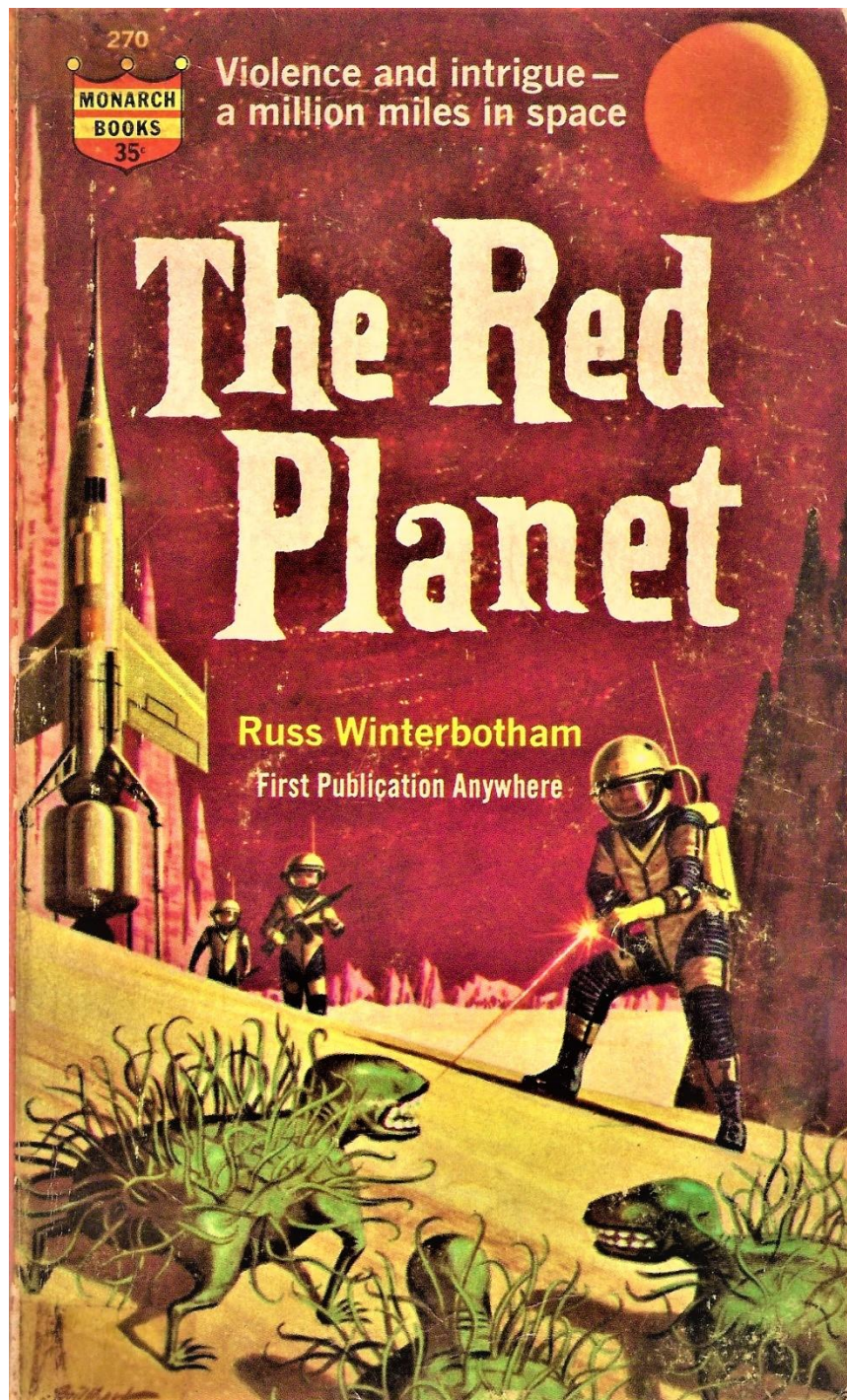


BCSFAZINE

Clubzine of the British Columbia Science Fiction Association
(Issue #541 – June, 2020)



(Issue #541 – June, 2020 – Vol.46 #6 WN541 – 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 >

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

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CURRENT BCSFA EXECUTIVE

Chair: Position open

Vice Chair: Position open.

Treasurer: Kathleen Moore.

Secretary: Barb Dryer.

BCSFazine Editor: R. Graeme Cameron.

Keeper of the FRED Book: Ryan Hawe.

FRED Organizer: Michael Bertrand.

VCON Ambassador for Life: Steve Forty.

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

FRED ZOOM MEETINGS – (Graeme Cameron’s FRED SF Fen Confab Meetings)
— Every Monday 6:00 PM (PST) to 9:00 PM (PST). All SF Fen welcome.
Contact me at < the.graeme.bcsfazine@gmail.com > and I’ll send you the link.

SUBMISSION DEADLINE

Midnight, June 30th. My simple layout design ensures it will get into the following month’s issue to be published no later than July 2nd. Guaranteed.

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Cover Credit

Cover – By Ralph Brillhart.

EDITORIAL: THE GOD-EDITOR SPEAKS!

Needless to say (and of course you take for granted I will always say “needless to say” when it is needless to say it), I am thrilled to receive two nominations for the 2020 Aurora awards, namely

- For my book and magazine review “Clubhouse” columns in *Amazing Stories* (online) Magazine more or less every Friday throughout 2019, and
- For four issues (#9 to #12) of my semi-professional Speculative fiction Magazine *Polar Borealis* I published online in 2019.

Both nominations are in the same category: Best Fan Writing and Publications. In my wildest fantasies I can imagine winning both in a tie vote result, something no one has ever done before. That would be wonderfully silly.

However, I am up against stiff competition, including my fellow Amazing columnist Steve Fahnstalk (full list of nominees below in “Literary Shenanigans”) so, realistically, I have, at best, a one-in-five chance of winning. Still, better odds than the lottery. And for some illogical reason, which I cannot fathom at all, I feel an urge to point out that everybody should vote for me simply because. From my point of view it is the best course for everyone to take, and, of course, I want what’s best for everybody, so do yourself a favour and vote for me! There you have it. A shining example of my extreme altruism. Verily, I humbly blush. It’s fun being so unselfish.

Be that as it may, I confess I am a tad disappointed that none of the eligible contributors to *Polar Borealis*, even though I made sure they were in the eligibility lists, were nominated this year. After all, in 2018 three of the poets I published in 2017 were nominated, and one of them, Matt Moore, won! Ah well, I plan to keep on publishing PB into the foreseeable future, so maybe next year

I hope there wasn’t any confusion over the comparative status of the zine and its contributors. The semi-professional category isn’t recognized by the CSFFA. You’re either professional or fannish, based on the fact you either earn money or do it for free. I charge no money for *Polar Borealis*. Even the ads I place for free. So, under CSFFA rules, it is considered a fannish publication.

On the other hand, my contributors are paid out of my pension funds. Granted, at rate levels ludicrously below the SFWA standard, but nevertheless counting as a sale. Under CSFFA rules, their sales to *Polar Borealis* are considered Professional activity. Thus, they are eligible for awards in professional categories.

Admittedly a schizophrenic situation. Why not make things simple by converting *Polar Borealis* into a professional magazine, i.e. charge money for it? I looked into the myriad aspects of running PB as a business. Hideously complicated. Hideously expensive. Impossible for a one-man operation. And if I go full bore and employ others plus distribute hard copies and do all the constant juggling of subscribers, patrons, grants, store sales so necessary to financial survival, hideously stressful.

Nope. Bizarre as it sounds, earning zero income is the most successful financial option of all. It renders me immune to the vagaries of the market and public taste. So

much so that I suspect professional magazine editors secretly envy my business practices. They're constantly in danger of going out of business. I don't have that problem. Weird, but true.

What about BCSFAzine? It varies in size from issue to issue. Too big to realistically print hard copies, especially as BCSFA has no actual income. Perhaps someone could reduce issues to teeny print size to cut down on the number of pages, but who would want to read such a thing? All I am prepared to do is what I do. Costs nothing. In theory BCSFAzine can sail on forever. Any hard copies would have to be the choice of the executive and membership and nothing to do with me.

Anyway, getting back to CSFFA and the Aurora awards, there's a minor controversy that crops up every year. Some old-time traditional fen are wont to complain that the Aurora Awards are no longer fannish and have gone "filthy pro" (to use archaic fannish slang). Well, yes and no.

When the awards first started up in 1980 the majority of fen voting were probably "traditional" fen, i.e. fanzine fans, with a healthy dose of club/convention fen. This is no longer the case. Let's face it, fanzine fandom is a fad, an unusually long-lived one to be sure, but definitely no longer what it once was, at least in Canada. I know of only two active traditional fen in B.C., myself included. Taral Wayne commented online recently that Toronto is no longer significant in [traditional] fandom. True. I suspect the number of "active" traditional fen in all of Canada can be counted on the fingers of two hands, maybe just one hand. Still a bunch of former traditional fen around, but no longer active. Without a doubt, the vast majority of fen voting for the Aurora Awards are modern fen who've never heard of traditional fandom. So, given that most of the Aurora electorate are totally different from fans of yore, it can be argued that the people voting for the Auroras are longer "fannish" in the strictest sense. True enough. Times have changed.

However, to argue that the awards themselves have been betrayed by a shift in emphasis toward awards for pros is simply not true. The focus of the awards has always been about fen voting for pros. Always.

In fact the first five Conventions hosting the awards were strictly professional awards. Not till 1986 was the first fan award presented, to Garth Spencer. For a while there were 2 pro awards and 1 fan award. Then, in 1989, 6 pro awards and 3 fan awards. 1991 presented 7 pro awards and 3 fan awards. This carried through to 2010. Note that during this period 3 of the pro awards were French language. At some point after 2010 (my records only go that far) the French language Auroras were handed from CSFFA to Boréal for administration. I confess I don't know off the top of my head how many Aurora-Boréal awards are currently presented. I do know that Aurora-CSFFA English language pro awards have increased to 8, with the fan awards steady at 3.

My point is that the emphasis of the awards over the years has always been on fans voting for their favourite pros. The nature of the fans may have changed, but the focus on pro awards is nothing new. It has always been thus.

And, indeed, the pro awards are very healthy. Lots of pros out there. It's the

fannish awards that are struggling. Traditional fen have hardly any peers they can appeal to for votes. If you publish a fanzine, you are trying to get votes from an electorate that has never heard of you. Quite a conundrum. Hence the expansion of fandom publications to include online blogs, online columns, and bizarre oddities like a semi-professional fiction magazine that costs nothing to “buy.” Unlike fanzines, those are popular fads with modern fen (well, I think there *are* fanzines more popular than my *Polar Borealis* but, as always, PB is an anomaly to be ignored so as not to interfere with the overall trend). That fanzine fandom is less than a major influence nowadays is proven by the fact that this year, once again, not a single traditional fanzine was nominated. Sigh.

It is entirely possible that no fanzine will ever be nominated in the future. Not enough readers. No significant awareness among fen. Fannish creativity hasn’t come to an end. It still flourishes. It’s merely shifted away from a dying tradition.

So, Pro Auroras continue to be the central focus as was always the case since the very beginning. Fan-Auroras also survive, but in an ongoing state of mutation reflecting the evolving tastes and interests of contemporary fen. The old parameters no longer apply. Modern prodom and modern fandom are both healthy organisms. It’s the old fandom that’s dead, Jim.

Except for old curmudgeons like me. A vanishing breed. But what do you expect? Nothing and nobody is immortal, least of all cultural fads. It’s in the nature of things. I, for one, embrace my nostalgic regressions for as long as I live. That, too, is both natural and inevitable. Frankly, I see myself as a force of nature. But then, I would, wouldn’t I, being the God-Editor and all.

If you are a traditional fan, no need to despair. There’s still time to have fun. Whole point of being a fan, any kind of fan, the way I see it. And the Auroras are very much part of the fun. Thus I support them. You should, too.

And now for something completely different.

I cherish SF&F for its thrilling escapism. Thus I am delighted to announce it may be time to abandon reality. We may not have a choice. Reality is abandoning us.

Forbes Magazine laid it out; we are entering the post-truth era.

Question: Who killed truth?

Answer: A Canadian. Blame Canada!

Seems, back in 2014, University of Montreal PHD student Ian Goodfellow invented the first GAN (generative adversarial network), basically consisting of two AI entities aiding and critiquing each other as they compete to create new images from a database of images. This technology has led to the creation of “Deepfake” videos which are increasingly difficult to prove are fake.

Naturally, the porno industry, the biggest business on the web, was first to introduce deepfakes. There are now thousands of porno videos depicting prominent celebrities and politicians having sex. It will soon be impossible to blackmail such, as they can present the case to the public that any genuine footage is just deepfake. Two politicians in Malaysia and Brazil have already done so. Experts can’t decide

conclusively one way or the other.

Recently a video depicting Mark Zuckerberg boasting that the purpose of Facebook is to manipulate and rip off the public went viral. This may or may not be true of Facebook's purpose, but the video itself was deepfake, an artificial construct. Since the GAN technology was released free as part of an open source ethos, it has proliferated and evolved under the active interest of governments, intelligence agencies, corporations, organized crime, hackers, and damn near everyone with a subversive agenda of any kind. Even a disgruntled individual in his basement can make use of it. Is this anything to worry about?

Well, a "I'm still alive and wonderful" video released by the President of Gabon resulted in massive riots followed by a military coup attempt since many suspected it was a deepfake cover-up of his death. Turned out the video, unrealistic and fakish-looking as it was, was genuine. Probably filmed on a bad hair day when he wasn't feeling his best, or something.

Point is, GANs are constantly finetuning the quality of what they are capable of producing. The deepfakes are getting better and better. Soon it will be impossible to tell whether a video is genuine or fake. This will have two consequences.

