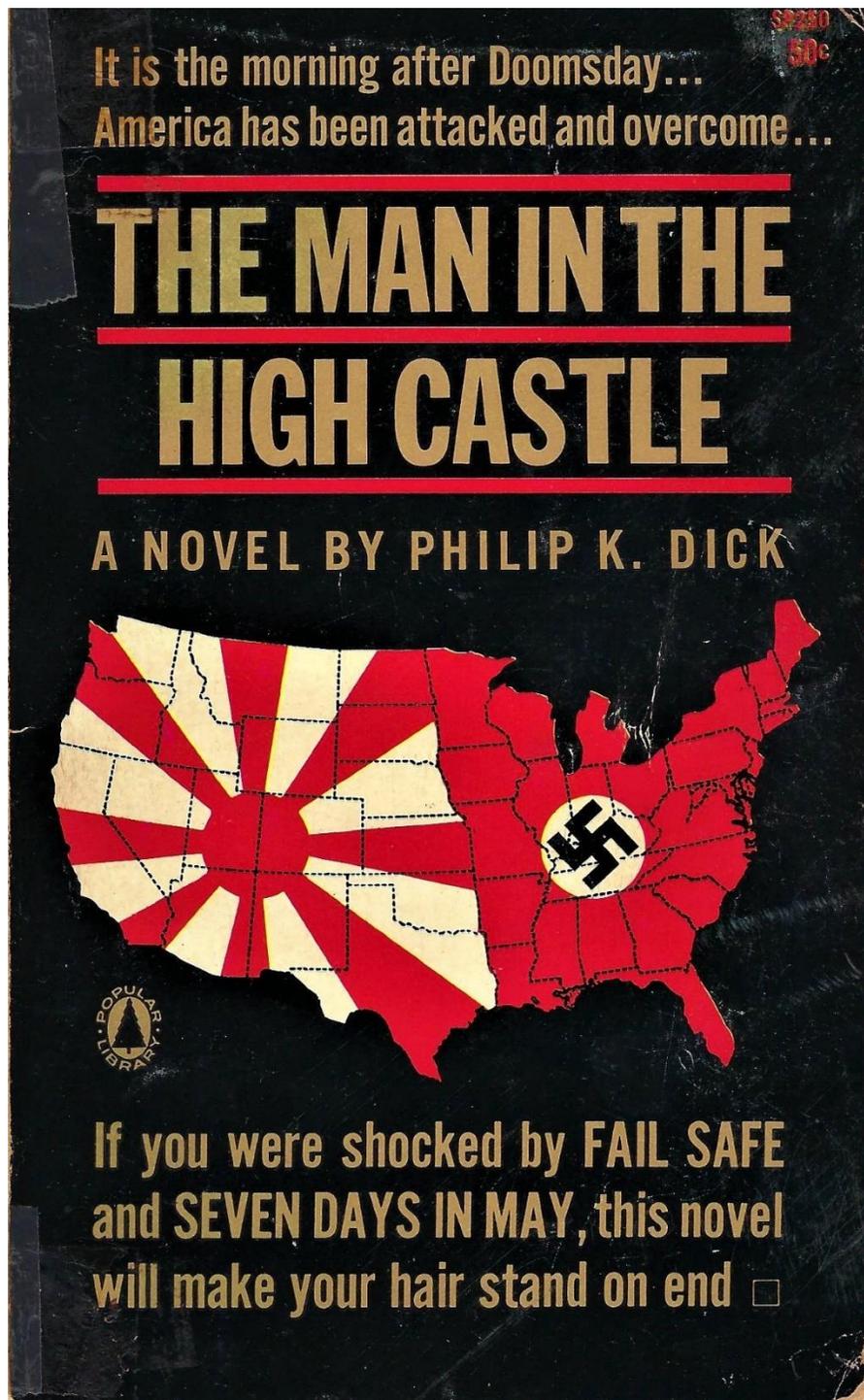


BCSFAZINE

Clubzine of the British Columbia Science Fiction Association
(Issue #548 – January, 2021)



(Issue #548 – January, 2021 – Vol.47 #01 WN548 – 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 >

For lots of back issues, please go to: < <https://efanzines.com/BCSFA/> >

CURRENT BCSFA EXECUTIVE

Chair: Moss Whelan.

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.

BCSFA 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 > and I’ll send you the link.

FRED DINNER – (FRED = “Forget Reality! Enjoy Drinking!”) A local Vancouver area meet-up founded circa 1979. Usually held every second Sunday, but currently on hold due to the Coronavirus Pandemic.

SUBMISSION DEADLINE – Midnight, January, 31st, 2021.

BCSFA PUBLIC GROUP FACEBOOK SITE – Participate in ongoing discussions and check out photo albums of past VCONs at: < [BCSFA Public Group Discussion](#) >

BC SF ASSOCIATION WEBSITE – Download the most recent BCSFazines and peruse assorted texts on BCSFA, WCSFA, and VCON history at:

< [BCSFazines and Club History.](#) >

HELP VCON STAY ALIVE – Group discussion at: < [Help Keep VCON Alive!](#) >

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Cover Credit

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

APOLOGIES

Been unaccountably lacklustre in mind of late. Burst of writing enthusiasm sporadic indeed. Fallen behind. BCSFAzine 10 days late. So, to heck with trying to catch up. I’m going with what I’ve got. Hope to return with full compliment of usual articles in the February BCSFAzine. Perhaps my problem boils down to too many projects and a rather amateur pacing protocol. Or maybe I’m just getting old.

EDITORIAL: THE GOD-EDITOR SPEAKS!

BCSFA FINALLY HAS A TOP EXEC!

I nominated Moss Whelan as Chair of the BC SF Association. He has accepted.

I was the last Chair, but stepped down years ago. The position has been vacant ever since. Not at all a problem, because the club has been moribund for about 20 years now. 40-30 years ago the club had about 200 active members. Last decade and more down to just the executive plus a few others, and some of the executive haven't shown up in years.

BCSFA is a ghost club. There is no membership list. No dues. No activities. Before Covid maybe 6 to 8 regulars would show up for a FRED dinner once or twice a month. In a blue Moon someone else might drop by. Technically, FRED was never a part of BCSFA anyway. Strictly speaking, BCSFA doesn't do anything, other than BCSFAzine, which is free to anyone who wants to read it.

BCSFA is as close to being dead as it is possible for any organization to be. It is a zombie club, in effect.

Thing is, Moss is a science fiction author, editor, and soon, a publisher. BCSFA has always been about promoting SF. It was also accused of being "the Drunk of the Month" club, but that is back when we had two wild parties a month. I frequently qualified for the title. But now I'm old and sober. As are most former BCSFAns.

Moss is particular interested in First Nations Science Fiction authors. That is very B.C. and fits right in with our mandate. Not that he is proposing radical change or activities. BCSFA is not a registered society. Never has been. At the moment it is just a tiny social group of SF fen. What Moss has in mind is expanding to a loose grouping of local authors for mutual and collective promotion purposes which, through hosting readings and other such events, perhaps offering a literary award, would allow BCSFA to do something useful for a change, and possibly revive the club.

Why on Earth would authors want to attach themselves to a zombie club? That BCSFA is fifty years old has a certain promotional cachet. That's about it.

We haven't had an election in years. No point, really. Some positions are filled by regulars out of habit. Chair and Vice-Chair are empty because literally no one wants those jobs. The fact that a qualified person has shown up unexpectedly is a miracle. Moss did some excellent work promoting VCON in the past. He can do the same for BCSFA today.

OMG! OMG! OMG! What horrible changes will happen?

Nothing. At first. I think I'll transition "Graeme's SF Fen Confab Zoom Meets" into the "BCSFA SF Fen" etc., and hope an increasing number of B.C. writers become regulars. Over time, post-Covid, this or that public event might be organized, like a book-reading at a cafe. Fits right in with our mandate.

Do we need to get all formal and whip out a new set of bylaws, demand dues, institute Robert's Rules of Order? Screw that. It would kill the club dead. Let empire Builders go elsewhere.

We will simply grow a bit as a loose social group, bringing together people with common interests (mostly writing SF), and together do things we love doing and want to do.

I, for one, am tired of being a zombie. I'd like to bring a little life back into the organization. Moss is the man to do it. Worth a try. After all, nothing else we've tried has worked. The worse that can happen is we go on being zombies.

Welcome our new Overlord!

BCSFA FINALLY HAS A DECENT WEBSITE!

After dint of much effort (including accidentally first setting it up as a business site), I've established a Facebook public group open to all interested fen (92 members so far) to discuss all matters pertaining to BCSFA, WCSFA, and VCON, as well as general SF matters. Primarily aimed at ex-BCSFAns to bring them back to the fold, but also at any foreign fen interested in our exotic club. Many Americans have joined.

I was inspired to set up the site by Moss Whelan and our conversations during the FRED Zoom Meetings, which are really no such thing. FRED was always kept apart from BCSFA as an entity of its own. I forget why. I set up the weekly Zoom meeting not so much to carry on the tradition of FRED but to provide a means of local fen socializing with each other in these pandemic times. Since more and more people seem willing to get involved with BCSFA, at least for discussion purposes, it makes sense to make the meetings "official" BCSFA events. Actual FRED in-person meets may revive post-Covid. Hard to say. But I'll carry on with BCSFA Zoom meets post-Covid as a useful communications tool.

Anyway, the BCSFA Public Group site is a place to ask questions, talk, and peruse photo albums devoted to past BCSFA events (like VCONs) and activities. Gives you an idea what we accomplished back in the day.

To download the latest BCSFAzine, or peruse textual info on the history of the club, you can go to a non-Facebook site I reactivated called the "BC SF Association" site. Material a bit sparse at the moment, but eventually there will be much to read.

And there's the "Help Keep VCON Alive" Facebook Public Group site I created a while back. There's the place to go to initiate discussion on the upcoming VCON 2021, to ask questions, maybe volunteer to help out.

All three sites are meant to work in conjunction with one another, and are part of the newly created kaleidoscope of possibilities for BCSFA Moss and I are dreaming up. It remains to be seen if BCSFA can successfully be revived into an active club. Ideas are being entertained. Concepts are being put forward. Recruits sought. You never know. Something may happen. See the links on page 1 to check out the 3 sites.

BCSFA ONCE AGAIN SWAMPED BY CONTROVERSY!

Which is a PR-hack bit of hyperbole suitable for the modern era devoted to hype and flimflam. The truth is a bit more prosaic.

