first stay-on-the-ground snowfall of the year, and there is probably about 5cm on the ground right now. Hibernation is starting to sound really good right now. Take care and stay safe, and see you with the next issue.

Yours, Lloyd Penney.

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

Letter of Comment for *BCSFazine* #546 (November 2020)

**Random Musings: Fans Aren't Slans by Robert J. Sawyer:** I've found that there's nowhere you can go where bullying doesn't exist. That includes fandom. It just seems to be human nature.

The current hyper-sensitive state may not continue forever. Things may settle down and we may find a happy medium where minorities don't feel unwelcome and the majority doesn't feel like the world is full of verbal landmines.

There's a Canadian film/TV producer named Jon Slan [*Alfred Hitchcock Presents* (1985); *Forever Knight* (1992)] and every time my friends and I were watching TV and would see his name in the credits we would think of Slans.

**The Light-Hearted Vituperator and Jolly Reviler: Fandom as Halloween by Stan G. Hyde:** Halloween is my favourite holiday for pretty much the reasons Stan describes.

**Films to See Before You Die: A Checklist for Obsessive Completists:** I like the word "*Häxan*." It's an aesthetically pleasing word in and of itself, but also it reminds me of a good video game called *Hexen* (1995). Basically the same word, except in German, and with the same meaning: "witches." In my day job I've also encountered a piece of music called "Hexenlied" ("Witch's Song") by Felix Mendelssohn.

Also, I don't know if it's too obsessive to point this out, but there are too many S's in the word "Obsessive" in the title of this article. :-)

I remember seeing the words "*Au Secours!*" all the time in *Tintin* comics.

**It Is What It Is (Mansplaining the State of Fandom) by Garth Spencer – Sample Excerpts from the October E-APA: Wild Ideas #4:** There's a meme that goes, "This is the ideal male body. You may not like it, but this is what peak performance looks like." According to the website Know Your Meme, it began when a conservative pundit named Steve Crowder tweeted a photo of a very fit Russian heavyweight fighter, but has since mutated to show all manner of people, including couch potatoes eating junk food. In other words, the meme is asking: "peak performance" for what context?

*Boople Doggin'* #100: I like the theory that the Mona Lisa is Leonardo in drag.

*The Torpidity Times* #9: I've never liked Westerns either. I'm glad the era of the ubiquitous Western was before my time. I only have to put up with every SF TV series having at least one Western-themed episode.

**Afterwords:** You now by know that Biden won, though predictably, Trump claimed it was rigged and refused to accept the result. He warned us as much in the previous cycle when they asked him if he would accept the result of the 2016 election and he said "I will let you know at the time"—in other words, it depended on whether he won or not. As I write this Trump has at last reluctantly accepted that he is not, in a literal, physical sense, going to stay in office, though he and his party are determined to do as much damage as possible on the way out. Also, his supporters will believe 'til the day they die that he won. Reality is now officially broken into two halves. There's real reality and MAGA reality, a parallel world where there is no absolute truth and the facts don't matter. Per that bumper sticker, we're used to escaping reality through science fiction, but this is another crutch altogether.

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