One: all "documentary" footage will be suspect. Expect visual history to be "rewritten." Say, for example, footage of Hitler and Churchill talking in English about their conspiracy to create a WWII hoax in order to destroy the Soviet Union. Or President Roosevelt declaring before Congress that he was responsible for tricking Japan into attacking Pearl Harbour because he wanted America to abandon its interests in the Pacific. Any nonsense you can think of may well become official "history."

Two: Contemporary politicians will deploy deepfakes to shred the reputation of their opponents. They already do this through clever editing of political commercials to imply the worst possible interpretation of this and that. Sooner than you think they will be able to show voters convincing fake footage of their opponents doing and saying outrageously horrible things, like Trump "admitting" Putin is his master, or Biden "admitting" the first thing he will do as President is seize all privately-owned firearms. Whatever pushes the fear buttons of the voters will be exploited.

To sum up, in the not-too-distant future you won't be able to trust *anything* you see on TV or online. We will be living in a form of 1984 beyond George Orwell's imagination. For the next generation truth will be impossible to establish. Truth will be obsolete.

No problem. I suspect "news junkies" will disappear as popular taste switches to fiction and fantasy. Video games will become massively more popular than they already are. Escapist media will grow beyond the wildest dreams of even the greediest Hollywood entrepreneurs. Escapist fiction will flourish in one form or another.

Actually, I'm not delighted at this prospect. I confess I feel rather sad over the impending demise of facts and objective truth. These were always somewhat precarious and debatable at the best of times; that they will be replaced with the worst sort of propaganda accepted as gospel truth is a tad dispiriting.

However, this scenario, if it comes about, will be a gradual transformation over many decades. There's still time to have fun. That be my happy mantra, my motto. Definitely worth keeping in mind.

Cheers! *The Graeme*

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

< the.graeme.bcsfazine@gmail.com >

ODDS AND SODS ABOUT THIS ZINE

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

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

WHAT THE GOD-EDITOR WOULD LIKE TO PUBLISH

Basically, contributions by fen like you!

VOID BREATHER BOMBAST

Twenty tons of space debris hits Earth – Some people are worried the Chinese Military's build-up of anti-ship cruise missiles grants them dominance in the West Pacific. Ah, but they have to aim properly to do any good. On May 11th a twenty ton chunk of Chinese space debris (part of a Long March 5B rocket launched May 5th) came down toward New York city. It missed. Instead it flew directly overhead and crashed in Cote D'Ivoire. See? Poor targeting. Nothing to worry about (unless you happen to live in West Africa).

Previously, the American Skylab Space Station successfully struck Western Australia in 1979, and the Soviet Union's Salyut 7 smacked exactly on target in Argentina in 1991. Once the current International Space Station is abandoned (it will be eventually), I wonder which continent will be chosen for impact? They'll have to be careful, since the recent incident suggests aiming standards are slipping.

US Space Force Imitates Captain Kirk – And you thought only fen are inspired by SF movies? The US Space Force has adopted a new computer program called *Kobayashi Maru* after the battle simulation Captain Kirk notoriously cheated in order to win an unwinnable game in his cadet days. The real world program is designed to

track objects in near-Earth orbit, rocket launches, and such, and seamlessly share the info with a limited number of allies, including Canada. (We are in NORAD, after all.) I find this very reassuring. After all, US missile silo computers still use giant floppy discs. Been a long time since their launch-crew computers were upgraded. Decades in fact. Nice to see at least part of the US military is as modern as can be. Perhaps because the Space Force has a software development division named *Kessel Run*. SF has a wider influence than you think.

NASA on Rocket Engine Buying Spree – NASA just placed an order worth \$1.79 billion with Rocketdyne for another 18 RS-25 engines to go with its new SLS behemoths designed to return astronauts to the Moon. Note that the first of the Artemis missions will be unmanned. The Orion Spacecraft will go into orbit around Luna for 6 to 23 days (depending on the whim of Mission Control?) spewing 13 cubsats to aid future missions. This and the following 3 missions will not rely on the new rocket engines but on 16 reconditioned RS-25 engines left over from the space shuttle program. A wise cost-saving measure considering the SLS has already cost \$20 billion. The SLS rocket, which *Popular Mechanics* describes as “comically big,” is 212 feet high and incorporates 4 RS-25 engines producing 2 million pounds of thrust. (If this is comical, *Popular Mechanics* must think the even bigger Saturn 5 of yore was “hilariously humongous.”) Anyway, hope it works. The SLS (Space Launch System) rocket has yet to be test launched. Keep your fingers crossed.

Martian Mud is Weird – Assuming there is any. Seems some volcanoes on Mars may have spewed a near-liquid mud of some sort some time or another. Similar mud on Earth flows pretty much like water, albeit more slowly. Nasa used a huge vacuum chamber to pour mud under Martian atmospheric and temperature conditions. It ends to clump and move slowly in lobes being pushed from behind, rather like lava flows on Hawaii. Not sure what the practical application is.

Green Slime Even Weirder – Footage has been released of astronauts aboard ISS playing with a batch of Nickelodeon green slime. Previous reports indicated it was brought aboard at the insistence of the Russians. To do with studying fluid mechanics. As you might expect, the results were a bit messy. Amusing to see that the crew suspended a white sheet as a backdrop to take spill and splatter. Even more amusing to see what happened when they pricked a balloon filled with slime. The slime retained the balloons shape and the skin of the balloon shrunk across the surface of the slime only to be subsumed entirely within. If you ask me what’s going on I figure it’s a not-so-secret program to weaponize green slime! First it is balls of slime, then blobs of slime, then hungry blobs ... you get the picture.

Space Force Flag unveiled by Trump – He stood there taking the credit while an officer waved it about, or maybe just held it at an angle to show as much of it as possible. Hard to tell. All I saw was a still photo of the event. Anyway, what struck me forcibly, apart from the Star Trek Logo, was the vast amount of black background on the flag. I immediately conjured up the black flags of ISIS. Co-incidence? I can just picture the flag hanging limp for lack of wind and being mistaken for an ISIS banner. I sense another conspiracy theory forming. Who knew Trump is a follower of ISIS? No

more daft than many another theory making the rounds. The people who design flags don't often think things through.

Galilean Moons Formed from Grains of Sand – So goes a new theory announced in the New York Times. I couldn't read much past the headline because paywall. Doesn't matter. After all, I formed from a tiny grain of protoplasm so what's the big deal? To make something big all you need is a grain of this or that. I did manage to read far enough to note that what inspired the scientist to think in these terms was the sight of a broken beer bottle. Hmmm. Not surprised, really. I used to rely on such for my flashes of inspiration.

Space Shuttle Launches – Went up May 17th. No, no, not THE space shuttle. The little one. The U.S. Air Force guy. The X-37B. It's about 29 feet long with a wingspan of 15 feet and has a cargo bay 6.8 feet long and 3.9 feet wide. Unmanned of course. Tends to go up for months at a time doing Ghu knows what. There have been five missions to date, spending a total of 8 years in orbit. This, the 6th mission, is not expected to return to Earth till some time in 2022. The Air Force has casually claimed that the space plane's primary experiment is to gather energy with solar panels in order to project beams of power down to Earth. Ooh, an alternate energy source, good for the environment, is the implication. Yeah, sure, why not? The US military is famed for doing a lot of research on how to protect the environment. Call me cynical, but I'm thinking Particle Beam Acceleration Weapon at the very least. Ah well, practical results should be obvious to all in about twenty years.

Pluto Sucking in Big Time – Pluto breathes out when it gets closer to the sun, its surface ice sublimating nitrogen, methane, and carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. Then, when Pluto's orbit carries it away from the sun, the lower temperatures cause these gases to freeze out and come crashing down in one heck of an ice storm. That's what's happening now, but at a rate 20 times greater than what scientists had anticipated. So powerful an atmosphere collapse indicates a sharp intake of breath. Seems to me Pluto is suddenly worried about something. Maybe because it started paying attention to our TV news broadcasts.

Alien Life Quite Neighbourly – Alpha Centauri is the closest star system to Earth, only 4.7 light years distant. It's actually a triple star, with Rigil Kentaurus and Toliman orbiting each other, and further out, the red dwarf star Proxima Centauri, which is actually the closest star, only 4.24 light years away. Turns out it has an earth-sized planet, named Proxima B, orbiting it within the habitable zone. If there's water, for instance, it would exist in liquid form. Unfortunately it is being bombarded with X-Rays from Proxima Centauri, 400 times more powerful than what the Earth receives, but if Proxima B has any sort of atmosphere, the X-rays won't get through to the surface. Conditions could be benign for life, and depending on how stable those conditions are, life may have evolved there.

How truly convenient the possibility of alien life is so close! In the 1980s NASA designed Project Longshot, a nuclear-powered interstellar probe designed to reach the Alpha Centauri system in just 100 years. Surely by now advancing technology has reduced the flight time to only 90 years? That's not too long to wait. Doable.

SpaceX Starship Blows up on Launch Pad – On Friday, May 29th, a static test resulted in a massive explosion when the main Raptor engine was ignited. Not only was the launch vehicle destroyed, the launch facility itself apparently suffered damage. This is the third Starship launch vehicle to suffer a serious accident while being tested. Expect the first actual launch to be delayed. Fortunately, the Starship system has nothing to do with the more reliable and proven SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket. Starship is still at the prototype stage. There's a reason why the newest technology is called "cutting-edge technology." It's as sharp and dangerous as hell until all the bugs have been worked out.

Milky Way Black Hole Puts On Happy Face – Apparently the black hole at the centre of our galaxy "lit up" and no one knows why. The black hole (that's "Mr. Sagittarius A" to you) is 400 million times more dense than our sun (which has a much higher IQ) so of course it is invisible, no light can escape from it. But everything it feeds on gets all sparkly and excited when drawn into its maw. That we can see. In the course of a mere 2 hours on May 13th the doomed stars nearest the black hole increased luminosity 75 times above normal. Scientists appear to assume a particularly tasty tidbit came within reach. I know better. I think it means Sagittarius A has entered a feeding frenzy phase. Darn good thing our solar system is in an outer arm of our spiral galaxy. Should be a while before we get gobbled up. A few years at least.

THE DRAGON TAKES FLIGHT

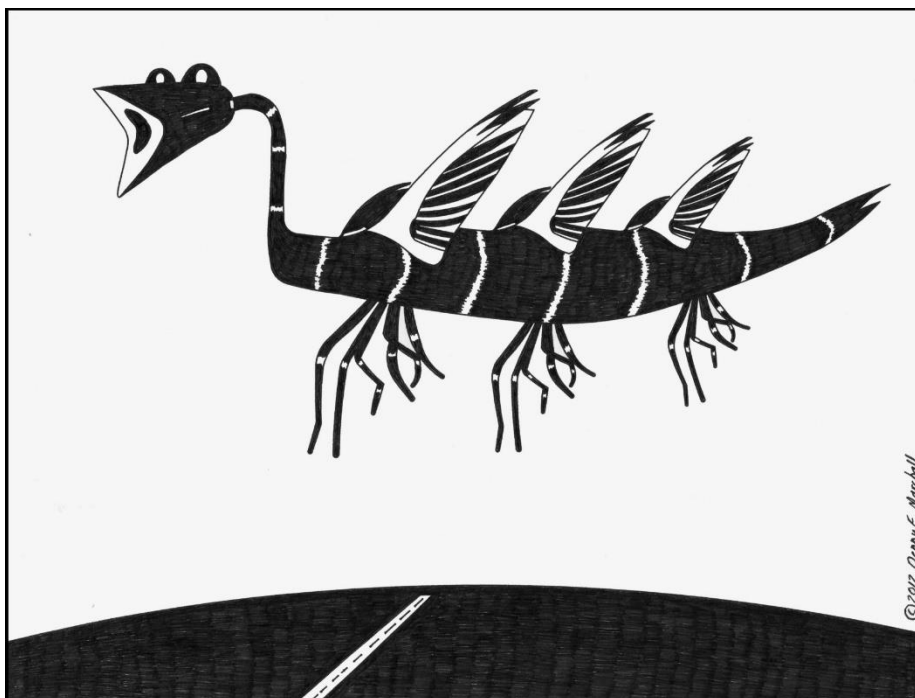
I used to be a connoisseur of Saturn 5 lift-offs back in the Apollo mission days. I'd kneel in front of the TV muttering a mantra as the count-down reached ignition, namely "Don't screw up! Don't screw up!"

Oh, I wasn't referring to the risks of the launch. I wasn't addressing Mission Control. I was chattering at the CBS (I always watched the Walter Cronkite channel for space stuff) video feed director. As the mighty Saturn slowly, unbelievably slowly, left the ground and gathered speed, the scene would switch among multiple camera views. Done right, the live experience was majestic and awesome. Done poorly, if the director was in an artsy mood, the sense of "being there" was lost and the experience diminished. This happened several times in the later missions.

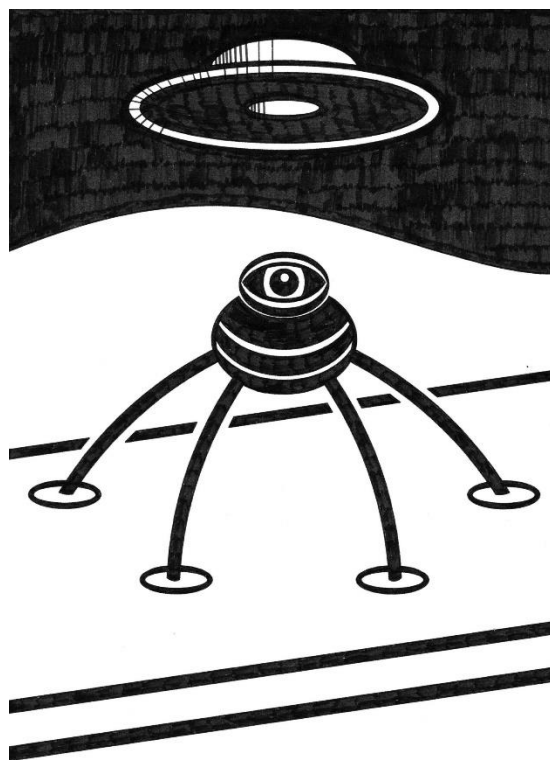
I got up early, Saturday May 30th, but fell asleep for a nap before the SpaceX Dragon capsule was carried aloft by the Falcon 9 rocket. Failed to wake up in time. No live launch for me. Damn!