Simply put, Moss and I are proposing a BCSFA literary award, the “Rainshine,” to encourage and celebrate local artists, poets, and authors. More specifically, targeting ethnic groups generally ignored by the more generic large-scale awards, singling out the groups which represent the ever-growing diversity of the genre in B.C. We see this as a positive thing, something small-scale and local, but familial and personal because of that, and thus entirely doable for a local club.

Of course, we don’t want to be another “pat on the back” bit of condescension on the part of the white majority. Indeed, we don’t even want to place any emphasis on the Awards as such, but rather on the winners. This is why we see the role of BCSFA as a facilitator, with the artists and writers in question helping to define the awards and to administer them.

Still too early to set the concept in stone. There is much to be debated, much to be defined. But we have to start somewhere.

Some fans have expressed reluctance to go in this direction, possibly in part because they are afraid of offending this or that minority. Which is why Moss and I are keen on consulting the ethnicities in question to find out what they think of the basic concept and whether they will want to get involved. If the idea turns out to be a non-starter, something ethnic minorities won’t approve of, then so be it.

It’s just that Moss and I feel the concept has potential. It would be a juried award, though not aimed at defining the academic-minded “best” of some category or another so much as drawing attention to something new and exciting. Not meant to be a “prestigious” award so much as a shoutout “Hey! Read this! It’s cool!” sort of award. What the jury would consist of remains to be seen. Respected literary figures of some sort, preferably from the various ethnic groups themselves. Indeed, for our purposes, it might be ideal if various minorities are represented but nobody from the white establishment. In other words, letting the ethnic communities deciding who among themselves best deserves recognition, with BCSFA merely being the backdrop sponsor helping to keep these groups in active contact and participation with one another.

Moss, though not First Nations himself, has many interests and contacts with the First Nations community. He has initiated preliminary discussion which may lead to a detailed dialogue which could render the possibilities much clearer. Exploratory fact and impression gathering as it were.

Meanwhile, Moss has used words like “racist” and “genocide” in some of his comments. He is intimately familiar with people to whom the concept behind these words is part of their daily lives. In short, these words do not mean what we think they mean. For liberal-minded people they are abstractions easy to dismiss because remote and unthinkable. For the victims, these words have a great deal to do with current reality. They are words which define their reality to a distressing degree.

After all, Canada is a country where police occasionally drive a “drunk indigenous person” deep into the winter countryside and “release” him into the freezing cold and snow in the full expectation he will die before stumbling to any warm shelter. The practice is known as “Starlight Tours” and has been going on since 1976. Tell me that isn’t racist. Tell me that isn’t genocide on an individual scale. It happens rarely, that we know of. But it happens.

Point is, as an old white fart who has never experienced discrimination in his life (apart from people who thought me stupid), I have no right to pontificate about racism. Throughout my life I assumed a policeman is merely someone with a far more interesting job than what I did for a living. I would not hesitate to call the police for help were I in any sort of trouble. I don’t view the police as a threat, let alone as an enemy. I know about various examples of “bad apples” but feel safe to assume the majority are okay. However, from what I understand, many minorities feel less secure. Therefore I feel justified at this late stage in my life to attempt to understand viewpoints beyond my own.

Which brings up another aspect of the word “racism” as actually experienced by its victims. In the past First Nations were considered an embarrassing “other,” an alien presence in our midst, and laws were enacted to deliberately destroy their culture and languages in order to reduce them to imitation “Canadians” who would blend in to the point of being assimilated, albeit as a sort of low-status caste, the least among equals as it were.

Laws and practices have been reversed, which is good, though barely in time, evidently. I find it a bit sad that many First Nations students have to go to universities to study the remaining repositories of their language and culture, the oral and tribal traditions having been broken. Despite this, there’s a veritable renaissance of tribal lore going on, coinciding with the growing explosion of diversity in our beloved genres. Exciting, that.

Still, drugs, ill health, and poverty afflict ethnic groups, especially First Nations, more than the “average.” To which the rejoinder often is, “Well, that’s their fault. Why don’t they shape up?” Or sometimes “You got it no worse than others, so shut-up already.”

An extreme form of this is to accuse minorities of being racist for daring to deny everyone is treated equally because everyone knows we’re equal under the law so problem solved, right?

Take, for example, the tendency of some whites to dismiss black accounts of being victims of racism on the grounds that the blacks are “biased” and “over-sensitive” and “misled by activists.” In other words, there are whites who genuinely believe they know more about black problems than blacks do. I don’t think so.

Same can be said of how some whites think about First Nations. End result? A continuing lack of interest in solving social problems, a form of denial which perpetuates the problems and leaves them cancers gnawing on entire communities. People die. Or live in despair. So, yes, a form of “genocide” is the result. Not the classic “round up and kill” type of genocide to be sure, but an ongoing neglect and

decay which results in a shorter life-span all the same. Something which needs to be addressed, but is so often ignored.

In many respects quite a few average Canadians live in a state of denial concerning our imperfections as a society. I myself have often maintained that Canadians tend to solve problems by waiting till they go away. Doesn't apply in this case though. The problem won't go away until it is resolved.

But what the hell has this got to do with science fiction? Isn't the whole point of SF to offer escapism from the world's woes? Isn't it all about shiny spaceships and epic battles between transformers and monsters? All about Galactic Empires and wise-cracking cyborg racoons? Pure fun and games? Nothing to do with real people, i.e. the despicable mundanes and their boring problems?

Fact is for the past 40 years or so SF lit has centred more and more on people, on society and how it should or shouldn't evolve. Or as Bill Gibson put it, "the best Science fiction is about today." As witness how he warns about current trends by extrapolating forward to the unthinkable in his novels. To paraphrase Trotsky, "You may not be interested in dystopia, but dystopia is very interested in you."

Now, BCSFA is no big deal in the scheme of things. A major political force we are not. But I take for granted the majority of our members oppose racism, systemic oppression, environmental collapse, mass extinction, nuclear war, dystopias in general, and myriad other nasty things us humans like to play around with for some unfathomable reason. I figure there's a role for us in proactive SF support of humanity's future.

So, what do we do? March in the streets? Man the barricades? Not me. Not my style. Never was. I was an old man even when I was young. Always preferred peace and calm and quiet conversation.

The way I see it, celebrating First Nations accomplishments (and other ethnic groups) in the SF&F genre is a joyous way of promoting Canadian diversity and imagination, and potentially a small but useful means of advocating a saner, more civilized Canada. Only good can come of it, in my opinion.

By the way, racism looms large in my thoughts because it is the current topic of conversation, thanks to Moss. I suspect he identifies with a certain figure in First Nations mythos. No, not the Wendigo. (At least, I hope not.) Some variant of the Trickster. He likes to play with forms and ideas, concepts and words, to stimulate creative, rut-destroying thinking. He's a writer and editor who likes to look deep behind motives, values, and perceived wisdom. Easy enough to understand him if you participate in the conversational BCSFA zoom meetings. Compared to his brain, mine is merely a somnambulant mushroom. I suspect Moss is infected with youthful enthusiasm.

In my opinion he is not trying to encourage pedantic debates over what words like "racism" and "genocide" may or may not mean, but rather deplores "the same old same old" pattern of thinking as a dead end, which indeed it is. If we are to face the future and seek to take part in it (which many SF fen are curiously reluctant to do) we need to "explore new worlds and boldly go where no man has gone before." In this

context that doesn't mean Captain Kirk seducing the all-women planet of wherever (as the old joke has it), but the thrill of exploring new ideas and making practical use of our imagination. The thrill of thinking and doing, actually.

Personally I can't imagine anything more exciting then routinely getting together (figuratively if Covid persists) with a whole bunch of local new talent in the SF&F genre and bringing attention to the products of their imagination. Celebrating them, in fact. And in the process, having loads of fun. Isn't that what being a fan is all about?

One last point. Am I not putting words in Moss' mouth? Absolutely. I do that all the time. If he is the Don Quixote of SF advocacy, I am the most annoying Sancho Panza who ever lived. He'll just have to get used to me.

Cheers! *The Graeme*

P.S. This issue is way late. Sorry. Fell behind for myriad reasons. Am now rushing it out as an incomplete version of what I originally intended. Hopefully I'll be back on track for the February issue.

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

< the.graeme.bcsfazine@gmail.com >

ODDS AND SODS ABOUT THIS ZINE

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

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

WHAT THE GOD-EDITOR WOULD LIKE TO PUBLISH

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

VOID BREATHER BOMBAST

Moon Astronauts named – Nasa has announced the names of the next batch of astronauts to walk on the surface of the moon. They are:

Joe Acaba, Kayla Barron, Raji Chari, Matthew Dominick, Victor Glover, Warren Hoburg, Jonny Kim, Christina Koch, Kjell Lindgren, Nicole Mann, Anne McClain, Jessica Meir, Jasmin Moghbelim, Kate Rubins, Frank Rubio, Scott Tingle, Jessica Watkins, and Stephanie Wilson. (Victor Glover is currently stationed aboard the ISS.)

Note that there are no “token” female astronauts. 50% of the astronauts, 9 out of 18, are women. Bloody marvelous, I say.

A reminder: Artemis 1 with an unmanned Orion capsule will orbit the Moon sometime in 2021. Artemis 2 will be manned and do a flyby in 2023. Artemis 3 is planned to land people on the Moon in October, 2024. I’ll be 73. I plan to stick around till then because I want to watch live TV coverage of astronauts frolicking in the Lunar dust for the sixth time—Apollo missions 11, & 14-17 were the first five—and many more after that. (The camera for Apollo 12 coverage conked out.)

Hell, I want the thrill, once again, of stepping outside, looking up at the Moon, and thinking “there are people walking around on that even as I’m looking at it.” It’s a wonderful feeling.

It should be noted that the first 12 astronauts named are just the first batch. More to come. Beginning to look as if human presence on the Moon will be as constant and common as people aboard the ISS. I, for one, think that’s a good thing.

Lunar Base at Moon’s South Pole – According to recent plans unveiled by NASA one of the ultimate goals of the upcoming Artemis Missions is a permanent base camp at the Moon’s South pole. Makes sense. There be water ice there, according to previous surveys. The plans are apparently detailed in goals, but shy of specific details because so much depends on the success of the first Artemis Missions, what they discover, what they accomplish, etc.