Checking online, the BBC had a 12-second clip. CNN a couple of minutes, but an abomination. Steady audio of the countdown, but edited version of the launch. Still counting down when the Dragon was thousands of feet off the ground. Bad editor! Bad! ... But congrats to NASA, SpaceX, and Doug and Bob for a great flight.

DENNY E. MARSHALL ART PORTFOLIO



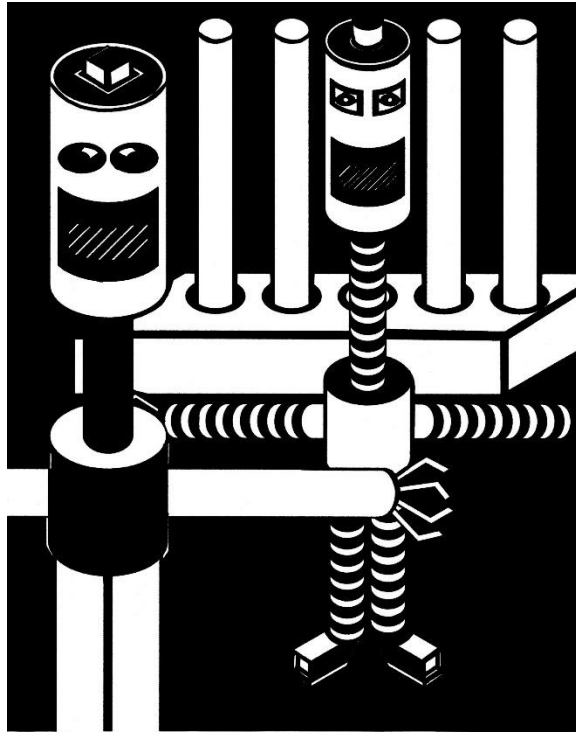




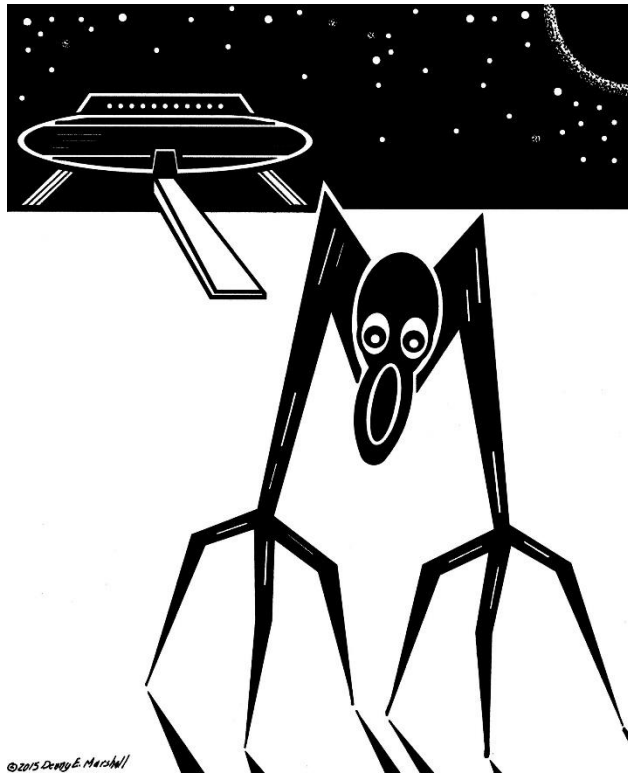
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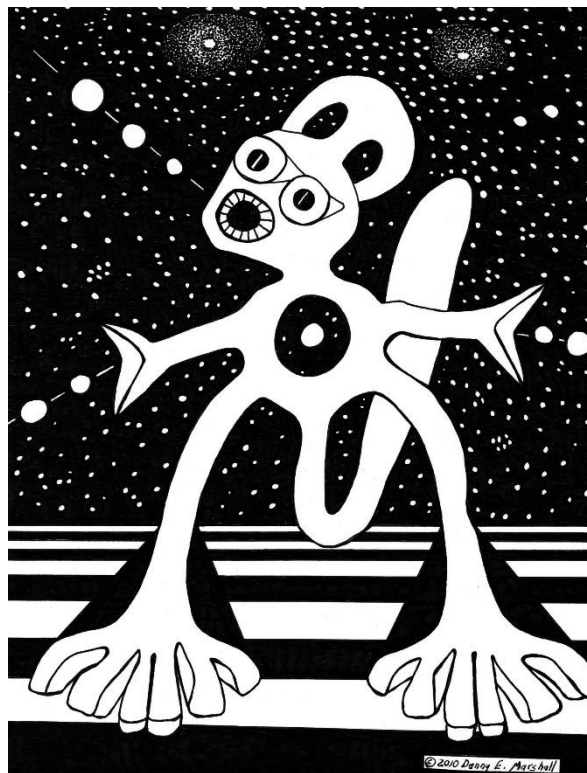


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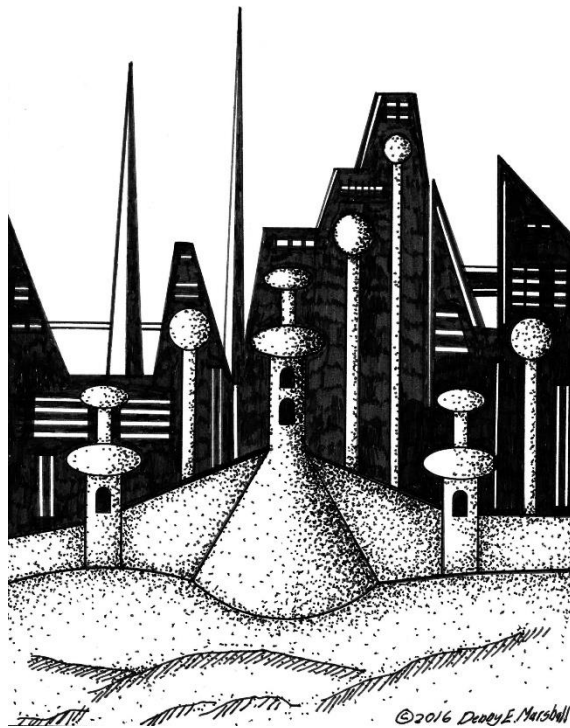












LITERARY SHENANIGANS

Solaris 2020 Award announced – Josée Bérubé won for her short story “Les Épinettes à corneilles.” She will receive \$1,000 and her story will be published in an upcoming issue of Solaris, Quebec’s oldest French Language Speculative Fiction Magazine. I believe one posting online stated this would be her first published story. Naturally, I can’t find that announcement again to confirm it. At any rate, certainly it is the first time this particular story of hers will be published. Congratulations!

Tähtivaeltaja Award Announced – Of course you know Tähtivaeltaja is Finnish for “Star Rover.” The award was announced by the Helsinki Science Fiction Society on May 13th. It goes to Canada’s own Margaret Atwood for her novel “Testamentit” or, as it is known in English, “Testament.” Always nifty to see a Canadian author win an international award. Congratulations!

Bakka-Phoenix Books Urges Caution – Ontario began to loosen its pandemic lockdown mid-month. On May 19th this famous Toronto bookstore specializing in SF&F books announced it would not yet be reopening to the public because “We don’t feel that the COVID-19 situation in Ontario has reached a point where we can provide a safe environment for our customers to shop in, or where we can comfortably ask our staff to resume commuting and working with people. We’ll continue curbside pick-ups and mailing orders.” A great deal of common sense exhibited here. There have been too many cases of communities easing lockdown only to see the number of infected shoot up again. I can only applaud their caution.

Aurora Award Voting Begins Soon – On June 20th. Meanwhile, go to the CSFFA Aurora site, join up, and download all the books and stories, poems, magazines, etc. that are up for awards and start reading now!

Go to < [Aurora Awards](#) >

2020 Aurora Award Ballot

This ballot is for works done in 2019 by Canadians. The Aurora Awards are nominated by members of the Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy Association. The top five nominated works were selected. Additional works were included where there was a tie for fifth place. The awards ceremony will be held online in conjunction with When Words Collide (Calgary) on August 15th.

Best Novel

Haunting The Haunted - by E. C. Bell, Tyche Books
The Gossamer Mage - by Julie E. Czerneda, DAW Books
A Brightness Long Ago - by Guy Gavriel Kay, Viking Canada
The Quantum Garden - by Derek Künsken, Solaris Books
Jade War - by Fonda Lee, Orbit Books
Gods of Jade and Shadow - by Silvia Moreno-Garcia, Del Rey

Best Young Adult Novel

Wolf's Bane - by Kelley Armstrong, K.L.A. Fricke Inc
The Brilliant Dark: The Realms of Ancient, Book 3 - by S.M. Beiko, ECW Press

The Ehrich Weisz Chronicles: Metamorphosis - by Marty Chan, Fitzhenry & Whiteside
Bursts of Fire - by Susan Forest, Laksa Media Groups Inc
Murder at the World's Fair - by MJ Lyons, Renaissance

Best Short Fiction

This Is How You Lose the Time War – by Amal El-Mohtar and Max Gladstone, Saga Press
Clear as Quartz, Sharp as Flint – by Maria Haskins, Augur Magazine, issue 2.1
Alice Payne Rides – by Kate Heartfield, Tor.com Publishing
Little Inn on the Jianghu – by Y.M. Pang, The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction, September
Modigliani Paints the World – by Hayden Trenholm, Neo-Opsis, Issue #30
Blindside – by Liz Westbrook-Trenholm, Amazing Stories, v. 77, issue no. 1, Fall

Best Graphic Novel

The Handmaid's Tale: The Graphic Novel – by Margaret Atwood and Renee Nault, McClelland & Stewart
Krampus is My Boyfriend! – by S.M. Beiko, Webcomic
It Never Rains – by Kari Maaren, Webcomic
Carpe Fin: A Haida Manga – by Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas, Douglas & McIntyre
Dakwākāda Warriors – by Cole Pauls, Conundrum Press

Best Poem/Song

The Girl who Loved Birds – by Clara Blackwood, Amazing Stories Magazine, v. 76, no. 3, Spring
At the Edge of Space and Time – by Swati Chavda, Love at the Speed of Light, Ancient Hound Books
Steampunk Christmas – by David Clink, Star*Line, v. 42, no. 4., Fall
The Day the Animals Turned to Sand – by Tyler Hagemann, Amazing Stories Magazine, v. 76, issue no. 3, Spring
Totemic Ants – by Francine P. Lewis, Amazing Stories Magazine, v. 77, issue no. 1, Fall
Beauty, Sleeping – by Lynne Sargent, Augur Magazine, issue 2.2
Bursts of Fire – by Sora, theme song for book trailers

Best Related Work

PodCastle by Jen R. Albert and Cherae Clark, Escape Artists Inc.
Nothing Without Us by Cait Gordon and Talia C. Johnson, Renaissance
Neo-opsis Science Fiction Magazine edited by Karl Johanson
Lackington's Magazine, edited by Ranylt Richildis, (online)
Dave Duncan's Legacy by Robert Runté, On Spec Magazine issue 111
Augur Magazine, Issue 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 published by Kerrie Seljak-Byrne
On Spec Magazine, Diane L. Walton, Managing Editor, The Copper Pig Writers Society

Best Visual Presentation

The Umbrella Academy, Steve Blackman, Dark Horse Entertainment
V Wars (Season 1), William Laurin and Glenn Davis, High Park Entertainment
Killjoys (Season 5), Michelle Lovretta and Adam Barken, Temple Street Productions
Murdoch Mysteries (Ep. 10-18/Season 12 and Ep. 1-9/Season 13), Peter Mitchell and Christina Jennings, Shaftesbury Films

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

Best Artist

Samantha M. Beiko, cover for Bursts of Fire

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

Lynne Taylor Fahnestalk, A Rivet of Robots in On Spec Magazine and Cartoons in Amazing Stories

Nathan Fréchette, covers for Renaissance Press

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

Best Fan Writing and Publications

R. Graeme Cameron, weekly columns in Amazing Stories (online)

R. Graeme Cameron, Polar Borealis, Issues #9 to #12, editor

Jennifer Desmarais, Travelling TARDIS, JenEric Designs

Steve Fahnestalk, weekly columns in Amazing Stories (online)

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

Christina Vasilevski, Books and Tea

Best Fan Organizational

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

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

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

Randy McCharles, chair, When Words Collide, Calgary

Sandra Wickham, Creative Ink Festival, Burnaby, BC

Best Fan Related Work

Brandon Crilly and Evan May, Broadcasts from the Wasteland

Kari Maaren, Music on YouTube Channel

Derek Newman-Stille, Speculating Canada

Joshua Pantalleresco, Just Joshing, podcast

Edward Willett, The Worldshapers, podcast

BOOKS TO BURDEN YOUR MIND

THE RED PLANET by Russ Winterbotham

(Previously published in Space Cadet # 2, March 1995)

While not the first SF book I'd read, THE RED PLANET was the very first SF pocketbook I went out and purchased for myself. The year was 1962. I was 11 years old.

What attracted me to this particular book? Look at the cover. The Martians are bright green (of course!), the sand a somber tan, the spacesuits bright yellow, the spaceship olive green, the sky dark red, and the Martian moon above a dusky orange. Beautiful. I wanted this book as soon as I saw it. Spacemen. An alien landscape.