So What If It Blew Up? – The first test of the SpaceX Starship on December resulted in its complete destruction when it landed just a tad too hard. Big deal. The early Atlas rockets developed for the manned Mercury program blew up dozens of times before they got it right. Used to be a running joke in the news media. I remember. The mission just means the landing aspect needs to be fine-tuned.

Thing is, it successfully launched, then shut down two of its engines, then the third, as it descended, flopped over on to its belly like it was supposed to, so that aerodynamic lift could slow it further rather than waste fuel, then turned upright again and re-ignited all three engines for the last few seconds.

To me it looked like it wasn’t quite upright when it contacted the ground, as if it needed another second to adjust to proper landing mode. So, the problem could be timing. I’m sure they’ll figure it out. The main thing is, the “belly flop” manoeuvre and the re-ignition of three engines—both never tried before—worked perfectly. I’m happy about that.

One thing surprised me. Watching the cluster of three engines gimbal about to

make minor course corrections came as no surprise. That's part of how the vehicle steers. Even the Saturn 5 did that to some extent. But when the cluster of three engine bells splayed apart "to spread the fire" that really startled me. Hadn't expected that. Also surprised to see flame consume some of the "cloth" covering the interior rim of the bottom of the fuselage in a flash flareup. Totally normal, I assume.

Anyway, the "test" was a total success where it counted. Blowing up is just a minor detail. That'll be easier to fix than if the main mission hadn't worked out. They might have had to go back to the drawing board for that one.

Current US Base on Mars – According to the Jerusalem Post, the 87-year-old retired Israeli General and Professor Haim Eshed, "who served as head of Israel's Space Security program for thirty years," claims that the USA and Israeli have been dealing with aliens for decades. For instance, America and the Aliens are operating a secret base on Mars. Where are the aliens from? Some kind of "Galactic Federation" he explains, keen on helping the human race "evolve and reach a stage where ... we will understand what space and spaceships are." He further claims that President Trump had wanted to tell the American people but the aliens told him not to do it "Because humanity isn't ready ... they wished to prevent mass hysteria." Even better, if you buy his book *The Universe Beyond the Horizon: Conversations with Professor Haim Eshed*, you will learn "when we can jump in and visit the Men in Black."

All I can say is, if you believe what he says, I've got a ticket to sell you for the next spacecraft hiding behind the next comet to appear. You do remember the "hitch-a-ride-with-the-aliens-behind-the-Hale-Bopp Comet" Heaven's Gate suicide cult of March, 1997? Thirty-nine people died. That's where this sort of thinking leads.

By the way, the Heaven's Gate cult insisted its male members get castrated (no pun intended) so they could purify themselves to the extent of achieving equality with the aliens. Right. If that sounds attractive to you, go for it. The cult still exists. I'm sure they're eager for new members (again, no pun intended).

BOOKS TO BE IGNORED:

The Man in the High Castle — by Philip K. Dick

I first read this book in 1964 when this Pocketbook version of the 1962 G.P. Putnam's Sons Hardcover edition came out. I recall being thrilled by a cool premise and slightly disappointed by its slow pace and "lack of action." Seemed obvious to me at the time there wasn't enough material for a movie, but at least it made for an interesting novel. To be truthful, I was disappointed there wasn't much of a resistance movement, and I interpreted the book in the shallowest fashion possible, seeing it as a simplistic version of occupied Europe and none too original. To be fair to me, I was but 13 years of age and not the most mature or knowledgeable reader.

I heard about the TV series while it was being made and broadcast but had no access, but after it was cancelled I subscribed to Amazon Prime and binge-watched

all four seasons. I was amazed how good it was, except for the ending. After all, they had planned a fifth season, and the sudden cancellation meant they had to quickly tie everything together and come up with a credible conclusion on short notice while they were finishing the 4th season, which had never been intended to be the final one. The ending felt like the equivalent of “And then shots rang out and everybody fell dead” except that it was a “Happy Happy Joy Joy” ending. To put it another way, abrupt and unsatisfying. A bit of a Deus Ex Machina cop-out overriding all the issues and concerns raised by the previous episodes. Still, at least it was an ending.

My biggest problem with the series was the soap-opera tendency to drag out the angst of the characters in their interactions, plus the numerous plot surprises and reversals to “surprise” the viewer as if to counter the deadening effect of the endless angst.

For example, it takes a lot of guts to try and involve the viewer emotionally in the family problems of the American Reich Leader who had clawed his way to power in part by exterminating the Jews of America. That the screenwriters (and actors and directors) managed to pull it off is mindboggling. They did it in a very sophisticated way. They explored the mentality of people who had already outgrown the “resistance” period of the struggle and learned to accommodate and even embrace the “new order” as the only logical means of survival and “getting ahead.” Nazi America and The Imperial Japanese territories on the West Coast were the “New Normal.”

In an era when “The Arab Spring” and other such protest movements are taken for granted (by some) as proof of people’s instinctive desire to obtain human rights and democracy, such that dictators and authoritarian regimes “inevitably” come crashing down, the concept of embracing the conqueror seems absurd. But then, to people of my generation, the very question of how someone like Hitler or Mussolini could ever rise to power in the first place seemed incomprehensible. How could people be so stupid?

Speaking as a centrist liberal, the rise of Trumpism suggests to me that demagogues are more desirable than democracy in the minds of many, and it is actually easier to establish a dictatorship than maintain a democracy. As so many failed revolts and revolutions have shown, people get rid of one bastard only to see him be replaced by another. Classic example: out of the French revolution rose Napoleon. The ancient Greeks themselves regarded democracy as a temporary phenomenon doomed to failure. A close study of the history of their city states, including Athens, proves them right.

Dictatorship isn’t the aberration. Democracy is. It’s a goddamned miracle. And it can disappear in a heartbeat. All it takes is fear and hatred and someone who knows how to manipulate those emotions to rise as a secular Messiah.

In the TV series a subtle distinction is made between the methods of the Japanese Empire and the American Reich. Under the Japanese the Americans are lesser subjects with fewer rights than Japanese, yet the demand for absolute obedience and loyalty applies to everyone, no matter what their race or rank. The Imperialist Japanese Feudal system writ large.

Whereas the American Reich celebrates Americans being American, albeit with all festivals and cultural practices adopted and adapted to Nazi ideology, much as the conquistadors built cathedrals atop Mayan Pyramids. It has become patriotic to wish your neighbour a friendly “Sig Heil” while watering the lawn. The American flag flies everywhere, albeit with a swastika and fewer stripes, but it’s still patriotic to honour the “American” flag. The “New” America is built firmly on the foundations of the old America. So much so that Americans cheer the Statue of Liberty finally being blown up. So much so that some of the Germans back in Berlin worry about America getting a bit uppity, as if the American Reich represents the future more than the German Reich. All of this is presented in a plausible and credible manner, especially in light of recent history.

Frankly, I think the screen writers did a magnificent job of depicting how subversive and all-encompassing any totalitarian state can be when it conducts an intelligent reign of terror exploiting the weaknesses and desires of newly subject peoples. Such monsters never portray themselves as the “bad guys,” but as “good guy crusaders” offering both protection and reward to anyone who is loyal. People are often eager to obtain such. Especially if they think the state is sincerely serving them and their interests. America could easily become the nightmare depicted, given the right circumstances. Canada, too, for that matter. That’s why I think the series is a useful educational tool. It depicts an alternate reality that is by no means far-fetched or impossible. In fact, I’m convinced some people watching it drooled over the American Reich as something they wish they had been born into. It suits their “ideals.” This be a frightening reality.

Viewing the series, I was vaguely aware the screenwriters had gone way beyond the book. For example, instead of a subversive novel depicting an alternate history in which the Allies won the war, a novel the authorities are eager to suppress, in the TV series “Documentary” films are circulating underground, which cannot be faked, so must come from an alternate universe. Hence the Nazi plot to find the path to this and every other alternate universe in order to invade and conquer them all. Certainly nothing if not ambitious. A definite science fiction premise which I assumed was not present in the original novel. Calls for almost as much suspension of disbelief as the concept of an American Reich itself. Bold thinking that would put a James Bond villain to shame. It borders on the ludicrous, but the show’s matter-of-fact treatment of it somehow renders it believable in the context of the plot.

I had not planned on rereading the novel. But then I came across a podcast in which a descendent of either Dick or Avram Davidson (can’t remember which and can’t find it again) read out a review of the book by Davidson which was published in *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* in June of 1963. Dick later credited this review with establishing his bona fides with critics and rejuvenating his failing career. Certainly it attracted attention, enough for the book to win the Hugo later that year.

What struck me in the review was Avram’s praise for Dick’s original and brilliant portrayal of the mentality of the conquered, how their every thought and desire (with the exception of the resistance-minded) was aimed at being found worthy to fit in to

the new order. For instance, not simply the desire to understand the Japanese mentality (which in the show reflects the historical Japanese imperialist mindset) in order to anticipate what is or is not permitted in conversation with them, but rather an obsession with thinking like a Japanese, in effect becoming Japanese, in order to blend in with their patterns of thought and behaviour as seamlessly as possible. This combined with humiliation and an inferiority complex. All in all, the logical psychology of a conquered people for whom “liberation” is mere fantasy.

Intrigued, as this contradicted my childhood impression of the novel, I had to read it again.

In a sense, I slipped comfortably into the book because characters like Mr. Tagomi and Robert Childan were very familiar because of the TV series. I was able to see how similar the two sets of characters were, the one greatly expanded and built-upon to “pad” the series, yet remaining true to the original vision, more or less. And yes, the pace was slow, with very little happening, yet the unexpected and shocking violence of the series was foreshadowed in at least one instance remarkable in its callousness. The essence of the book was clearly present in the TV series.

To be sure, the plot of the novel was limited and relatively straightforward compared to the series, but again, there was a core which formed the fundamental infrastructure of the TV show. My respect for the screenwriters increased once I realized how effectively they had wrung every possibility out of the novel.

And my respect for Philip K. Dick grew stronger when it became clear the most prominent aspect both book and series held in common was a precise and detailed attention to small details to generate plausibility and veracity in the portrayal of the characters and their environment. What particularly struck me was the sense that everyone is constantly thinking, constantly adjusting their situational-awareness, in order not to make the fatal mistake of failing to keep up with changing circumstances dictating expected behaviour and views. Very much reminiscent of Stalin’s Russia where no one dared utter an opinion until they had read the day’s Pravda newspaper which reflected the latest party line. In short, letting paranoia be the key to both survival and success, out of necessity.

What really surprised me was the ending of the book, when it is made clear that the “alternate reality” described in the subversive book circulating in the American Reich was in fact the “genuine reality,” the Allies really had won WWII. Leaving the question, of course, of how all these characters came to exist in their “false” reality. No answer provided.

Even more startling, a brief three pages where Mr. Tagomi slips into the genuine reality. Convinced he has gone mad, he contemplates suicide. Then he returns to the “new normal.”

This can be interpreted as a kind of in-joke, a way of P.K. Dick saying “See how clever I am.” But actually, he is saying reality is whatever we want it to be, whatever we are willing to strive for. Future reality, that is. Want an American Reich? Work for it, or simply do nothing and let others achieve that goal. Prefer a democracy? Than work for it, or at least support it in the face of those who would bring it down.

In a sense we are all the man in the high castle. He relied on the I Ching to write his book. We, too, through contemplating the present and the future, have the ability to create the future, or at least influence it a little. The cynic in me shouts against this, but I kind of like the idea. To sum up, *The Man in the High Castle* is a sort of philosophical call to arms. Do something before it is too late.

One last note: finally I see where the science fiction gimmick of entering alternate universes came from. It was present in the book to begin with, or at least implied.

It's a powerful book, and a powerful TV series. Probably more relevant today as a warning than when the book was first written.

Now I understand why Avram Davidson wrote something along the lines of "If Philip K. Dick never writes another book, his importance and reputation is secure for all time." He was impressed with *The Man in a High Castle*. I am too.

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

Speculative North Magazine #3.

Sample story:

Bang the Drum – by Andy Dibble

Premise:

King Suddhodana has a newborn son. He wishes the sage Asita to come and examine his son's Karma so that the King need not fear his son's fate. But first Asita wants to figure out how the Demoness Tamisra escaped from Hell. Trouble is, the Karma of the Doomseer Viplava, castrated by Tamisra, is rendering everyone's Karma difficult to read.

Review:

The author is a "Sanskritist" which I assume means someone who reads Hindu scripture, such as the Bhagavad Gita, in the original. I read that in English translation over 50 years ago and have forgotten everything. But I do recall Karma is a Hindu concept later incorporated into Buddhism, so it does not disturb me to read a story in which Hindu and Buddhist concepts appear to mingle. Although my subconscious mind undoubtedly retains some material from my youthful spiritual readings, this story impacts essentially what is a blank slate on my part.

Consequently I had a bit of difficulty following the subtle implications of the twists and turns of Karmic revelation. Accepting everything at face value helps. Certainly allowed me to accept the ending with calm equanimity, almost as if I see it as a triumph of Karma, even though I personally do not believe in Karma.

Overall, though, I can't help but wonder isn't one life bad enough? The tangled web of Karma woven by multiple lives seems less than inspiring and something of a burden and even a curse. And then it hits me. That's the point of the story. For the goal of Buddhism is Nirvana, a state of non-being which releases the individual from the endless cycle of death and rebirth. I guess I'm the Homer Simpson of philosophers. Wasn't till I wrote this paragraph that I realized the story encapsulates the fundamental basis of Buddhism. In that sense it's a kind of parable.

"Ah, grasshopper. I thought my wisdom flew over your head, but at the last moment you reached up and grabbed it out of thin air. You are not completely an idiot. You are capable of learning."

My above idiotic spoof of an old TV show cliché does not prove I can learn, but it perhaps indicates I can appreciate learning when I see an effective example of such. The story adds drama to the meaning and significance of Karma. A neat trick of great use to the uninitiated and the unaware.

See the full review here < [Speculative North #3](#) >

THE LIGHT-HEARTED VITUPERATOR
AND JOLLY REVILER:
Facebook Fandom
By Stan G. Hyde

So, I want to talk about some specific Facebook pages I am involved with that have a fannish slant, but first a little background ...

I seem to be addicted to starting fan clubs. I'm not sure why. I think the main motivation is to spread the love. It's great to be able to hang out with people who are enthusiastic about your passions ... and understand you. The general public doesn't always get travel through space and time, the joys of piloting giant robots, or the soulful side of giant monsters from Kong to Godzilla.

Back in 1975 I was a founding member of the Science Fiction Association of Victoria ... pretty much "the" founding members as I did all the promotion via radio and newspaper. The other three liked science fiction, but only two of them actually came to the meetings when they started, and only one hung around for a few years. However great folks like Paul Delany, Lynne Fonseca, Dixie Sackett, Gary Harper, Ellen Battle and others showed up and we had a lot of fun—and the group even sponsored two conventions—one with Gregory Benford as a guest and another where Jack Williamson should have been the guest ... but apparently someone on the concom forgot to send the air fare

Regardless over the years we had a lot of fun thanks to the enthusiastic folks that made up SFAV (pronounced like "suave.")

I had a lot of fun in the ensuing years with BCSFA, and VCON, and wrote many Vituperator columns for BCSFAzine ... but by 1989 the club-founding bug had got

me again. This time I suggested to some folks who were regulars at local toy shows that maybe it was time to have monthly meetings to show off our stuff and discuss model kits. It was the era of the “garage kit,” when folks could make their own models if they could afford the rubber and the resin, and many talented sculptors had joined the movement.

Monster Attack Team - Canada came about because building kits is a lonely hobby, but sharing your toys is a source of joy. Pretty quickly Vancouver had its own model kit company, Charlie Grant’s *Monster Fun* ... and all the sculptors were coming to meetings. A lot of the folks worked in film, and gradually a group of sculptors, builders, and folks who just thought that was cool showed up to join in the fun. The Club—which has held demonstrations of how to sculpt, build, and paint—has done workshops for years at VCON, and various Anime and Comic conventions.

Later on another science fiction model group—*VanPla*—arose. These builders are addicted to building models of Mecha (essentially Giant Robots with pilots)—especially from the many iterations of the Gundam anime. In Japan, the robot model hobby is called “GUNPLA” - from “Gundam Plastic.” Hence “Vancouver Plastic.”

Finally, in 1995, the editor of G-Fan magazine, J. D. Lees, called me up to go to Chicago for G-Fest. (“G-FEST” is the name of “Godzilla Fest” but since Godzilla is a trademark of Toho Films, the convention sidesteps that—although otherwise Toho has given its unofficial approval for the event.) I discovered a great community of “kaiju otaku” (giant monster fans) and have gone to G-FEST ever since. Although I hardly started G-FEST, I was really involved in its development and trying to keep the model for it the model of a science fiction convention—that is, while there are film showings and lots of goods on display—the focus of the yearly convention are panels on kaiju history and—especially—creative opportunities like workshops for model building (my biggest concern there), costume making, art classes and more.

(I am proud of my Mangled SkyScraper Award from G-FEST ... the highest honour the convention awards. Mostly it’s given to actors, directors, suit performers and other notables, but there have been a couple times it’s been given to fans. In my case, it was really just for fighting so hard to build a convention that was a community of creative people, and not just a convention in the “Creation Con/Media Con” style model where people just come to buy things.)

My first science fiction convention was Toronto’s TorCon 2, the 1973 World Science Fiction Convention, which I learned about in the pages of Ted White’s *Amazing*. I also knew about conventions via Forry Ackerman’s *Famous Monsters of Filmland*. I quickly understood that you didn’t have to go to a “World” Science Fiction convention, because there was a science fiction community in Vancouver, so my first VCON was #3 in 1974.

All of this means that I have always regarded fandom as my second family, and it has been the focus of much of my life. I don’t think I ever feel as happy as when I’m spending time with fellow fans—whether they’re fans of science fiction, fantasy, monsters, kaiju, or model building.

My kids grew up around fandom—and Katie and I actually went to a VCON in 1979 instead of a more formal honeymoon after we got married (but I have since made up for that).

Of course, this year Covid-19 has put a damper on fan gatherings. I've missed many of the events that I usually attend, and the chances to just get together with fellow fans, what with the global pandemic and social isolation.

But luckily, here in the future, we have some ways to make up for isolation.

Just as I seemed to be addicted to creating clubs and working on conventions, I also seem to be addicted to creating Facebook pages for fans. I think this is just an extension of the “share the love” thing that has always motivated me (there are times I have really wished I had something to sell or promote given all the contacts, but really the promotion seems to begin and end with let's all have a good time.)

BTW: there is a discussion to be had about the pros and cons of FACEBOOK, but I don't mean to have it here. While like many internet destinations it has its share of misinformation and data harvesting, the fact that it is simply so easy to use to communicate via both text and pictures makes it very appealing, and the ‘group’ idea is pretty much a virtual “club.”

MONSTER ATTACK TEAM - INTERNATIONAL

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

This is the group page for MONSTER ATTACK TEAM - CANADA. The problem was, with so many model builders and sculptors outside of Canada, the Canada in the name became a problem with people constantly being told “it's alright that you're not Canadian.”

Like the club, the page exists to spread model kit news, discuss current projects that people are building, to be a forum for new folks to ask questions and to share techniques.

At one time the club motto was “Anything goes, so long as it isn't real.”

That said, some real things are very appropriate to discuss, too.

When I was young, model kits were all of styrene plastic and produced from injection molding machines—so the subjects interpreted were limited to those with mass appeal. At this point, with materials like soft vinyl and resin that can be worked in essentially cottage industry ways (aka “garage kits”) there is every kind of interest represented in 3D art. (And of course, 3D printers are now coming into it in a big ways.)

Please feel free to check it out. If you are local, we have meetings IN REAL LIFE once a month too—although we're temporarily on hold due to the pandemic.

Please join the “Monster Fun!”

VANPLA

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

Although I have nothing to do with the Facebook site, I am a member of VanPla and recommend you check it out if you are interested in Anime modelling. Of course the focus is the many iterations of GUNDAM, but they are also a tolerant bunch and a lot of fun.

This is of particular use if you are a builder of styrene kits—since that is the primary focus of Mecha builders.

Check it out!

FACEBOOK MONSTERLAND

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

Of course, in the original Toho mythology, there was a reserve for giant monsters created in 1999 called Monsterland. (This was in Destroy All Monsters (1968)

Particularly because of the friends I had made at G-FEST, I wanted to build a group where we could get together throughout the year. I really belong to a “kaiju family,” and though people tend to show up days early to spend time together in the hotel lobby for the convention, we really needed some other places to hang out.

Currently there are around 8,400 members on Monsterland, and it makes for a lively community that shares a lot of interesting news.