Martians. What more could an 11 year old boy want? To this day I remain a sucker for “sensa wonda” cover art.

I just re-read the book cover to cover for the first time in over thirty years. It’s not as bad as I’d remembered. In fact it reads very much as if author Russ Winterbotham was hoping Hollywood would turn it into a movie, or perhaps, less charitably, that he’d been influenced by grade-B SF films. THE RED PLANET has a passable, if cliché-ridden, plot. The ubiquitous meteor shower for instance. Or the expendable crewman sent out to repair a damaged motor who discovers too late that his air supply has been sabotaged. But for all that, it’s actually kind of fun, in large part because the technology and the characters are so redolent of the time it was written.

To begin with, we are introduced to the point-of-view character, Bill Drake, one of six men chosen for the first manned expedition to Mars. He’s in the mission control room which is conducting the flight of a Mercury-like capsule in which the last possible candidate is attempting to qualify for the mission. The rest of the proposed crew is present, including Mission Commander Doc Spartan, a martinet with social skills somewhere between Adolf Hitler and Attila the Hun. Bill Drake doesn’t care, he’s got nothing to do except watch Spartan’s assistant, Gail Loring, run the show.

It seems that Bill lusts after Gail, despite her intelligence. A quote will illustrate my point: *“She was all business. It was a pitiful waste, because she was an attractive girl and so untouchable. She wasn’t beautiful... She was good-looking, the kind of girl who wore well. Without lace or fancy trimmings, she was solid, durable, functional—and feminine, in spite of herself Even in slacks she looked good; a statement I could make about no other woman I’ve ever seen. She wore no make-up, except lipstick, and that didn’t hurt her. She had brown hair cut close, almost mannish style, and still she looked like a woman.”*

Hoo boy, this kind of stuff is painful to read today. What sort of effect it had on young girls trying to read SF back then I daren’t imagine. But as an 11 year old boy, I paid no attention. Undoubtedly I skipped over all the “mushy stuff” and went straight for the action, and Winterbotham didn’t disappoint, at least initially. By the end of the first chapter the orbiting spaceman is dead, Gail thinks it’s her fault, and the Mars mission is in jeopardy. Where are they going to find another candidate to make up the 6th member of the crew? From the thousands of test pilots and fighter jocks available? Nah! Too obvious. Spartan chooses Gail.

Even as a kid, I knew this was a device to provide love interest, and I was outraged. “Mushy stuff” was included in movies for the girls in the audience, and that I accepted as a deplorable economic necessity, but in a book? Only boys read SF books. And boys weren’t interested in pages wasted on “love” and stupid things like that.

Still, there was hope she’d be left behind. Bill points out that: *“A lot of people would take the stand that an unmarried young woman could hardly expect to spend two-and-one-half years in close quarters with five unmarried men and expect to come back chaste.”* Her response is to laugh. As a kid I thought it was because she found the idea she couldn’t resist temptation just plain silly. Now I suspect it was because

she thought it hilarious that Bill assumed she was a virgin. Don't know what the author had in mind. Can be read both ways of course.

Doc Spartan has a solution. She must marry a crew member, and offers himself. She spurns him, but agrees to marry Bill Drake, providing it be a marriage of convenience only. This sets the stage for all sorts of jealousy, sexual tension and outbursts of frustrated lust, exactly the sort of thing an 11 year old boy avoids like the plague (at least back then—I can't speak for kids today, who are exposed to so much more. Granted, I discovered my father's stack of Playboy magazines hidden in the attic, and instantly fell in love with the photos of a very nude young starlet by the name of Jane Fonda, but hey, I certainly didn't want my serious fiction to be messed up with such diversions ...). Fact is, I ploughed on, hoping against hope that the mushy stuff would be kept to a minimum, and that the delights promised by the cover would soon appear.

The situation improves. The six crew members are launched into orbit atop a Saturn rocket to rendezvous with the Jihad, the Mars expedition vehicle. Winterbotham has done his research. The Jihad is a logically designed collection of modules powered by a plasma engine. Acceleration is slow, but steady. Air and water are recycled. Everything makes sense. The one odd thing is that the transfer capsule does not actually dock with the Jihad. The crew transfer via EVA, which is actually far more dangerous. However, at the time the book was written no spacecraft had yet attempted to dock with another, and the author seemed to think it was theoretically impossible anyway, as judge by the following:

“One little push was all I needed and now I had to somersault quickly, and, at the same time, push out the long loose end of copper wire so that it would strike the side of the Jihad before I did. This was very important, for the electrical potential of the Jihad must be adjusted to that of the Saturn capsule to guard against being struck by a bolt of lightning as I contacted the sides of the craft. Apparently there was not much of a differential for I saw no sparks against the black sky.”

What a bizarre concept. I suppose it was one of the many hypothetical dangers (like the idea that the internal organs wouldn't function in weightlessness, or that astronauts would succumb to vertigo) that were proved wrong in actual flights. The idea of having to “ground yourself” on the spacecraft you were approaching by trying to lasso it with a copper wire is something I've encountered in no other book or story. Unique touch, that.

There follows several chapters of intrigue, murder, attempted rape and other boring stuff, my adolescent hopes kept alive only by the occasional interesting bit, like the announcement that the ship is being swept by radar signals from Mars. Wowzers! There be Martians after all!

Soon the Jihad is close enough to Mars to justify the author describing the appearance of the planet in detail. The book was written three years before Mariner 4 revealed the cratered surface of the red planet. Winterbotham's Mars is Percival Lowell's Mars, not that I'm complaining mind you. The old names for features which

in fact have turned out to be visible only from Earth are wonderfully evocative: "Solis Lacus Minor," "Mare Erithraeum" and best of all, "Umbra" and "Pnyx."

"What do you make of those things, Dr. Joel?" I asked, pointing out the spots. Joel shook his head. 'Our astronomers have noticed them,' he said. 'The one in Lacus Major is called Umbra. The other is Pnyx, at the junction of two canals. Certain people have suggested they are cities.'

'Circular cities?' asked Gail, who also watched the screen.

'With a dome over them,' I said. For now I saw why they glinted. That shiny surface was some transparent substance which covered the city like an inverted bowl. Beneath were blackened buildings.'

All this as the Jihad's landing capsule howls through the thin Martian atmosphere. Domed cities! And trouble a brewing, for Doc Spartan instructs the crew: *"If you see signs of life ... shoot first."* This is rather typical of the mission commander, who has already murdered one crewman and attempted to kill another. No wonder Drake muses during the descent: *"If the Martians don't get me, Dr. Spartan will."*

But the landing, at least, is accomplished safely. They spend their first day on Mars digging a defensive moat and a breastworks of rock to shoot from if need be (they're armed with M-14's). Just a trifle paranoid I'd say. While digging the moat they discover rubies:

"The soil was full of them. They were more plentiful than pebbles on Earth.

'Possibly a lot of the color of the Martian sand is due to aluminum oxide tintured with chromium,' Joel explained. He assumed we all knew this was the chemical composition of rubies.

'I suspected the Martians used lidar,' said Axel."

And, of course, he assumed we all knew that lidar was light radar, which physicists on the Earth were just learning how to use. It's a method of amplifying light through a special tube of artificial rubies" and so on and on for a lengthy paragraph. *"He assumed we all knew"* is a singularly awkward way of introducing scientific exposition, in that it leaves the reader feeling vaguely annoyed and insulted. Still, I had forgotten that lasers were once referred to as "lidar." Relearn something new every day. Unless, of course, Winterbotham made up the term. But at least he's trying to incorporate futuristic high tech and explain why the Martians had so readily developed their own.

Drake and Axel are ordered to drive a "Mars-car" to the lip of the nearest canal, which turns out to be on the order of the Grand Canyon, about five miles across and three miles deep. Taking advantage of an ancient landslide, they drive to the bottom and discover a broad swath of reddish-green vegetation, mostly cactus-like and toadstool-like plants, all charged with electricity, flanking a narrow stream. Here Winterbotham points out the difficulty behind the concept of open water in Martian canals: *"the atmospheric pressure was so light that water was evaporating in great quantities."*

Questing about for an explanation, he discovered: *“tiny springs along the bank, sending little rivulets of water into the canal. It was so simple that I should have guessed where the water came from. It all came from the polar caps, of course, but the water flowed underground. The Martians had simply cut their canals to feed on the artesian supply from the North Pole.”* Thus in one stroke he provides a plausible explanation for the existence of canals on a planet with light atmosphere. Rather insightful in fact, considering that modern planetologists believe that the only source of water on Mars lies frozen in colossal permafrost beds just beneath the surface. I guess I’d have to describe Winterbotham as one of the last apologists for Percival Lowell. The real Mars is fascinating. But Lowell’s Mars would have been wonderful. Truth can be disappointing

But fiction can be darned exciting, especially to an 11 year old kid

“A small creature, a little larger than a St. Bernard, was approaching the Mars-car. It looked like a dwarf camel, except that it was headless. And the hump wasn’t a hump, but a shiny bump with a metallic luster.

I said it had no head, but it did have a mouth—gaping, grinning and full of pointed teeth. It had four legs and many arms—long, sinuous, many-jointed, with two fingers at the end—growing like a fringe around that bump in the middle of the creature’s back.

Then I saw that the vegetation in its path was smoldering. The animal had only to move a small black thing that spouted on a stem from the top of its hump, and whatever lay in front of it started to smoke.

‘Axel!’ I screamed into my helmet transmitter. ‘There’s a Martian down here!’”

Now compare this description with the cover art. Instead of many-jointed arms with two fingers, there are writhing tendrils. Instead of no head and a hump, there’s no hump and a head. Later on, Winterbotham reveals the Martian’s have padded feet like camels, whereas the Martians in the cover art possess four-toed feet that are dainty and rather cute. Mind you, their skin is a most satisfactory bright green, but their lips are so red as to appear covered in lipstick. Winterbotham must have groaned when he saw the cover art done by an artist with the (alleged) name of Ralph Brillhart. He may have been adequate in composition and perspective, but obviously not very attentive to accurate detail. Still, I like the cover. It’s evocative.

Truth to tell, it’s hard to decide which concept is the more idiotic. But at least Winterbotham has some internally consistent logic at work. It turns out that each Martian functions as an individual electric cell, producing power to communicate on radio wavelengths and to project radar beams as a weapon. This makes sense. Radar can fry you. I remember, as a child, stomping through the snow in the countryside beyond the town of Chibougamau, Quebec, and glancing at the white domes of a Norad Radar site, part of the PineTree Line (next line further North: the Mid-Canada line, and then lastly, north of the Arctic circle, the more famous Dew Line) and reading a billboard-sized sign in the empty field that said something like: “Any closer and the radar will kill you. Stay out!” I recall I promptly turned back toward town and picked up speed, only to break through snow and ice into an ice-cold stream up to

my waist. Whereupon I began to move even faster. And in the summer Chibougamau is infested with clouds of "No-see-ums." (Blackflies.) Currently I have no plans to return to Chibougamau, but I digress

Uhhm, lessee ... the Martians constantly interrupt communications with parroted phrases like: *"Sweetheart! ...Thiswaydrake! ...Ha! Ha!"* which is vaguely amusing, and they become twice as dangerous if two of them hold hands, three times as dangerous if three of them hold hands, etc., etc., which is a lot more amusing. You guessed it, the climactic battle sequences involve thousands of Martians holding hands as they rush the Earthmen in a line formation so that their combined electrical power can be utilized by a single individual to produce some really powerful radar beams. All for nought of course, as the Earthmen simply blow them to pieces with explosive bullets. Quite idiotic, but at least the concept of handholding killer Martians is rather novel, and that's what SF is all about, isn't it? Novelty?

But to get back to the canal, Drake escapes to the ship, closely followed by two curious Martians. Spartan kills them, but not before the radio a warning to their buddies. Oops, maybe he was a bit hasty. He sends Drake and Gail out in a Mars-car to see how the Martians feel about this. They discover an abandoned, lifeless canal, and beyond it, a road. At the end of the road, an abandoned city, its dome smashed, *"as if some giant hammer had struck it with a terrific, shattering blow."* The city is full of functional, featureless buildings, which makes sense, the Martians have no eyes after all. Besides, it saves Winterbotham the trouble of describing them.

On the other hand: "At the edge of the city stood a monument—a headless camel, a Martian, with his eight arms raised proudly above his spine." If they have no eyes to see, why make a statue? Bounce radar beams off it? Fondle it with their many-jointed arms? And does the description imply their spine runs through the electric-cell hump atop their back? Hmmm.

But of course, the most surprising discovery, was *"a terrific crater"* on the other side of the city.

"And now I knew why the city was no longer lived in, why there was no water in the canal, and why the road wasn't used."

"The bomb!" I said, almost in a whisper." (Except for the exclamation point.)

"Mars had its own nuclear war!"

At this point about 15,000 Martians advance holding hands and Drake and Gail retreat to the ship for the final battle.

Hmmm. Domed cities. Ever since this book I've always like domed cities. Odd, because the description is sparse indeed, yet in my 11 year old mind I conjured up poignant visions of the wind keening through the shattered dome and the empty buildings. In fact, that's why I like domed cities so much, they look great when they've been smashed to ruin. Mind you, I don't think Buckminster Fuller would have approved of my liking for domes, tied up as it is with the 18th century mania for appreciating the beauty of ruins ... hmmm, remind yourself not to put me in charge of the Earth ... I have a rather unique approach to city beautification schemes ... blame it on Russ Winterbotham ... hmmm

Anyway, a whole bunch of Martians get blown up real good, Doc Spartan gets his, and the survivors—Axel, Drake and Gail—take off to return to Earth secure in the knowledge that no one is going to come back to Mars. First, because the water on Mars is full of ammonium hydroxide (very deadly to drink, though peachy keen for washing clothes). Second, because all Martian lifeforms are based on cyanide, so there ain't nothin good to eat. And third, and most important of all, the planet is teeming with millions of extremely pissed-off Martians, probably *all* holding hands, forming a line clear around the planet, just waiting for a spaceship to drop into orbit to be fried by the biggest Martian-induced radar beam yet. At least, that's what I would have written had there been a sequel.