I am the sole moderator of all my sites—so all the content is approved. Because I’ve always felt that folks should be able to share the love of monsters with younger kids, the rules are a bit stricter than some—but that also ups the politeness factor and eliminates a lot of trolling.

I’ve reproduced the rules below to give you a flavour—sigh ... am I too anal about this?

MONSTERLAND: THE RULES

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

This page is supposed to be family friendly. Please no swearing or (even if it's topic appropriate) nudity. Please no posts that are bound to create argument (and are off topic anyway) such as posts about Politics, Religion, et cetera.

Thanks.

The focus of this group is giant monsters, in particular Japanese giant monsters and kaiju film and television. Other “International” giant monsters may also apply to Monsterland ... Ymir sized (approx) and larger.

Anyone is welcome here, subject to rules below. (I’m not particularly keen about having to enforce rules or adult behavior—so please read.)

- 1. Movies, artwork, toys and models, television shows—basically anything RELATED to the giant monster topic is an okay topic. Please do not post links to copyright films. When possible, please identify artists.*
- 2. Spam will be instantly (as much as possible) deleted and the spammer banned.*

3. Please try to stay on topic ... if it gets too weird or clearly not related, the admin will probably message you.

4. Selling things ... Hmmmm. If it's of interest and related, and if there aren't too many posts, it is okay. At a certain point, when you're dunning us with posts that you've made already, you become a spammer. Please limit these types of posts.

5. DISCUSSION Great! What we're here for! But please remember that other people feel differently than you do and they also have a right to feel this way. When you are discussing things, remember you are discussing things—not people!

6. Don't accuse others of stupidity, et cetera, because they feel differently they you do. Thanks. As well, I would like this page to be open to young kaiju fans—so please watch try to keep language appropriate. While swearing really doesn't bother me that much, I want to keep the page friendly to whoever might visit.

7. Rather than making sweeping general statements, or calling things “boring”, “stupid,” or whatever other adjective you want to use ... why not supply us with EVIDENCE of why you feel the way you do. Details are great. Then we'll all understand why you feel the way you do, even if we still disagree.

8. Remember, it's not about making everyone agree with you. It's about making everyone understand you.

9. Have I hammered this home enough? PLAY NICE!

10. PLAY NICE! You'll be sorry if you don't ...

Please be a little sensitive.

I despair of having to talk about this, because most of us are adults here, and I didn't start a Facebook group to tell adults to play nice. But I also am afraid that rational discourse (particularly on the internet) is being replaced by empty rhetoric and just plain B.S.

I will probably delete any statement in the nature of “You are a _____ because you believe _____.”

When you fill in the blanks of this statement (it could be good things as well as bad things) you are either

1. Defining your tribe

2. Trying to build a tribe

The idea for this group is to have a discussion here and find out why other people, who may not agree with us, may feel differently. In other words, a peaceful place for different tribes to speak.

And even if you are right all the time, please allow others the space to be wrong at times. Understanding is a process, not a game you win.

G-FEST

<https://www.facebook.com/godzillafest>

This is the official page for the convention which is held yearly in Chicago. If you have any interest at all in giant monsters, you should consider going.

We should have had #27 last summer, but Covid-19 ended that. Hoping that #27 will be held this summer, but we will see ...

MONSTER FIGHTERS INTERNATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

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

More “Monster Fun!”

Given the fact that Facebook Monsterland is primarily focused on giant monsters and Japanese films especially, what about all the other great monsters from science fiction, fantasy, and horror films?

Obviously we needed another page.

In this case, there is also the “Monster of the Week” (which, frankly sometimes turns into the “Monster of the Month” when I don’t have time) which is sharing about a film with the group.

Films have included THIS ISLAND EARTH, THE GIANT CLAW, CURSE OF THE WEREWOLF, THE MUMMY ... you get it, the sublime to the ridiculous.

So there’s the overview, and I do hope people will join us if they’re interested ...

MILLION WORD YEAR BLOG A LOOK BACK AT THE FILM *UNDERWORLD* (2003) By Michael Bertrand

Decided to do a DVD tonight instead of TV. I like being able to pause the action when I feel like typing something in.

But, all the really obvious ones, movies I knew and knew I liked, have been watched, and so I had to go further afield.

I chose *Underworld* because it seems like a fun Goth action movie, and yup, a few minutes in and it is already filled with rain, trench coats, a British chick doing a voiceover in a cold monotonous voice, and everything is in the Official Gritty Realistic Filter that makes everything blue, black, and white.

Formula already in place.

One of these days, I have to watch the original *Matrix* just to remind myself that this all started with something wonderful and good, and wash the stink of the imitators and the crappy sequels out of my brain and into the gutters of history.

It’s very important, when there is the waging of a secret war between two groups of creatures most people think of as mythical, that you have enormous gun fights in the most public places possible, instead of a nicely Goth-looking subway station, because nobody notices things like that. Just another routine commute. There are always people dying painful, glow-sparky deaths around. Ho hum.

Also, when you are the big scary black guy Lycan, and you are the one who shouted “BLOODS!” and kicked this whole thing off, make sure you wait a good long time while the star of the movie loads her (twin, of course) guns and shoots at apparently nobody in a random direction before you do the same. It’s only polite.

A little over 10 minutes in, and I am already at the “I don’t know what is going on and I do not care” point of the movie. Impressive. There’s a big black guy who is a werewolf, and our heroine, and then there appear to be an unlimited number of very generically European-looking white guys in trench coats who shoot at other people and sometimes at one of the principle characters. A lot of bullets have been fired, mostly to no effect, and our heroine seems surprised by the weapons being used, and in general, not entirely on track with what is happening either. I am guessing this is not how she expected the evening to go.

Part of the confusion is my own fault, or rather, the fault of a hidden disability of mine. I learn faces slowly. Being very intellectual and not very visual, I often learn to recognize people by their voices or their clothing before I recognize them by face. This, no doubt, has played a minor factor in my social anxiety, because one of the things I am always worried will happen in an unknown social situation is that I will not remember someone’s face and commit a horrible social gaffe of some sort because of that.

Oh, we must be in Vampire country, they added red to the palette.

Aaand the creepy, ruthless, cold-blooded scientist with a vampire chained up in his lab ... has a German accent. How corny.

Giant Scary Black Guy Lycan has a ridiculously deep voice. He sounds like a stoned frog. It is making it nearly impossible for me to pay attention to the scene, let alone take it seriously. I have had to “rewind” a few times to catch all the exposition, and turn captioning on.

I wonder if the problem was that they had this enormous scary black guy who was perfect for this role, but due to steroid abuse, he had a high girly voice, so they had to pitch-lower it, and they went too far.

I am serious, everything he says sounds like he is burping out his lines. Nobody has a voice like that in the real world. It is hilariously stupid.

I really hope that I am not supposed to believe this Michael Corvin guy is a surgeon. He is way too young and pretty to be a surgeon. Nobody gets to be a surgeon without going through so much medical school that by the time they are allowed to cut someone at all, they are in their thirties and somewhat battle hardened.

This guy is about as believable as a surgeon as Keanu Reeves was as a scientist in *Chain Reaction*. Or as a hacker in *The Matrix*. Or, really, as anything but Ted from the Bill and Ted movies. As a brain-dead Southern Californian teen, he was alright.

OK, where the hell are we? Because a lot of the people in this movie sound British and yet those cops are clearly American.

We are in New London Chicago Paris York.

The werewolves look retarded. Like big stuff animals. Thanks, CGI.

And now she doesn’t sound British any more. Lost her accent somewhere on the way to go find Michael, I guess. Maybe it, like me, has trouble keeping up with the fast edits and pretentious camera angles of this film.

I will give the movie this, though: they have me quite intrigued to know what this whole deal with Michael being “The Carrier” is all about. It is a good thing that I know

absolutely nothing about this movie so I have read no spoilers. Color my interest piqued.

I am starting to think our heroine, Selene, does not know how to use doorknobs any more. She just kicks doors in, instead. Must keep the local supernatural locksmiths busy.

This CGI effects sequence where Selene awakens Viktor makes me feel like I am watching *CSI: Transylvania*.

Viktor, at least, has an interesting accent. French, with some Eastern European notes, I think. Or possibly the other way around.

And now, a completely gratuitous vampire sex scene. Geez, Selene and Viktor were both right, this Kraven asshole should never have been put in charge, he wastes time fucking his blond bimbo when he should be worrying about being exterminated by Lucian and the Lycans.

Her machine pistol makes a sound like a heavy machine gun. I hate it when they do that in movies. I am no gun expert, but even I know that a machine pistol goes RATTATTAT, not THUDDATHUDDATHUD.

Well, if you are going to turn into a werewolf for the first time, the back of a police car is as good a place as any. And apparently, they listen to the music from the soundtrack to this movie in squad cars these days.

Now that Viktor is all fully awakened, he kind of seems like he could be a really old David Bowie character. He has that regal, arrogant look.

Nice of this Vampire idiot to just stand there swishing his silver whips around while Raze (big black guy with stupid voice) transforms into a werewolf. Very polite and gentlemanly. I would have starting whipping Raze into pieces too small to choke a gnat the moment he starting transforming. But I am a wretched pragmatist.

Once again, I have no idea what the hell is going on. Pretty Goth people are shooting each other again, and Lucian injected Michael's blood, and then got shot in the back by Kraven, which has to be embarrassing, because Kraven is such a tool. He does not deserve to be named after one of Spider-Man's coolest enemies.

Don't kill Kahn, he is loyal and competent! Honestly, he is the most likable one in the film so far, which is sad. Viktor seemed pretty cool but he refused to believe Selene and lost cool points then.

Well crap. Lucian is dead. I was really hoping he could rise up as an uber vamp/wolf and kick Kraven's ass. I guess Michael gets to do that now, along with killing Viktor. Damn.

Vamp/wolf Michael pretty much looks like a Nightcrawler with claws. Not a bad look. Not as pretty as the actually Kurt Wagner, of course, but there are worse templates.

"Time to die"???? Did I just seriously hear Viktor say that? What a completely pathetic thing to say right before you kill some one. The definitive "Time to die" is in *Blade Runner*, and it pretty much owns the phrase. So using it for Viktor, who should be way cooler than that, is sadder than that. Shame on you, screenwriter(s)!

Why not have him say “Frankly, my dear, I don’t give a damn” or “nobody puts Baby in a corner” while you’re at it?