Today *The Red Planet* would probably be considered hack work at best, and I guess that explains why I've never seen a reprint, it's too "dated," too firmly planted in the era it was written. But that's the charm of it. It's a period piece, and worth reading as such.

Besides, it stirred that old "sensa wonda" within me when I first read it and has haunted me ever since. More importantly, it spurred me to seek out other SF pocketbooks. The next one I purchased, drawn by its powerful cover which figured—you guessed it—a domed city (though not smashed yet), was *City at World's End* by Edmond Hamilton, which I will review next issue.

As for Russ Winterbotham, on looking him up in *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, I discover that he had been something of a big name in the *Big Little Books* before and during the war, having written 60 of them. He concentrated on SF novels beginning in 1952, producing *The Space Egg* (1958), *The Men From Arcturus* (1963) and *The Puppet Planet* (1964), among others. Retiring in 1969, he died in 1971 at the age of 67.

Russ Winterbotham was not the greatest writer in the world, and you've probably never heard of him. But I, for one, appreciate him (and artist Ralph Brillhart), for the wonderful introduction they gave me to a world of books of *my* choosing. Prior to *The Red Planet*, all the SF books I'd read had been gifts or library books. Now I'd discovered the joy of selecting and purchasing my very own SF books. A life-long addiction had begun. Thanks Russ.

MAGAZINES DRENCHED IN MAPLE SYRUP (Canadian Zines Worth Reading)

***Pulp Literature Magazine* #26**

In my Amazing Stories (online) Magazine column of May 15th I review every story and article in this issue. To give you an idea of what *Pulp Literature* is like I present my review of the first story.

The Bicolour Spiral – by Matthew Hughes

Premise:

Life is extinct on Erythreot, its surface scoured by periodic glaciations brought about by a unstable sun. No trace of its ancient alien civilization remains, except for grave goods found in deeply buried tombs. The rarest of these goods are large “pearls” created by some long forgotten creature. Collectors pay vast sums for them. Luntz Kundlemaz is lured to Erythreot with an illegal opportunity to add to his collection. He arrives in his space yacht with his niece Purindath. Luntz is mysteriously murdered. Purindath is blamed. Investigator Kaslo takes up her case.

Review:

An old-fashioned mystery in a science fiction setting. Greed and corruption are universal through both space and time. That’s a given. The murder of a wealthy man is a common trigger for many a mystery. This one has a “drawing room” feel to it. One scene takes place at an event in a ballroom. Another in a private home office. A comfortable mystery that seems very traditional. Is the science fiction setting necessary? Isn’t it just a rich people’s thirst for expensive trinkets? Could have been set in any time period?

No. Not really. The intricacies of the several cultures involved are unique to the centuries ahead. And the sophistication of the investigation depends not only on imagination and perception, but also on technology which has yet to be invented. What we have here is an entertaining and seamless blend of futurism and human chicanery that makes for an intriguing and satisfying tale. Matthew offers more proof that genre-combination stories can work as well as single genre stories, especially when written by someone as talented as he. I don’t read many mysteries but I can say I definitely liked this one. I was fascinated throughout.

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

Check out issue#26 here < [Pulp Literature #26](#) >

RANDOM MUSINGS

Bill the Cat, Meet Bill the Shat

By Robert J. Sawyer

To this day, Star Trek fans continue to debate why Kirk’s gravestone, as seen in “Where No Man Has Gone Before,” has his middle initial as “R” rather than “T.” (And as we learned in the animated episode “BEM,” and later confirmed in the movie *Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country*, the T stood for Tiberius.) Why the discrepancy?

Well, I had to revisit that issue when I was privileged to script the two-part series finale of the web series *Star Trek Continues*, which revisits the notion of Gary

Mitchell-style super-ESPer. In that script, I went along with showrunner Vic Mignogna's suggestion that the error Mitchell made in creating that headstone demonstrated that some part of him remained human and fallible until the end. But, actually, my favorite in-canon explanation comes from Peter David in one of his *Star Trek* novels. Basically, it goes like this:

Gary: "Hey, Jim, what's your middle name?"

Jim (embarrassed by the truth): "Um, it's, ah, Roman ..."

See, at the time, Kirk felt that was a better answer than admitting he'd been named for a debauched and depraved Roman Emperor—but Gary took it to be his actual middle name.

But, really, it's just a production issue—and not even an actual *error*.

First, neither "The Cage" (with Pike, not Kirk, as the captain) nor "Where No Man Has Gone Before" (where the tombstone appears) were ever intended to be aired. A "pilot" is *not* the same thing as a "first episode," and, in the 1960s, a show was often retooled after the pilot before going into production, with the pilot never seen by the public, especially when major recasting has occurred (as it did with both *Trek* pilots, the former resulting in the recasting of every character but Leonard Nimoy's, and the latter having the doctor and the communications officer both recast after its production).

For instance, the pilot for what became *The Dick Van Dyke Show* was called *Head of the Family* and starred Carl Reiner rather than Van Dyke. It only surfaced decades later as a bonus on the DVDs of the final series.

Second, the "R" may well have stood for something Roddenberry had in mind—or it might have just been an arbitrary choice by the art director who'd been told to make a tombstone.

As an example of that sort of thing, everyone will tell you that Columbo's first name is never revealed in the TV series (Trivial Pursuit's answer that it was Phil was a deliberate error introduced into the board game so they could track anyone pirating their questions). In fact, though, it's shown multiple times on his police ID card as being "Frank." But was that series creators Richard Levinson and William Link's *intent*, or just a case of someone in the art department dashing off something that they figured no one would ever study in detail?

Third, and most importantly, as soon as Shatner actually said Kirk's name out loud with a middle initial, if he ever did say "James R. Kirk" when filming an early episode of the series, then he or the director would have recognized that it sounded weak and more like something the future Bill the Cat would say: the first name plus "Ark-Erk." It may well have been changed to "T" on the spot.

"Where No Man Has Gone Before" was filmed in 1965—and here we are, fifty-five years later, still loving it and reveling in its tiniest details. May we all be so lucky to be fondly remembered decades hence.

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

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

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

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

TONIGHT'S MOVIE – ROBIN HOOD

(Originally posed as an online blog 16th September, 2010)

By Michael Bertrand

Well, I have watched the rest of my animated movies on DVD, so it is time to do this one. All Disney movies have a certain effect on me, but this is one of the Big Three, the other two being their animated *Jungle Book* and, of course, *Lion King*. Those are my all time favorite Disney movies, and I have seen nearly all of them, so I have a fair sampling to judge.

I consider myself a Disney fan, though sometimes it feels like they are trying their hardest to get rid of me. I am a fan of the company, their theme parks, their animated features, and of Uncle Walt himself, may he rest in freeze.

Of course, like most people, for me, the animated features are the core of the appeal. They are not all wonderful and a few are downright stupid, but for the most part, a Disney animated feature is going to be just plain better made than nearly anything else out there, and I like to think Walt himself gets some of the credit for starting a company where they set out to make magic and a lot of the time, they do.

Walt is one of my heroes because he built an empire on bringing magic and wonder and delight to the hearts of millions, by now billions, of people all over the world. I would love to follow in his footsteps. I can think of no higher calling.

Anyhow, on with the movie. I might get teary here and there, bear with me, I will go back to being snarky sooner or later.

Speaking of odd aspect of cartoon animal worlds, like I was last night, the movie starts with Roger Miller as the voice of the rooster telling you that this is the animal kingdom version of the Robin Hood story, and that this is what REALLY happened. I would imagine there are some English folklore professors who would object to that assessment.

And maybe there does not need to be a real Robin Hood, ever. Maybe it was enough that people thought there was one, and it gave them hope, and allowed other to do good anonymously.

Ah yes, Peter Ustinov hamming it up to levels only possible when someone else is animating you and all you have to work with is your voice as Prince John. One of the

all time great waaay over the top villains. I mean, he sucks his thumb and calls for his mommy when he is upset. I am pretty sure that is so over the top that the top is a tiny little dot barely visible below.

And come to think of it, this movie is quite seventies too, although from an entirely different angle than *The Dirty Duck*, obviously. But it has that seventies sensibility, and of course, you do not get more seventies then gentle and silly singer song writer Roger Miller, of whom I am quite fond as well. It was good time for plain and simple things in the seventies, and Roger's songs are that and how.

I never noticed this little detail before. According to this version of history, Richard only went off on his Crusades because the snake, Sir Hiss, hypnotized him. Well, I am sure all the Saracens he slaughtered will understand that it was not his idea.

I know, I know, stop injecting reality.

Ah, now we get back to the core of good old fashioned family entertainment: dressing in drag to steal from rich people. And they seem quite eager. Probably the most fun they have had all day. Best part of the job. I think I know a certain gator they should meet.

And while you are dressed like a woman to steal from the king, be sure to tell him how handsome, regal, and cuddly he looks. Geez, no wonder I love this movie so much.

Oh, and what is the number one rule of drag comedy? Some man at some point has to be attracted to the character(s) in drag, no matter how ugly they are, or how unpassable and obvious they are. In the comedy universe, absolutely nobody can tell they are men, no matter how obvious it is to us.

And people never seem to get tired of that. Men dressed in women's clothing is just hilarious to the masses. It says a lot about how deep our gender assumptions go into our understanding of the world and of humanity that comedy like this never goes out of style. It also says a lot about how certain men are possibly just dying for an excuse.

And you do not get the opposite gender equivalent nearly so much. Women dress in men's clothing all the time. Nobody laughs.

Jesus, they say "oo-da-lally" a lot in this movie. Another thing I never noticed before. It could be the title.

This is pretty much exactly how Libertarians see the world. Mean old government taking money from poor people, collecting taxes by force, just because they are evil and greedy.

What is truly sickening is that big corporations with billions of dollars try to act like they are the victims too, just like rich individuals do.

It's bad enough you take everything else, do you have to take our victimization as well? Victims ... aren't we all.

Dear Rush Limbaugh, Glenn Beck, Fox News, et al: you are not Robin Hood. You are Prince John's propaganda wing, enabling the rich to steal from the poor all they

want, because they are Not Government, and only mean old government can do any wrong.

It's all about heart, really. I bitch about technique, but really, the really good stuff has a big warm heart and that informs everything about it. This movie has heart. Every frame is filled with warmth and affection. That is how you make a good animated feature. Heart.

Good art made with a good heart and a good mind makes you feel good. It has the aspect of a story told with love by someone who really wants you to be happy. That is something we all need more of, sincere good will conveyed with passion and care.

Bad art made with a poor spirit and imperfect understanding, on the other hand, gives the impression that the people making it just did not care and only wanted to do the bare minimum it took to part you from your money. That doesn't make anyone feel good.

Then there is that other beast, bad art made with the best of intentions. That makes you feel good two ways, one by making you laugh, and the other by making you feel the sincerity of their desire. It is like a silly old uncle making a big deal out of lighting his pipe the wrong way around just to make you laugh.

Maybe that is not what the people who made the art intended, but they bring joy, and that is what all true artists desire. To make others feel as good as the best art has made the artist themselves feel. That is the true calling of all art. You want to give back some of the joy the world of art has given you.

The things they do, the fun they have, animated the serpentine Sir Hiss! They are hilarious and adorable. You would not normally think of snakes as funny or cute, but Sir Hiss is both.

I mean, he sticks his head in balloon, blows it up until he is floating with his head inside the balloon, and uses his tail as a propeller, turning himself into a snake powered aircraft. Genius.

Bushel Britches seems to be the Sheriff's official nickname.

I love the scene where Maid Marion's lady in waiting, the indomitably Scottish chicken, Lady Kluck, takes on all those mean old Price John rhinos and elephants like a football player, short-arming, rugby slamming, and fancy claw-working her way through them all. Big girls rule, man. She is awesome.

Oh crap, the love song. When I was a kid, I always skipped this part of the album, because to a kid, it is just mushy stuff. Boring! Now, when I listen to the MP3, I just melt. Something about that special power the seventies has over me, I think. I mean, this movie came out in the exact year of my birth, 1973, and the woman singing the song has such a warm, affectionate, loving tone as she sings about how it seems like only yesterday, you were just a child at play ... it reminds me of what a cool seventies Mom my mother was back then, tending the big back yard garden, cooking for us, showing us things about the world and all its wonders. I just want to melt into that song and live there, at least for a while.

But the eighties came along, my mother went back to work, I was passed on to babysitters, the garden was torn up so my Dad could put the extension on the house,

and our big back yard became a postage stamp. All so we kids could have our own rooms.

Dad, for what it is worth, I would have kept bunking with my brother till we were both in college if it meant I got my mother and my siblings and the big garden all back again.

No wonder I am late to the eighties nostalgia party. All the bad things that happened in my life happened in or near the eighties.

Man, fuck the eighties. They made everything colder.

And just in case you forgot it was the seventies, a satirical song about Prince John done in a wild blend of styles including bluegrass, jazz, country, folk, and English traditional. One of my favorite things about Disney is the amazing music they make for their movies. Some songs are better than others, but they are always incredibly well done. Their production capacities boggle the mind.

Now raising his taxes so high people were starving to death was proof enough that Prince John was the worst kind of evil, Stupid Evil. But then tripling them so that everyone ends up in jail is even stupider. You might find that tax revenues slack off a tad, PJ, when there is nobody doing any work or making any money.

Again, that is how libertarians see the world. If only it was that simple. Taxes don't go to some greedy king. They pay for society. Schools, bridges, courthouses, policemen, firemen, armies, the whole thing. Government does not own society, society owns it, but government supports society like a skeleton.

Well, leave it to conservatives to concoct the worst possible reasons for the worst possible way to be anti-Establishment, and forty years after it meant anything. I miss Establishment conservatives. Them, I at least could understand and to a certain degree, respect. I am a law and order kind of guy myself. Just has to be the right laws and the right order first. Robin Hood didn't want to become an outlaw, but it was the only way to see justice done. I feel a little the same. I am only a rebel against a particular system, not the idea of a system itself. I believe in peace, justice, and good government, like a good Canadian.

And government is always needed and never perfect. So I am, by nature, a reformer, not an anarchist.

Everything must be optimized. Things can always be better. Dare to dream of a better, saner, safer, kinder, more rational, more humane, more wonderful world. It can happen, if we believe in our dreams enough to work like hell for them. Work, and fight.

Perhaps it is a strange conflation of my lawful side and my forgiving nature, but I never get too mad at the servants of a bad leader. They are just doing what seems right and trying to get by. Even if I was an outlaw, I wouldn't hate the cops.

Sir Hiss sleeps in a long, thin cradle. LOL.

And here we have yet another accidentally lit fire. Stone castles still have wood timbers. Don't use a torch as a weapon, idiot.

Oh, right. It ends with a wedding. Kind of a touchy subject for me right now. Oh well.

Oh ... and this one has “real” DVD extras. Disney doesn’t skimp.

Oh awesome, one of the extras is a very old Disney animated short, as in from 1933, with Mickey with the button eyes, Goofy as a prince, Mickey as a Minster ... now THIS is old school Disney. Holy crap, it is Clarabell the Cow. Now THAT is one who disappeared early. She was quite big in those days, but she never made the cut later on. She never became one of the Gang of Donald, Mickey, Goofy, Minnie, and Daisy, the all time classics. So if you want to see her, you go back this far or it is nothing doin’.

One thing about the old Disney toons: someone is always getting their butt abused. Someone will get poked in the butt, or stung by a bee there, or get their butt burned, or something. Butt abuse is, I would imagine, a pretty much guaranteed crowd pleaser. You are guaranteed one big belly laugh from the audience if someone gets it in the butt.

Man, it sucks to be Goofy in this toon. He plays the prince that Minnie is being forced to marry, and she acts like he’s a leper with diarrhea. You could do a lot worse, Minnie. Jesus.

As a long time fan of this movie and a grown up (sorta) kid who had listened to the album a million times, I was one of the only people who instantly knew where the main sample from the infamous '90s Internet meme the Hamster Dance Song came from. It’s from the opening song to this movie, a Roger Miller song call “Whistle Stop.” Nerd power!

Jesus, I am even more prolix than usual tonight. One of these day, I am going to do my entire day’s blogging while watching a movie like this, and not know what the hell to do with myself for the rest of the day.

Well, that’s it for tonight. See you tomorrow night, when I will be watching something from someone else’s DVD collection. Lord knows what. Should be fun to pick!

MESSED-UP MOVIE MOPES

Note: I had planned to carry on listing and describing my 10 favourite films by decade, half of them genuinely good, half of them so bad they’re good, but that turns out to be a lot of work. Even worse, that type of schedule is a bit too dry and mechanical to encourage enthusiastic inspiration. So, in the spirit of just winging it, I’ll just write about whatever comes to my attention in the month leading up to publication.

Further note: Except that I ran out of time making notes on the movie that I decided to review. So, in the interest of providing at least a modicum of entertainment value, I instead provide two reviews I wrote years ago which I hope you find amusing, if not enlightening.

Both of these films are seldom shown on TV. The first is not currently available to purchase. The second is available, but not cheap.

***Wizard of Mars* (1964)**

This is one of the most charmingly inept SF films ever conceived. Written, produced and directed by a single individual (always a bad sign), the best that can be said for this classic gem by David L. Hewitt is that it is well lit and exhibits strong, comic book-like colours. And hey, it has John Carradine as the title character. What more could you ask for?

Well, how about Forrest J Ackerman as technical adviser?

The film begins aboard MARS PROBE ONE as it orbits Mars. There's Doc, Steve the pilot, wise-acre Charlie, and a non-love-interest gal whose name I never did catch, so I'll just call her Gal. The cabin of the spacecraft has large windows on the ceiling, but none facing forward. If they want to see where they're going, they each pull down their own individual cardboard periscopes, referred to as "Camera Scopes." The crew is much given to punching buttons and staring at battery testing meters. Computer tape wheels twitch on the walls. A few lights flash on and off. In short, your average extremely low-budget spaceship interior.

Doc tells gal things like: *"Be sure to correlate your cameras. We don't want any overlap."* He decides to peek through his own scope. *"I'm picking up some sort of pulsating light!"* he exclaims. Sound effects from FORBIDDEN PLANET fill the air. Naturally they all panic, I guess they've seen that movie too.

"Watch out," yells Gal, *"there's another one ahead!"* Everybody fiddles with the single control knob on their scopes.

Steve gets into the act, *"Collision alarm! Emergency procedures, quick!"* Evidently their emergency procedure consists of doing nothing.

Charlie provides precise information, *"Scanners show we're approaching something of monstrous size, and fast!"*

We see a shot of lightning (in space?) striking the spacecraft. Charlie is the master of his instrumentation, he's got a handle on the threat now: *"Whatever it is it keeps changing size, and range. Distance varies from extreme range to zero!"*

It doesn't seem to occur to him that maybe he shouldn't put much faith in his instrument readings. For no particular reason a few sparks fly across the screen. Doc goes to grab a fire extinguisher, accidentally sets it off before he picks it up, but manages to put out the non-existent fire anyway. (One-shot Beaudine would be proud.)

Charlie, overacting to beat the band, yells *"WE had to go to Mars, WE couldn't go to the moon like everybody else!"*

Steve finally decides to do something. *"We've got to pull up,"* he says, *"Activate all operable rockets!"*

"I can't," shrieks Charlie. *"They're inoperable! We're going down!"* The surface of Mars looms up. Now normally, you'd think the crew would want to strap themselves in to brace for the crash, but not this crew.

"In to our pressure suits quick!" shouts Steve. *"The hull may rupture on impact!"*

Well Steve, that's not all that might rupture. Anywho, quick like bunnies they hop through a circular hatch into their changing room. The spaceship crashes, presumably, though we are not shown this. The crew hops back into the cabin.

We now witness a bizarre, pointless discussion, the first of many.

"The transmitter works, why don't we send for help?" suggests Gal.

Replies Steve, *"We blew transmission, we'd have no way of knowing if we'd be heard."*

"Well, what's to stop us from trying?"

"Well, nothing ... technically."

So why don't they? They don't, that's all. Why didn't the writer simply have the radio smashed all to flinders instead of trying to explain why a working radio wouldn't work? Arrgh! It is to develop an existentialist headache!

So they ask Doc. He states *"Before making any rash decisions, we should evaluate where we are and what we're going to do,"* thus neatly passing the ball back to them.

Charlie suggests they search for their jettisoned main stage which contains all their supplies. (Not too bright jettisoning it in the first place, was it, Steve?) Gal mentions they have enough food for three weeks. Steve comments their suits will provide oxygen for only four days.

Doc turns to the wall and contemplates a map. *"We're here, at the edge of the polar cap, near the main canal. (Canal? CANAL?) Three weeks should be more than enough to reach the main stage."* Doc! Wake up, Doc! Wake UP! You don't have three weeks! You weren't listening! You got four days only, you dummy!

But Gal is brighter than Doc. She wonders if it is possible to breathe the Martian atmosphere.

Steve has a very weird answer, *"No, it's too thin. Not enough to sustain life. But it DOES contain oxygen. If we keep our suit pressure below the outside atmosphere, and crack our helmets, it will allow the outside oxygen to seep in, thus boosting our oxygen supply."* See if you can spot the flaw in this proposal. Forrest J Ackerman, technical adviser ... hmmm.

"Will it work?" asks Gal.

Replies Charlie brightly, *"Sure it'll work. Why wouldn't it?"* Always the optimist, that Charlie.

They grab two rubber rafts and a set of paddles—no expedition to Mars should be without such—and head toward the "canal," which looks like a stagnant pond.

"Even though we haven't seen any signs of life," says Doc as they pass through bushes and tufts of grass (yet another SF film where plant life doesn't count!), *"we should stay near the shore."* Cut to a shot of them sitting in stationary rafts.

"How far is it now?" asks Gal.

"Pretty near," says Steve, then adds, *"the current will keep us in midstream."* What current? You aren't moving. You aren't paddling. You're stuck, boyo!

The next scene shows everyone asleep, but moving, actually moving, the rafts drifting toward a clutch of dreaded Martian water worms that can most charitably be described as a bunch of toilet paper rolls squashed flat and joined together to form

“segmented” bodies floating motionless atop the water, with two leaf-like fins projecting from either side of the first roll, possibly the least menacing monsters ever recorded on film. The crew awakes and panics, striking out with the paddles, though one suspects not to kill the critters so much as to impart a bit of movement to them in a failed effort to render them more credible as a threat. These “monsters” can best be termed hilarious.

Next they find themselves within a cave.

Comments Steve, *“We’ve been here five hours now and there’s no sign of a way out.”*

This is not surprising, as the rafts are floating dead still in a pool barely large enough to hold them. There’s not the slightest movement. The crew make gestures of paddling in an absolutely futile gesture to convince the viewer they’re being whipped along white-water style when it’s perfectly obvious they haven’t budged an inch. I’ve heard of suspending disbelief, but this is ridiculous! Finally Steve tells everyone the water is so hot the rafts might explode, so they’d better get out and walk. So they do.

How do you pass time in a cave? Hold pointless conversations of course! Like these:

Gal – *“Wonder how far this goes?”*

Steve – *“I don’t know but we’ll soon find out.”*

Or:

Charlie – *“Whatcha looking at, Doc?”*

Doc – *“This rock formation, there’s something familiar about it.”*

Charlie – *“Oh, come on, Doc. A rock’s a rock. Let’s go.”*

Or:

Gal – *“Steve, you don’t suppose this doubles back the way we came, do you?”*

Steve – *“I don’t know, it sure sounds like it.”*

Gal – *“Oh, I hope not, then we’d be really stuck.”*

Or:

Charlie – *“No sense in doubling back.”*

Steve – *“We didn’t. Look! Daylight!”*

Gal – *“It must be outside.”*

Dialogue like this sort of does something to you, doesn’t it? Like churn your stomach into tight little knots? With brain to match?

But alas, there’s more earth-shattering suspense to endure. Having crawled out of the interminable caves, they must inch along the cliff-face above the valley of fire (whose volcanic effects consist largely of smoke pots, roman candles, and revolving wheels of out-of-focus red plastic in front of the camera lens. Always nice to see in-camera sfx, eh?) More than ever one becomes aware that Hewitt’s conception of dialogue is to state the obvious as redundantly as possible. Examples:

Steve: *“Does that look like a cave to you?”*

Charlie: *“Uh huh, sure looks like it.”*

Or:

Gal: *"Do you suppose something's happened? Oh, there he is. He's waving at us. He wants us to come."*

Or:

Doc: *"I almost wish this weren't the right direction."*

Steve: *"May as well go as far as we can."*

Doc: *"What is it?"*

Steve: *"It must lead outside."*

Well, thankfully, they do emerge amid Martian sand dunes. Then, just to inspire us to hope something might happen, Steve's voice-over narration intones *"In the west, more than a day's journey, we can see what appears to be a weird, pulsating dome of light."*

However, they ignore this and instead follow a weak signal on Charlie's direction finder. It stops working. They're about to run out of oxygen. They discuss futility. They get mad. Suddenly the finder is working again, indicating the main stage is just over the next dune.

"Talk about timing!" crows Charlie. Yes, someone should talk to Hewitt about timing.

Alas, the gizmo on the other side of the road turns out to be an automatic probe, a *"time-corroded relic from an earlier chapter of the exploration of Mars."*

Charlie falls all to pieces. *"It's so funny, so ironically funny,"* he gibbers. *"We sent it here two years ago to find out if we could live on Mars. We have to travel millions of miles to find it just to prove we can't survive!"*

Naturally, he pulls out his rifle and shoots at the probe. The bullet breaks a fuel line, the hissing of the escaping gas reminding them oxygen is part of it's fuel (the oxidizer anyway). Why, there's enough to last for days! Their mood improves.

"Gee, I feel sort of silly ..." says Charlie.

What happens next? The title is THE WIZARD OF MARS. I'll give you a hint. They're off to see the Wizard? ... Yes! You guessed it! They find a YELLOW BRICK ROAD buried beneath the sand! (Though oddly, it runs up and down the slopes of the dunes, instead of running level beneath them. This suggests it is extremely recent, rather than ancient as Doc claims.)

Doc – *"Some form of intelligence was at work here."*

Charlie – *"Somebody built this? Who?"*

Steve – *"There's life here!"*

Doc – *"This is more of an archaeological discovery than life itself!"*

Hmmm, Doc sounds a little off the wall to me.

"Where does it lead to? That's what I want to know!" says Gal. They look up and see a small castle which looks exactly like the sort of thing you'd expect to see in one of those plastic bubbles you shake to get the "snow" flying.

Amazingly enough, that's more or less what the city turns out to be! Huh? Well, you see, within the city is a glass ball which contains the city ... er, well, there's also a whole bunch of columns containing little old men with big ears and giant, glowing brains, who make use of multiple exposure photography to meld together into a

talking head known as John Carradine ... er, played by John Carradine, who delivers a 15-minute speech containing every SF cliché known to man, at the end of which he tells the crew the Martians have come back to life so that they can die (once and for all I guess, as opposed to those temporary, inconvenient millennia-long deaths).