WHAT? Viktor is this uber-powerful ancient vampire that nobody can kill and who everyone fears, and Selene just cuts his head in half with the sword, and that is it? If it was that easy, Kraven could have done it centuries ago. That is unspeakably lame. Strike 2, screenwriter(s)?

I think one of the Standard Goth Action Film powers is the ability to make two long shiny silver blades come out of your sleeves into your hands in that really cool way whenever you need them.

Movie over. The ending was so amazingly lame that it has really spoiled what would have been a strong-ish grade from me. I found the plot surprisingly interesting and complex, and the action sequences brief and unobtrusive. But that ending ... she just cuts his head in half ... and that is it ... holy fuck. The credits say there was just the one screenwriter, but there are three “story by” credits. Someone has to answer for that stupid ending. Jesus.

There are special features, but I am in no mood to watch them. I am going to have to give this movie a D+, and if it had not been for that stupid ending, it would have been a B-.

Thanks for nothing guys!

This entry was posted on September 21, 2010, 6:48 am.

IT IS WHAT IT IS
(Mansplaining the State of Fandom)
By Garth Spencer

Fanhistor: a waste of time, a useful record, or practicing sociology without a license?

Along with fanpublishing, APAs, amateur fiction, ghoodminton and feghoots, Classic Fandom came up with fanhistories—stories about fans and clubs and conventions – some of which have been published professionally.

This may sound a bit self-important. History? About a juvenile hobby group? Only a few decades old?

When you realize that fandom in some form is almost a century old—and how the similarities and the differences between fandoms past and present can be important to you, and maybe your finances—then you might begin to realize why you might have a stake in fanhistory.

Of course the first works of fanhistory were a bit partisan, and maybe a bit juvenile. Some of the first works of fanhistory—Sam Moskowitz’ *The Immortal Storm*, and Francis Towner Laney’s *Ah! Sweet Idiocy!*—could be taken as overheated partisan

accounts by young men who took their adolescent disputes much too seriously. Moskowitz was one of the earliest members of New York fandom in the 1930s, and made much of the political dispute by which some fans sought to exclude other fans from the Worldcon in 1939. (Bear in mind, this was a convention with maybe 100 people attending.) Laney was an early member of the Los Angeles SF Society, and projected a lot of his preoccupations onto LASFS, which seems to have been a pretty average SF group of the time.

Maybe this isn't so surprising. There is a saying that the Golden Age of Science Fiction is 13—an age when we are open to first impressions of everything, from fantastic adventures onscreen, to dizzying new ideas ranging from libertarianism to socialism, to popular-culture icons.

Possibly a first lesson to draw from fanhistory is that those who write it are those who have a stake in it ... or who have an axe to grind. Or, maybe, the first lesson is that the earliest fans of science fiction and fantasy were very few and far between, young, broke, socially marginalized, and strongly driven to find like-minded people they could finally talk to.

More even-handed early fanhistories were written by Harry Warner, Jr., a fanzine editor who published * and *A Wealth of Fable* through NESFA Press; Damon Knight, who wrote *The Futurians*, largely about early New York fandom; and Frederik Pohl, whose biography, *The Way the Future Was*, revolved to a large extent around his participation in American fandom. Rob Hansen, in Britain, posted his fanhistories online under the title *Then*.

Another lesson seems to be that all fan activity depends on amateur enthusiasm, or volunteer initiative. It seemed fairly clear, after reading some of these works, that what fans were and what they did rested very much on their individual initiative. If individuals showed up to form a club, carry on activities ranging from costuming to fanzines to conventions, to write Serious and Constructive analyses of stories and the genre and even to index the frequency of SF tropes, to host talks by writers, or try to write themselves ... everything depended on voluntary, individual initiative. Sometimes the enthusiasm was there, but little competence. Sometimes there were highly competent people, but the enthusiasm waned.

The curious things about fandom in Canada were that fans were even more sparse than elsewhere, due to our low population and wide dispersal; but fans appeared in Canada as early as they appeared anywhere. Nils Helmer Frome in B.C. in the 1930s, for example; in the 1950s, Lesley Croutch in Ontario, Norm Clarke and Gina Ellis in Quebec, Harry Calnek in the Maritimes, and Norman G. Browne and the Hibited Men in Vancouver, among others.

Again, the demographic distribution meant that Canadian fans were largely relating to American fandom, which was already large and populous in the 1950s.

The next lesson seemed to be that the bigger the population centres, the more people you can expect to develop an enthusiasm for SF, and thereby for fandom ... but still as a fringe, a minority population.

The sense of being a minority receded a lot, when fans could assemble in any numbers. Eventually some correspondents told me how the Edmonton Science Fiction and Comic Art Society became a hotbed of club activities, fanpublishing, and conrunning in the 1970s ... *precisely because* a lot of undergraduate SF fans met a lot of coeducational students with the same interests at the same time, in the University of Alberta.

This leads to my favourite joke, “the Golden Age of SF Fandom is about 23”. (The optimum age for both youthful energy and disposable income, that is.) That probably makes better sense applied to Baby Boomers than to later generations.

By the 1970s and the 1980s, I guess the level of correspondence and meetings between fans and clubs around the world—by fanzines and APAs and by private letters, as well as by convention attendance—had led to an impression of fandom as a community, almost a town or city, if a globally-distributed one.

I have been told otherwise by Taral Wayne: that the mitosis of one fandom into many began well before the 1970s. Taral ought to know. (Taral was a member of Toronto fandom, and a well-known fanartist, for some decades. His fanzines and his correspondence circulated around the world, he attended many eastern and Midwest conventions [at the least], and he has written several fanhistorical articles, mostly revolving around the 1960s.) By his account, fandom had already shown the signs of a big city, including the emergence of local communities, to which people related more than they did to the whole municipality. But I get ahead of myself.

One concept called “fannish” grew up, among other models of fandom. “Fannish” fandom seemed to be for fans who enjoyed the references to SF tropes but took nothing seriously, and enjoyed fandom for its own sake.

Many fundamental conditions changed in the 1960s.

Mass media, such as films and radio serials, had always made token gestures toward science fiction and fantasy. When television arose, of course some broadcasting companies launched SF shows, but their popularity had unexpected effects. There are rumours of something called “Dalek fever” as a result of the long-running *Dr. Who* show. Then came *Star Trek* in 1966.

Bjo Trimble published a chronicle of what happened next in *The Good Ship Enterprise*. The story as I know it may be shown by Worldcon attendance figures, from 1970 onwards. Where the attendance levels at Worldcons had grown to over 2,000 by the time of the second Torcon (Worldcon 1972), attendance levels began to skyrocket to over 8,000.

Frederik Pohl remarked in *The Way the Future Was* that everything gets bigger over time, which certainly seemed to be the case for convention attendances, for fanzine copies and distributions, for SF clubs and for fandom in general. What could

not be predicted was the great increase in fandom—or, at least, people who called themselves fans—after the kids who watched *Star Trek* began to show up. Older fans found themselves quite outnumbered.

Another lesson: *numbers count*.

Older models of fan activity were also eclipsed. General-interest clubs became outnumbered by *Star Trek* clubs—and later, by clubs dedicated to one media franchise, or to one subfandom such as comics, costuming, gaming, filking, etc., etc. Fanzines by and for “fannish” fans found themselves outnumbered by “fanzines” featuring amateur *Trek* fiction, and which were offered for sale. (In a way, this recapitulated 1930s fanzines, which emulated newsstand pulp magazines—as well as broke young fans could do so with spirit duplicators and mimeographs, anyway.) Conventions by and for “fannish” fans, conceived in substance as extended-family gatherings, were outnumbered by “media” conventions.

Let me expand on this media convention model. Today we have a separate word for them, “gateshows”, but it took surprisingly long for a word to surface.

In the early 1980s, when I was learning about fandom mainly from a stack of 1970s fanzines, I came across a mimeographed edition of *File 770*—which used to be a fanzine dedicated to fan news, and is now a website—and an article about the conventions run by an entity called Doug Wright. This entity would come across a naïve SF club, sell them on participating in a prepackaged, for-profit convention, it would make all the decisions about guests and venue and events, the fans would do all the work, and Wright would take all the profits.

This appears to have been the model adopted by Paramount, and by other studios operating other media conventions, such as Creation Cons. (It took some time, but eventually Creation Cons withdrew from operations in Canada, due to a complaint that they were not paying some fees required by the Canada Revenue Agency.) There is a story, which I cannot substantiate, that some studios would deliberately schedule their conventions against fan-run conventions – in the same city at the same time, that is – and if the fans were attempting media conventions, require the advertised actors to show up at the studio-run convention.

There are other stories like this, but you get the point: *money talks*.

The most Canadian things to happen in fandom began to happen in the mid-1970s.

One of the outcomes of the 1972 Worldcon in Toronto—Torcon II—is that a number of French-speaking fans met each other and thought it was time to organize. The result was a community of SF, fantasy and horror writers, editors, and small publishers, mainly but not entirely in Quebec. They had their own models of fanzines, semiprozines (such as *Solaris*), and small-press publishing. They set up their own congress (“Boréal”). They developed their own SF awards (such as the Prix Boréal).

They conducted a good deal of communication and cross-pollination with like minds in Europe.

All this went on in the 1970s, conducted entirely in French, and (inevitably) out of sight of English-Canadians.

The next phase in whatever is wrong with us all was when Canadian-identity-fever hit SF fandom. The first I knew of it was when a correspondent mentioned offhand a voting ballot for the “Canadian SF and Fantasy Awards,” some time after the voting deadline. It took about five years of backing and filling to uncover and publish the story.

Canadian-identity-fever has to be explained, if you live in Britain or the United States. Try to imagine living in a country that split off from some mother country, where people periodically don’t know who they are or how to act and have to reinvent themselves. This, apparently, was a recurring public issue in Canada, and it recurred again in the mid- to late 1970s. Some of the same people concerned with Canadian identity (not coincidentally, students at Canadian universities) were also concerned with representing the nation in science fiction.

Maybe you can compare this concern with today’s concern to represent black, or African, or gender-diverse identities in science fiction.

First, there was Linda Ross-Mansfield’s attempt at a cross-Canada APA. Then, Robert Runté from the University of Alberta started *New Canadian Fandom*, a Canadian newszine (a fanzine dedicated to news about fandom). And then, in 1979, some English teachers in the Maritimes decided there should be a Canadian award for science fiction.

The first five years of the award were marked by some repeated failures of communication. If there are any lessons in the story, it appears that not only the teachers, but all parties involved laboured under false assumptions, cross-purposes and failures of communication. The teachers in the Maritimes had no idea of the thriving independent SF scene in Quebec, and when they learned about it, one of them imagined he had obtained a commitment from the late Joel Champetier for Boréal to host the awards one year. Maplecon in Ottawa was likewise uninformed one year that they were to host the awards.

Well, this is ancient history, quite unlike the way the awards are run now, and only serves to show how intelligent people can perform, if out of their depth.

Today, the Aurora Awards (renamed in 1987) are a well-run and diverse set of fan-voted awards, and are hosted in rotation by several conventions across Canada. A national committee administers the award, and there is a website (prixauroraawards.ca).

During the 1980s, some events and some news added up to two major impressions; but you may read them differently than I did.

One impression was that fans were a bit more capable of producing a fanzine – which one person can do alone – than they are capable of running conventions. In my admittedly limited experience, even an average, local, annual convention required a *bit* more organization, clear communication, and sustained attention than many fan groups were prepared to deliver. Your mileage may vary.

The fact that the total expense of holding a convention kept rising, decade by decade, escaped me because I was only a WCSFCCA secretary for a few years. The fact that no decade passed without several convention horror stories going the rounds did not. Hotels did not define conventions as fans did, and lost their enthusiasm for hosting SF conventions within a few years. Fans no longer volunteered for conventions in enough numbers, at least not in my town.

Granting that “convention” meant significantly different things in different regions, different countries, and different decades: still the fan-run convention as I knew it seemed to be just a little too complicated for average fans groups, combining as they did the features of a conference, a writers’ weekend, a film festival, a trade show, and sometimes a Shriners’ convention, frat party, or family reunion. Any one of these events would tax the abilities of a volunteer group, however large and skilled.

I never did articulate the issues successfully, though, and ran into another lesson. Bluntly, when fans aspire to hold conventions, they want to do *their own thing, their own way*.

It takes a certain maturity to admit that there are *any* limits to what you can do, let alone limits to how far you can do things your own way. Not everybody in fandom is that mature.

Another impression was that I had gone to bed one night, and woken up next day to a world almost, but not quite entirely, *unlike* the fandom I had grown used to.

Actually, I was very slow to recognize that contemporary fandom was not a culture of eager participants in reasoned speculation and other unpaid hobbies, but a culture of passive consumers of prepackaged media franchises, far more interested in costuming, in MMORG gaming, in computer animation and special effects, than in actually working on an actual event without pay. It was a subculture in its own right, but not my subculture.

Obviously, contemporary fans are not going to have the same stakes in fandom, or even the same fandoms as any fans over the age of 50. Fandom is not now a refuge for social marginals, as apparently it once was. Neither is it a dispersed community for people who have some imagination, some intellectual interests, or some scientific literacy. Even “SF” and “fandom” and “convention” don’t mean the same things.

The latest lesson is that by the time you are adjusted to a fashion or a social milieu, it has transmogrified into something else. Either adapt again, or find something longer-lasting.

The foregoing superficial overview sketches out what many of us are alluding to, when we talk about issues in fandom. The lessons may be of use to you, and you may find more lessons when you go deeper.

FICTION:

TÉLH ☂ ★ MOSS WHELAN

“... he was responding to his own city, through his portrait of the imaginary land.” Samuel Delaney, 2020.

“Hello, China Cat Sunflower,” said Thames Omen in broken Halkomelem. ‘Did you fart?’

The white teen had awoken in his electric blue tent and thought the purr was his mirror phone. But opening his eyes, the *Lóng* dragon on his chest told another story as smoke arose from its golden nostrils.

At the end of the Revolution, the wiry dragons of Vancouver leapt from their Chinatown lampposts and raced to the Universal Arts boutique at Number Forty-Nine, Pender Street. From there, each one found its way to a burrow such as the time-space-submarine belonging to Thames’ grandmother.

The boy carefully sniffed the air, and instead of a *Lóng* fart (which is worse than sinus ants) he smelled the earthy, steeped, *Aethiopian* magic beans called coffee on Earth.

He sat and stretched his clipped wings as the phone vibrated like boiling lead. He declined the call because it would be the fifteen year old Grey Hawk upstairs. She was a human and not from Terrapin like Thames. More importantly, the captain said Grey Hawk had caused the Revolution which cast her in a horrible light.

“Sorry,” Thames said, and he reached up to scratch behind Sunflower’s ear. But, the dragon threw back its head and jumped clear with mischief as it seemed to say in a gagging voice, “Syzygy.”

All this was irrelevant. The wight boy had other concerns. He had a VCON panel to attend in Paris where they would be discussing the ancient origins of carbon scrubbers. The moderator } quantum mechanic Jon Kalto { was a shin-kicking stickler, and in order to actually join the workshops, Thames would have to be on time: and, this was not easy for a landlocked wight teen used to diving between the temporal geography of Terrapin.

Beneath that, the submarine’s financial concerns trumped his ambitions. Great grandfather’s teeth were running out. A dentist in the sublime court of Bone, he’d put away extracted fillings into a small safe that was now almost empty save a diamond tooth.

Thames had applied for Universal Basic Income: WCSFA had only just set up UBI to help the displaced citizens of the cosmopolis. He figured the two thousand dollars a month would pay their debts, but how they would get food would be another

matter.

Terror swam in him. What if the UBI application was delayed? What if it was rejected? In that moment, he wanted nothing more than to sit in the airlock and smoke some pipeweed.

He crawled from the tent and flexed his vestigial wings: they itched and would have to be clipped soon. Grey Hawk said he should grow the feathers, which added further thorns to their forced accommodation together.

Outside the tent lay a stone room that was nothing like a submarine. Its frescoes had long since fallen and its tapestries had rotted. A large, red and white toadstool grew out of a stone sarcophagus full of dirt. The room dripped water and white spiders raced away.

On one wall lay the carved monogram of Bone which was like a fused T, X, and upside down T. Beneath that a shrine-like typewriter and mirror on a low table before a pillow. An aerobic alarm clock where a coffee machine tethered to a long extension cord perked.

He had slept in his heretical black tee shirt that bled the words YOU'RE JESUS from pink bullet holes. It didn't smell, so he didn't change it. Nor did he change his traditional Boné loincloth underwear.

He bowed to the bonsai-like mushroom and said in high *English*, "Good morning, great grandfather."

Forefront in his mind was leaving the submarine before Grey Hawk showed up. Otherwise, he would definitely be late for the scrubbing panel and he would possibly miss the class entirely. Grey Hawk and her friends would want to talk in the world language Babble and mirror text in International Phonetic Alphabet instead of good old-fashioned Neuro Linguistic Programming in *English*. Oddly, he didn't mind learning Halkomelem.

} Mother Anachronism stops the sign language narrative of the finger bones. Her eye sockets stare into your cosmic stroller and * satisfied * the bones emerge from their indigo sleeves to form words again. {

"Syzygy," said Sunflower.

"Did you know ..." said Thames. "That actually means something." He put more effort into his Halkomelem this time, and it sounded almost passable.

The dragon raised a hindquarter at this, and Thames pointed a finger and made a don't-you-dare face as Sunflower feigned concern.

The Terror swirled in Thames again, and he decided that he would have some pipeweed to 'Take-the-T-out-of-Terror' and make it an error message instead; because nothing was really wrong. Everything was fine, and it was just a bug in his programming.

He sat on the cold floor and began the psychological prayer by tapping on the keys. The mirror monitor churned, and he read the virtual intelligence's morning *Mantra Against Brokenness* as it appeared on the screen:

"I believe there is only ()ne person. Everyone is ()neself. What happens to them is what happens to me. I am the other." He pronounced *()ne* as *Own*, and he felt calmer

as he imagined the whole universe as a beautifully connected tree.

Yet, it wasn't enough. His thoughts spiraled from loftily hope. They had no money. There was only eighty years left before the Big Crunch where the universe would turn off Sol itself—the last remaining star.

He looked at his phone in anticipation of Grey Hawk's call. Maybe he should skip the panel and go off gallivanting. He could have fun with the other kids in the house.

He brushed and flossed with baking soda, and his thoughts rolled in the dripping bowl. Things were different back when they were influence peddlers. Grandmother had gotten rich off of the temporal espionage of Terrapin. It had not been the safest profession, but it had been hers.

He dressed in a red, plaid vest with tarnished buttons. Pants of the same make. He took the feathered and flowered *cappo* off the top of the tent and placed it on his head. Like a magician deflowering a tablecloth, he swept the tent's flysheet around himself as a cape-like jacket. Around his neck went a thin, orange scarf. The tent's pole became a tall shillelagh.

The days of the Boné influence were done. Revolution had taught them that they lived aboard an artificial reality on the generation ark Byzantium. In the dying days of the universe, the *outer* solar system of Earth had been ripped apart to create the funeral barque while Sol itself was the engine. Now, it was the final ember to power the final journey to the final century. Soon, the Om spark at the heart of the universe would extinguish and chaos would reign absolute.

The Spilhaus map of Terrapin with its star island constellations was irrelevant now; Grey Hawk's revolution had created a universal, supercontinent city where Thames and his grandmother were landlocked in Vancouver along with all the other peddlers of historical geography. Terrapin, the woven world of perception with its deep and shallow histories in an endless cycle of death and rebirth, had passed.

Thames rolled the ground sheet and sleeping bag into a rucksack that contained all manner of things. He reached in and found the enchanted briar pipe Duskgate, but the pouch was empty. There wasn't a single nugget of Presolar Grains pipeweed left.

The terror swirled in him again. He'd forgotten to drop by the pharmacopeia and pick up more pipeweed!

His mirror phone vibrated again, and he expected the now-cloudy rectangle to clear and a brown, Indigenous girl of fifteen talking in near perfect Halkomelem. Grey Hawk would be excited and anxious as usual.

But instead, he saw Captain Omen in her orange astronaut suit and umbrella-rifle outside the airlock. Aether swirled behind her like purple squid.

She said in High English: "UBI deposited by WCSFA." Her voice held the usual disdain for seemingly everything. "Open the airlock." She had forgotten her keys again and was stranded outside the tomb-ship.

Relief coursed through Thames. Finally, there was enough money to pay off the loan sharks of Vancouver. At least for now there was relief.

"Well that's good news," said Thames. Now, he could get as far away from Grey

Hawk as possible. He could get to the carbon scrubbing panel: he could attend the workshop afterward.