But first the crew has to get time flowing again by sticking the city-within-the-ball-within-the-city into a giant pendulum, and then they have to run like hell to get out of the city before it disappears so they can disappear and reappear within their spaceship in orbit with four days growth of beard ('cept for Gal, natch) only to hear from Earth control they've been out of touch for two minutes already. Which of course, explains everything. God, I like a film where everything is tied neatly together at the finish, don't you?

***Mars Needs Women* (1966)**

This is a delightfully demented made-for-TV film which was scripted, produced and directed by Larry Buchanan.

We see exciting footage of a bored couple playing tennis. Through the miracle of editing, the woman suddenly disappears. The man, still bored, yet puzzled, looks about, bored.

We see a couple sitting in a nightclub. The man goes to a cigarette machine and seems to pause (almost as if he were waiting for the camera to stop) while the girl disappears.

We see (chastely) a woman in a shower. Suddenly, she's gone!

I think we're all beginning to get the idea by now.

Next we follow Colonel Bob as he's chauffeured to THE UNITED STATES DECODING SERVICE - NASA WING (evidently back in the days when NASA had a BIG budget). Colonel Bob strides through the halls. He walks funny. Like a stiff automaton with a demonic frown and a glazed expression. Guess that's why he never made General. Or won an Oscar. He wants to know if they've deciphered the message. They have

"MARS NEEDS WOMEN!"

Cut to credits rolling over shots of a finned Flying Saucer with square windows. Kind of cute, actually.

Next we see a reporter by the name of Simmons being briefed by Colonel Bob. I guess the military don't think much of reporters. Simmons is in a padded room on the other side of a glass partition. Communication is by intercom, and since the Colonel won't tell him anything, somewhat pointless.

But then, the Colonel is a man of few words, as witness his briefing of the Secretary of Defence:

"The code is broken," announces the Colonel.

"Trouble?" asks the Secretary of Defence.

"Big."

"Security?"

"Tight."

"Take the lid off for me."

"Mars needs women."

"It's a gag! It's a fake!"

"It's not a distress signal. It's intermittence is perfect!"

And I always thought Government/Military types pontificated. These guys are laconic.

Suddenly Tommy Kirk, former Mousketeer, materializes in the centre of the room as Doppler, a Martian wearing a wetsuit. He admits the kidnapping of the three earth girls by *"transponder"* didn't quite work out (implying they're dead?), so five Martians are coming in person. Quote:

"We are not hostiles. We are medical missionaries. We seek five female volunteers, unmarried and in good health." (Seems on Mars the ratio of females/males born has become untenable, they need fresh breeding stock.)

Colonel Bob reacts in a manly fashion, *"You have committed an overt act of abduction and war! Abort your mission!"*

Doppler refuses. *"You will not hear from us again until our cargo is secure!"* he says, then winks out of existence. The human race is horrified.

"The capital is stunned," intones a TV reporter, *"paralyzed by five men in a space cylinder hurtling toward the approximate vicinity of Houston Texas."*

Yes, stunned no doubt because the Martians believe Texan women are more desirable than Washington women, a blow to Yankee pride.

Instead of beaming down (as they seem capable of doing) the Martians somehow land their saucer inside an abandoned ice plant. We see them emerge one by one, all wearing wetsuits with red plastic ear-protectors and antennae. One carries a red plastic flashlight, another a spear gun. High tech, these Martians.

"Our first concern is chemicals," says Fellow One (Doppler). *"Brine, salts, sodium ..."* Hmmm, isn't that all the same thing? They're in luck. The ice plant is full of salt! Now they're ready for operation Sleep-freeze.

"Fellow Three, you will acquire currency and a city map."

"Can I employ violence?"

"No."

Fellow three materializes outside a filling station, karate chops an attendant into oblivion and steals what is required. So much for Martian discipline in obeying orders.

The Martians also steal clothes and a car. As they're struggling into identical charcoal-gray business suits, Fellow 3 mutters, *"These ties serve no functional purpose. Red Planet Mars abandoned ties fifty years ago! It's obvious Earthmen are environmentally naive!"*

Seems Martian super-science enabled them to discover some deadly environmental threat hidden in the wearing of ties that we Earthlings are even now unaware of.

The Martians drive off into the big city. Doppler and Fellow 2 check into a hotel which just happens to be crowded with reporters and scientists waiting for the Martians. They see TV news footage of the arrival of Dr. Margorie Bowlen who—according to the announcer—*“turned out to be a stunning brunette and found it hard to conceal her charm behind horn-rimmed glasses.”*

The Martians observe she is *“well-versed in genetics and well-endowed physically, at least anatomically speaking.”* Martians, it seems, have one track minds. Male Martians anyway.

Meanwhile, Fellow 4 is crouching in a glass telephone booth in the middle of a busy airport lounge talking into his wristwatch. Evidently he has not been well briefed on modes of behaviour unlikely to illicit notice.

“Calling Red Planet Talk Com, I have an excellent lead under surveillance!”

“Does she conform?” Doppler inquires.

“Subject meets physical specs, at least superficially.” Which is all that matters, after all. Closing in! Fellow 4 is after a stewardess!

Dr. Bowlen is attempting to hold a press conference. But the reporters (all men) are joking about the Martians. *“Martian women have it great, 100 men to every woman, har, har.”*

“No, you got it all wrong,” says another. *“Like WW2, 20 girls to every man, har har.”*

Bowlen is miffed and threatens to call off the interview unless someone asks an intelligent question.

Immediately Doppler pipes up: *“There’s a lot of talk about breaking the DNA code, about non-chromosomal molecules, does this suggest what happened on Mars could happen here?”*

Well, it’s not an intelligent question, but Dr. Bowlen falls in love anyway. She must have, for why else would she say, *“It’s presumptuous of us to think the Martians are any different than we are.”*

Obviously she must have been distracted by Cupid to say something so stupid. I mean, this gal is smitten.

She goes up to Doppler and declares, *“After my flight and a million jokes about sex in space, I’m bushed.”*

She wants to go somewhere different, it seems. Doppler catches on, finally, and agrees.

But first they go to the local planetarium to see a show titled “Trip to Mars.” They’re alone, till a horde of screaming kids flood in. Doppler looks at them fondly, a poignant moment. No kids on Mars. This is what his mission is all about. Breeding. Kids. Hordes of screaming kids. Brawling, fighting, yelling kids. Before Doppler can pursue this line of thought further (and perhaps lose faith in his mission), the show begins.

The narration tape breaks. Doppler fills in. The kids are enthralled. But a bit of a giveaway when Doppler comments, *“The temperature on Mars varies from 100 degrees below zero to 55 above, except on the Cerataya plateau where it often seems much warmer.”*

Hmmm, seeds of suspicion are planted in Dr. Bowlen's Mind. *"Let's not go back to the hotel,"* she suggests cautiously. *"When was the last time you took a pretty girl for a walk, I mean a pretty girl with a PHD?"*

Well, maybe she's not all that cautious

Meanwhile Fellow 4 has finally hypnotized the Stewardess into following him (took him hours). Fellow 5 has acquired a stripper. Fellow 3 is attending a football game. He looks acutely uncomfortable, as well he might, every other male in the stands is wearing a sportscoat, a brush cut, horn-rimmed glasses (remember, this is 1966) and a tie! The Dreaded Tie! No wonder he's worried. But a homecoming Queen is selected and soon falls under his spell. And Fellow 2 snares a female landscape painter. This leaves only Doppler without booty to bring back to the ship.

Doppler? Simmons, the reporter, is impressed with his scientific knowledge (Hah!) and is sharing the responsibility of the press pool with him. They sit in on a war conference with Colonel Bob and Dr. Bowen.

"All lovely, all built like Goddesses, and none married?" puzzles the Colonel. *"Who's next? If only there was a pattern."*

He stares at the pattern depicted on a city map. *"Within the primary perimeter, there's only a lake, and, what else?"*

At this point Doppler and Simmons, stuck in the padded room, are cut off from hearing the conversation.

"An ice factory," mentions Dr. Bowlen.

Colonel Bob smiles. *"I'm no scientist, but I feel better knowing where the enemy is."* He's not much of a Colonel either.

Simmons suspects something is up. He asks Doppler to take Dr. Bowlen into his confidence. Instead he takes her to a family planning museum to peruse life models of childbirth and such. (Boy, when he takes a gal on a date, he really shows her a good time!) She kisses him. He asks her what time it is, then runs out the door. She runs after him. Together they stare fixedly at the road as he drives like a maniac to get to the Saucer before it takes off. Meanwhile Colonel Bob and soldiers are creeping up on the ice plant.

Doppler and Bowlen arrive first. She sees four guys in wetsuits standing atop a flying saucer. Her suspicions deepen, approaching conviction.

"Abort the mission!" commands Doppler. *"A raiding party is on the way! Please leave before they arrive."*

Bowlen spots the recumbent forms of four frozen women yet to be loaded aboard. *"What happens if you go without the women?"* she asks.

First of all, the Martians become extinct, you dummy! Secondly, the trip would be much duller than planned. And third, what do you mean, *"The"* women? Haven't you noticed by now you're on the cargo manifest too? Dr. Bowlen may not be so bright after all.

Fortunately for her, neither are the Martians. *"To abort the mission is bad enough,"* hisses Fellow 2. *"If you stay, we all die!"*

“Why not take both of them? We can freeze her on route?” suggests Fellow 3 hopefully.

“To be a test case for insemination?” asks Doppler bitterly. I guess he was no longer inclined to share.

“One of you must go! You must decide now!”

Doppler turns to Dr. Bowlen. *“The word ‘love’ went out of the Martian vocabulary 100 years ago ...”* (What? Love disappeared 50 years before ties? What kind of priorities do Martians have?) *“... but whatever love is, I know it must be what I feel for you!”*

Suddenly bullets are zipping about the ice plant as the soldiers outside open fire. No fool he, Doppler hotfoots it to the Saucer and closes the hatch. So much for love. The Martians take off. Bowlen runs outside and stares into the sky.

The Colonel runs up. *“What were they like? Will you be able to describe them? Can’t you tell us anything?”*

This is rather odd, as the good Colonel has already met Doppler at the beginning of the film. Remember?

Anyway, Dr. Bowlen just stands there crying as the credits roll, knowing there will be no more paycheques for this shoot, and once it’s been on public view, not likely very many paycheques to come, at least not if she stays in the moving picture business.

The final credit is the famous quote from the works of Konstantin Tsiolkovsky: “THE EARTH IS THE CRADLE OF MANKIND, BUT MAN CANNOT LIVE IN THE CRADLE FOREVER.”

This is a great quote. It has nothing to do with the plot, but it’s a great quote.

THE LIGHT-HEARTED VITUPERATOR

AND JOLLY REVILER:

Growing Up in Fandom

By Stan G. Hyde

So, a couple of weeks ago, the organizing committee of G-FEST 27 (of which I am happily a part of—and I really value my Secret Master of Godzilla Fandom status) had to cancel this July’s convention. It was the right thing to do, as big gatherings in Chicago (where the convention has been held for all but two of its years) will not be allowed by that time, but I’m still going to miss it.

Of course, keeping people safe is the right thing to do ... but it occurs to me that many of my fellow fans—of whatever genre or art form—are missing conventions too.

Although I have just one brother, I come from a large family. My Dad had 13 brothers and sisters, and my Mom had 5. I am acquainted with large family gatherings—where many disparate people are brought together because they share a

common lineage. Mostly it's fun, sometimes it is not ... but fandom feels a lot like that.

In the case of G-FEST, which I have been attending since 1995, I feel like I'm missing a family gathering and I feel a surprising amount of loss.

(I should point out, I've been to all the Godzilla Fests except the first one in 1994, when I missed it because I was attending ConAdian—the 52nd World Science Fiction Convention in Winnipeg (my birth town). This wasn't a choice, however, as the first G-FEST was a meeting of the minds behind the (still being published) G-Fan magazine in a Chicago Howard Johnston's when people first floated the idea of an actual convention as opposed to just a meeting of SMOGFs

But I've attended every year since 1995, and the convention has grown up from a few hundred people to a few thousand now—even while Godzilla has gone from a 'mostly Japanese' cultural icon to a monster and metaphor known the world over.

I've seen kids grow up and, as adults, bring their children to the convention. Artists who started out as kids sketching in the hallway have gone from artist's alley to jobs illustrating DVD/Blu-Ray covers, doing art in comic books, and starting their own companies producing t-shirts, hats, and three dimensional toys and sculptures. Many have gone on to work in film. There are multiple podcasts and YouTube channels.

In the area I organize—the model show—we've seen talented folks get better and practice skills to the point that they're sculpting for model companies or working in film. At times it's hard not to feel like a proud parent when you've been organizing workshops and learning activities, and the younger folks start returning and showing you what they've done.

Of course, none of this could happen without the patience and contribution of gifted professionals. We've been lucky enough to get to know most of the folks who have ever been inside a Godzilla suit, and many of the folks who designed those suits or did the special effects. The actors from the film, particularly those from Japan, have been incredibly giving in terms of their time and their support, both at the convention and elsewhere.

In 2016, I led a tour of Japan on the occasion of the premiere of the newest Japanese Godzilla film, SHIN GODZILLA. One of the friends of the convention has been Mr. Akira Takarada, who was the love interest in the original Godzilla at just 20, playing Ogata. He's been in 137 movies since (check out the IMDB page) and in Japan is a lead actor who was often called "Mr. Handsome."

Although he couldn't be with us, he used his still considerable clout to organize a tour of Toho Studios. (It's hard to visit a working movie studio, but we spent a memorable afternoon being toured through sets that were being constructed, through prop storage, through sound stages, and even an extended stop at the building where music and sound was recorded for films back to the 1950s. A lot of the tour group idolize the composer, Akira Ifukube, who scored most of the Godzilla films, so being in that room was a bit like being in church. I heard, "Ikufube would have stood right here" a number of times in voices of awe.