Sunflower seemed about to say something, but instead it expressed such a wretched stench that Thames howled.

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.

From: **Garth Spencer** – (December 12, 2020)

Letter of Comment on *BCSFAzine* #547 (December 2020)

Dear Graeme,

Thank you for the December 2020 *BCSFAzine*.

Apparently you and I share the attitude that some of BCSFA's history, or Vancouver's fanhistory, can be entertaining and even valuable to contemporary fans; and apparently that is a rare attitude. If you ever get serious about putting together a volume of fanhistory, I will participate and support you, although we may want to discuss how to present it and how to publish it, as a website for connected sagas, or through something like NESFA Press.

In fact, I was contemplating turning my materials into a collection of yarns about Canadian fanhistory, the more entertaining the better. For some reason the stories of Farley Mowat come to mind. As I recall, he never let the facts get in the way of a good story, although he never quite left the realm of the factual and credible. That may be the best way to go.

Onward.

Thank you also for the in-depth history of Norman G. Browne and the Hibited Men. This story is one of many omissions in my fanhistory materials. It was striking to notice the false assumptions he picked up, the occasional sense of inferiority or grandiosity he expressed, much as some other fans did. It was also sobering to see what his life came to, like Nils Helmer Frome's life.

Onward.

Thank you—again—for the summary of VCON's new direction. On the whole it appears Chris Sturges has accurately identified the weaknesses of traditional fan-run conventions—not exclusively VCON's weaknesses, frankly—and addresses them in the best way.

Onward.

Robert Sawyer's article addresses one of the most entertaining things about popular culture, the kind of fringe theories that people engage in when they're hard of thinking, or simply never grasped some skeptical rules. Personally I think fringe theories are a kind of folk art, as amusing as tall tales or stand-up comedy. Maybe I will send Sawyer the collection of daft fringe theories I am distributing as this year's Christmas present.

[The Q'Anon belief held by millions that that the Democrats are a great communist evil which must be destroyed because of the pedophile porno studio they are running in their secret base on the planet Mars sours the very concept of "fun" fringe theories for me. Afraid I no longer find "crazy" ideas amusing. I prefer reality.]

Onward.

Your review of *Rork!* reminds me of a number of older novels I keep rereading, by Heinlein and Wyndham and Piper and other authors. Sometimes the social-satire agenda is a bit obvious, but the story is fun anyway. (And now I am thinking about the unpublished Canadian fanhistory volume again.)

Onward.

My last loc embarrassed me. Feel free to edit my contributions for sense, especially my run-on sentences. At my age I should be past things like that.

After thinking about it I finally came up with a subject for another column, which is attached.

Yours truly, Garth Spencer

From: **Lloyd Penney** – (December 24, 2020)

Dear Graeme:

December 24, 2020

Dear BCSFen:

It's Christmas Eve, and it is a dreary, rainy and cold day out today, with the promise of snow later on, so until we can get going with dinner tonight, and go out to see Christmas lights, as we always do every Christmas Eve, there's time to get caught up on a lot of things, like a letter of comment on the latest BCSFAzine, issue 547.

I have always liked the idea of fan history, for it is interesting to learn why we do the things we do, and where conventions, art shows, masquerades, etc. came from, and who first did it. Also, when our local cons started, who chaired, etc. We have our own history we should be informed about and proud of. Many fan histories are often skewed by the agenda of the fan historian, who might not like some of the fans he or

she may have to cover in that history. Some histories have also been as dry as dust. If you want to place your own researches into a book or e-book format, I would say write them up into a series of .pdfs, History of Canadian Fandom Parts 1, 2, 3, 4, etc., get it out there, but let Canadian fans have a look first to see if there are factual questions or errors.

I have tried to be a professional writer a long time ago, and it didn't work for me, while it did work for others in my writing group. So, now, for the past two years, I have been editing, copyediting and proofreading for Ira Nayman and Steve Davidson for *Amazing Stories* magazine. In a couple of days, one of *Amazing's* new Selects books, *No Police = Know Future*, edited by James Beamon, will be released, and I am listed as an associate editor. I have had a look at a number of other books, including Sharon Lee and Steve Miller's *Ambient Conditions*, and I am listed as a proofreader for that book. This is the first time I have combined my years of editorial work with SF&F books ... can I call myself an SF editor now? I hope so, but I know there's a lot to learn yet. I am working on it, and I am hoping for further opportunities.

[Yes, you are an SF editor now. Fully justified by virtue of the experience you have gained. Now all you need is a new gig. Best wishes for success in that.]

If this pandemic carries on for much longer, yes, the old format of VCON, or any other convention, for that matter, will have to change. When that revival and change actually happens, don't know...possibly not until 2022 or so, when most people are vaccinated against COVID-19, and the virus is generally declared gone. I think a con could open with a minimum of guests and panels, for most people will need the company of their old friends, and the whole weekend may wind up being one gigantic group hug. Many of us are company-starved and hug-starved, and I suspect the con suite will be the most popular place at the con. Every con also has the problems Chris Sturges listed, fewer volunteers to make the event happen, and a demand for more bang for the buck, more from your membership. I know Ad Astra used to rely on extensive distribution of flyers and a multi-year membership database to get the word out. Extensive presence on social media helps to do the job now, but too many choose one advertising method over the other, while the correct choice is to choose ALL ways of advertising. Pro-run cons still have the depth of cash to bring in dozens, if not hundreds of guests from various moves and TV shows, and we simply can't compete if we are looking at new people.

The Arecibo dish generally fell apart, and not long after it was formally decommissioned, the Chinese government announced that they have an even bigger dish, and would open it up to the world's scientific community. Add in the Chinese lunar missions, and it appears that there is a concerted effort to push the US out of the lead when it comes to this branch of science. Once the virus is defeated, some money might be pushed towards a revival of American expertise in this field, but the Chinese seems to have infinite cash it is willing to spend on getting to the Moon, and then to Mars. It may be a renaissance, but the West may not be a part of it.

I don't have a lot of cash these days, but when *The Last Dangerous Visions* is published I will buy a copy. It truly will be a time capsule of stories written five decades ago, but never published.

The state of fandom...well, I think it's under suspension for the obvious reasons, but seeing if it can be restarted so there are gatherings and conventions to go to is another thing. Most times in the past, if you noticed that someone who you used to see at cons regularly wasn't around anymore, the reason often given would be lack of cash, or spouse laid down the law, no more, or even a couple said it was time to grow up, which didn't say much about the rest of us who felt we were grown up, but still having some fannish fun. I felt that we'd probably be around until fandom evaporated, or we did, so that's why we joined First Fandom, and no regrets there.

A great bit of fan history about Norman G. Browne. Wilson Heights is actually in Toronto, the area north of the 401 up to Shepherd Ave. W., between the Allen Road and Bathurst Street. Most maps mark it as Clanton Park these days. I did not know that poet Al Purdy had a fannish pedigree.

I am sure that some fans are pleased about Worldcon returning to North America after some successful Worldcons in Ireland, Finland and New Zealand, if only virtually. If they get their way, a December Worldcon? That could be virtual, but winter cons might be too much for some.

(Sorry I didn't make the Zoom call this past Monday...the Third Monday of every month was a fannish pubnight, but is now the fannish Zoom call, and I was there for a couple of hours.)

A page and a half is nothing to sneeze at, but the end comes at a time when we need to do some final preps for our own little Christmas, so time to close. A bit of turkey is in the oven for a slow cook, and once dinner is done, we will go out to see some Christmas lights. We wish you, and all readers, the best of Christmases, and a Happy New Year, almost guaranteed seeing it won't be 2020 anymore, and we all have some vaccines coming up soon. Take care, and see you all next issue.

Yours, Lloyd Penney.

From: **Felicity Walker** – (January 01 , 2021)

Letter of Comment on *BCSFazine* #547 (December 2020)

Editorial: The God-Editor Speaks!": "Oh God, Don't Tell Me I'm a Writer!:
"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." I'm no longer young or a writer but I can sympathise. I want the plot to move forward. I don't want detailed descriptions of what the characters are feeling or what the

scenery looks like. For me, though, dialogue is action. Actual action is just more padding.

You can't go too crazy trying to appeal to people with short attention spans, though. Some people get bored and fidgety after two seconds and that's not enough time to show anything worthwhile.

[I frankly don't want readers with short attention spans. If people aren't prepared to read a book they shouldn't bother reading books. And the concept that dialogue is preferable to description cuts much of the beauty and poetry of the English language out of literature, in my opinion. Besides, I refuse to pander to people with short attention spans. Most people hate reading, anyway. I don't write for the majority. I write for me, and whichever luckless individuals happen to share my tastes.]

Art Portfolio: Covers of *Vanations*: I like the logo of *Vanations* and that June 1952 cover collage is cool. I notice that the lettering got less careful as the zine wore on. However kudos to Norman Browne for sticking with the Broadway font all the way through.

The Future of VCON as Best I Understand It: Sounds like things are cooking. Whether I can attend or not will depend on COVID, how much money I'm making at the time (so far not good), membership costs, hotel room costs, and whether there's free parking. I haven't missed a VCON in over 15 years, but if I have to miss this one, I wish them well anyway. I may be able to donate some small amount to defray the cost of paying back FUE.

Void Breather Bombast: "Chang-5 Grabbed Lunar Soil": "Siziwang" is a great word!

Man on Mars by 2024: It sounds like Elon Musk is nudging us towards the future we were promised in SF of the 1980s. Good!

Books to Be Ignored: Rork!—By Avram Davidson: One reason I'm glad I read this review is that I never knew the word *autochtone* was pronounced *otokton*. In my head I'd been hearing it as "auto-cha-tone," meaning something that is self-chthonic (whatever /that/ means). Today I learned from your review that it means "native-born."

Messed-Up Movie Mopes: *The Devil's Rain* (1975): Not a good movie, but I'm glad I've seen it once. The best part is indeed Ernest Borgnine. Corbis in goat mode is a good effect but also funny at the same time.

The "P" on his station wagon could have stood for "Preston" but why he would have a monogrammed car I don't know.

Ook! Ook! Slobber! Drool! (Letters of Comment): Lloyd Penney/Felicity Walker: I'd commented elsewhere that Trump is like outgoing councilman Ron Miller in *Robocop* (1987), who takes hostages at City Hall and refuses to leave, until Robocop bursts through the wall and throws him out a window.