Mr. Takarada, who was then 82, was rehearsing for a stage production of “The Fantasticks,” and so couldn’t be with us on the tour, but he still found time to join us on a party boat in Tokyo Bay that night.

At the end of the night, Takarada-san, gave me a hug as we were departing and, as I was hugging him, part of me was wondering how the heck this had ever happened

As we left the boat, some Tokyoites who had arrived at the dock for the next party boat recognized “Mr. Handsome” and inquired why he was there. He smiled, taking some pictures with them as he had with us on the boat, and explained that he was ‘meeting Godzilla fans from North America.’

Fandom ... isn’t it grand.

I went to my first Science Fiction convention in 1973 ... TorCon 2 ... the 32nd World Science Fiction convention in Toronto. I was 17. My friend Murray Grieg and I took a Greyhound Bus from Vancouver to Toronto—with a stopover in Winnipeg to meet up with family for a couple of days.

It is not untrue to say that I have grown up in fandom.

My first VCon was 1974’s VCon 3.

Point being, I guess, that fandom is family for me. My formative years, and many more, were spent among fans and I am, for the most part, the better for it.

Of course, fandom can be a little strange. Many of us are a little, or a lot, on the spectrum ... and we are interested in strange things (Fanzines. Fission. Filking. Fourth Dimensions. Fansubs. Faculae. Furrries. Feghoots. And that’s just some of the ‘Fs’)

I personally speak at least 4 varieties of fanspeak ... possibly more ... but definitely classic SF (not ‘sci-fi’) fannish (“FIAWOL!”)

Anime fannish (I prefer Mecha to Harem genre, but have been known to read some Ero euro nansensu),

Fantasy model builder fannish (just wrote an article for Amazing Figure modeller on ‘Super deforms”),

And—of course—

Kaiju fandom (Tokusatsu ... that stuff ... right?)

(Let me know if you need any of those defined, but what the heck, we have the internet now.)

My wife uses “gafiate” to describe anyone who pulls off a disappearing act from fandom, life or work ... as if “gafiating” is a real word. (I love the way Katie’s mind works ... and I’m sure she picked up the fan speak from me.) Of course, classical fan speak scholars know that the root word “gafia” means “getting away from it all.” Originally it meant disappearing into fannish life ... but later it seemed to do a moebius twist into meaning getting away from fandom.

So, in short, we are drenched in fandom here.

(Heck, Katie and I got married on March 18th, 1979, and VCON at Gage Residence that year was pretty much what substituted for a honeymoon for cash strapped students. It was fun too ... and we got a chance to travel later. After all, how

many chances do you have to hang out in the bar with Jack Vance and listen to him tell stories. (I remember a mom who was with us who said her son was disappointed with that. He had imagined that Jack Vance would be more like Cudgel the Clever rather than JUST A WRITER. Sigh.)

Beyond the fact that fandom is family ... well, we're missing our many family reunions now ... and the main reason for this edition of vituperator is basically to say, "I share your pain."

I miss the passionate discussions, and the wild speculation, and the camaraderie of spending time with other people who know what you're talking about when you're talking about really obscure things. I particularly like jokes that nobody gets but us. (I took a high school theatre class to a VCon once to put on a play by Don Debrandt, and backstage the students said, "Mr. Hyde. Everybody was laughing when you introduced us...."

"Yes?"

"They were really laughing."

"Yes."

"We don't know what you were talking about"

Like any family there are some people you want to be careful around, and some people who are just plain unlikable, but most of the time there's a kind of warmth that only comes when you're spending time in a group that understands you and where you're coming from.

Over the years I've been part of the formation of a few fannish groups—the Science Fiction Association of Victoria back in 1974, Monster Attack Team Canada in 1989, and participating in building G-FEST starting from about 1995. I've been part of many more groups such as BCSFA and VanPla (that last is the Vancouver Gundam Plastic models builders group—in Japan it's known as "GunPla" so, hence, "VanPla.")

I'm not really sure why it was important to be involved creating and building fan clubs, except that it seemed like there was fun to be had in sharing the love.

When I was teaching I used to tell my writing, theatre, and film students that it didn't matter what you loved. If you were excited and passionate about something, it would take you places you couldn't imagine and it would often lead you to make friends who you would otherwise never meet.

I saw a movie called KING KONG VS GODZILLA in 1963 when I was seven years old. I stayed to see it a second time ... somehow I think I knew it had changed my life ... though I couldn't have imagined that I would eventually travel to many of the real locations in the film or have supper with the man who'd played Godzilla several times.)

I asked the Manager—it was the Park Theatre in Winnipeg—if I could use the phone. While he sat in the room, I called my mom and told her I was staying to see the movie a second time. (Those were different days. The Manager said, "Buy some candy, kid." after I hung up the phone. Staying to see the movie without paying admission was no mentioned.)

Why Godzilla? I don't know

But afterwards I hunted down pictures of Godzilla ... which led to a bunch of silly magazines featuring pictures from monster movies with jokes in them ... which led to Famous Monsters of Filmland (editor of which I ultimately met a few times and presented an award to once ... you know, the guy who coined the expression "sci-fi," Forry Ackerman.) Which led me to Castle of Frankenstein Magazine ... which led me to book reviews by Lin Carter ... so that by Grade Seven I had read a book he recommended ... "The Lord of the Rings."

Then the Ted White Amazing ... which is where I read about TorCon 2 and hatched the plan to go.

One the bus to Toronto the guy in front of us was talking about science fiction to his seat mate, a woman who—as I remember—was politely pretending to be interested. I said "hello," and was he going all the way to Toronto because there was a World Science Fiction Convention there and

Turns out he was. He was from Hawaii, and somehow got Vancouver mixed up with Toronto. (Don't ask.) He only had enough money for the bus—so ... So, Murray and I had made a friend already.

He said, "But doesn't Vancouver have a huge science fiction fandom?"

It does?

Turns out ... yes ... it does ... and fandom keeps growing and widening into ever bigger circles and interests.

Sharing the love ... it works.

I could go on about some of the pitfalls of being a fan. Most of us are on the spectrum somewhere so most of us have discovered ourselves being "too obsessed" from time to time. There are those of us who are addicted to self-aggrandizement and being big fish in a small pool without regard to the feelings of others.

(Face it, if you put on events from conventions to film nights at your house, the reason to do it is to make people happy.)

There are those of us who try to manipulate events—er, like the Hugo awards—for not being what we would like. Politics does rear its ugly head too often, and has right back to the first WorldCon where the Futurians were banned from the event, giving rise to "The Great Exclusion Act."

Personally I was never really happy when people said they wanted to do something to "freak the mundanes!" After all, aren't mundanes fans who just don't know they're not fans yet?

And, from time to time, we have all met fans who are outright crazy. It is sad but true that fans are just as subject to sad and tragic mental problems as the general population, and that frequently when that is the case it takes real training and professional understanding to be a help to them.

But by and large—the tribe is a friendly tribe that is eager to share its lore and its ways. It's a place where a lot is given without much payment asked for except to pay the debt forward.

It's spreading the love that wins.

So to everyone out there who is also missing a convention, or a club meeting, or a fannish event ... I share your pain. This too shall pass. We shall meet again. There are conventions in our future, and our fannish family is waiting for us.

In the meantime, we have Zoom and Skype, and Facebook and Instagram, and ... well this fanzine.

It is not the same as being together, but it puts us in the position of the women and men who came before us, the tribes of the Xerox, the Gestetner, and the Hectograph. Distant but together, they crossed great distances with words, er, and the postal service.

Best wishes to all of you. More adventures to be held soon.

In the meantime, never forget, there are people out there who grok you ... and grok Spock too.

IT IS WHAT IT IS

(Mansplaining the State of Fandom)

By Garth Spencer

Hoaxes as fannish things to do

Graeme doesn't like the idea of hoaxes, or pranks, or practical jokes. I can see why, if he mainly defines them as the tasteless things that high school jocks do to bully anyone else, even after they leave high school. But there are hoaxes and pranks that are actually funny. Some have even made it into local history, like the CalTech tradition of "hacking" (which originally meant, solving ingenious devices to gain entry into seniors' dorm rooms), or into literature, as in H. Allen Smith's work *The Incomplete Practical Joker*, or the classic on college pranks, *If At All Possible, Involve A Cow*.

Local hoaxes in B.C. have a long history, if you include the absurd Pig War that resulted in our southern border, and took only one life (a pig's). I remember the short-lived pretend nation of Sealand, which used seawater for currency, and the five-and-a-half square miles of the Rockies called the "Kingdom of Loges des Corbeaux (a city clerk in Fernie, B.C. worked out that this territory was on the wrong side of the B.C./Alberta border), or a Social Credit backbencher who rose to speak once a year on the Turco-Mongolian Plot To Achieve World Domination, financed by Armenian bankers.

Fannish hoaxes have ranged from a First Fandom member faking his own death to exit fandom, to the famous fan "Carl Brandon", who was concocted by some well-known fan writers for a bit of fun. Hoax Worldcon bids have been promoted for Minneapolis in '73 and for McMurdo Sound in 1988.

And then there are the western Canadian hoaxes ...

Worldcon '89 at Myles' House: Some of my friends in Victoria put together the "Worldcon '89 at Myles' House!" hoax bid, satirizing vast convention plans with half-

vast execution. Myles Bos (the uncomfortable icon of this bid) had a home with an attached goat farm near Sidney, B.C., which is somewhat closer to Victoria International Airport and to the terminal for the ferries that cross Georgia Strait. Dan Cawsey made great little cartoons of Myles and the goats and fictitious committee members. Some Mylescon parties at other conventions featured a life-size figure of the cartoon Myles Bos. Karl Johanson and John Herbert had great fun writing mock progress reports boosting the great features they promised at Worldcon 89, including a local gravel pit, and Myles' sister's Duran Duran museum, and goats.

The Secret Life of Robert Runté: Robert Runté, who was an active fan in Edmonton fandom in the 1970s and 1980s, became the focus of hoax stories and faanfiction in the Edmonton fanzine, *Neology*. One guy wrote an article about him as a suspected alien masquerading as a human. Letters followed indicating he was either the focus of scientific investigation, or of a cult. Things ... sort of spun out of control, at least in several fevered imaginations. The faanthology *Confabulation* (available upon request) features this collection of stories.

After Westercon 44: Westercon 44, held in Vancouver in 1991 ended with was damage to Vancouver fans' goodwill, loss of manpower and a financial loss of over \$12,000 or \$14,000. Afterwards someone named Rajiv Witherspoon-Li wrote to *BCSFAzine*, complimenting Vancouver fandom and the chair for a great hoax Westercon, satirizing vast convention plans with half-vast execution. Graeme (who was editor at the time) basically asked, "Who the hell are you and what do you mean by writing this #\$%&#?"

The Royal Swiss Navy: This hoax SF club was inspired by some of the sillier, but more creative names for bygone SF clubs, such as the Beaker People's Libation Front (read that carefully) and the Elves', Gnomes' and Little Men's Science Fiction and Chowder Marching Society. I came up with this hoax in the mid-1990s as an excuse to play with building a website, at a point when the Vancouver CommunityNet only hosted them for community groups. As a self-teaching exercise, it sort of worked. As an actual club, it was basically imaginary, although a few friends (such as Joe Devoy) sported buttons and T-shirts for a while.

All of the foregoing amounts to tests of other people's sense of humour. Some people will get into hoaxes as a gag, and some won't. Some gags take on a life of their own, and others are non-starters. Perhaps this requires more research?

And on a different topic:

You may enter fandom with an uncritical acceptance of whatever norms and opinions you come across, thinking they're standard. (I did that, but for some reason I took my cues from a fanzine library, rather than the fans around me.) Later you may become more critical, and start questioning - not only the differing norms of other fandoms - but the assumptions of the fandom that indoctrinated you. At that point, you may express a lot of "should" statements about clubs, comics fans, costuming, gaming, filking, conrunning, or fanzines.

At this stage I developed some ideas about fanzine activity versus conrunning activity. It really looked to me as though SF fans are better equipped to produce fanzines individually, than to mount conventions together. Fanzines are ultimately solo activities, whether you write for them, edit your own and others' contributions, and/or produce them. However, mounting a convention takes a year's planning, and sustained, coordinated, cooperative efforts by a committee of volunteers. Amateurs, by definition.

To put things in proportion, though: the great majority of fanzine fans have at least average literacy, education and world awareness. Most have some sense of style, both in text and in layout and production. (Leave aside the mode of production – fanzines have been produced by hectograph, spirit duplicator, mimeographs, and by cramming as many sheets and carbon papers into a typewriter as possible; and now, anyone with a computer can download a free office program suite and upload a document to eFanzines.com.) Equally, the great majority of conrunners have at least an average awareness of financial responsibility, the performance of previous conventions in their area, the expectations of hotels and conference centres, the treatment accepted by writers and artists and congoers, and the range of interests and level of attendance of the congoers in their city.

Now, I haven't been everywhere, or done everything, and I deliberately avoided chairing conventions. Also, I have not been extremely active in the last twenty years. But I have participated in fan communities in Victoria and Vancouver over some decades. I corresponded with several scores of fans not only in North America, but in Britain and Australia. I have participated in convention committees not only in Vancouver, but in Portland and Bellingham, and attended conventions around the Northwest and in eastern Canada. Maybe I can venture a few hypotheses, and you can tell me (I expect you will tell me) if I'm full of shit.

Honestly, it is amazing that so many fans have put on so many conventions successfully, for so many years in so many places. There are always fans whose dependability, organization and ability to cooperate are sadly lacking. How great is the proportion of them in any given community?

Evidently I underestimated the solidarity, the competence and reliability of fans in general. There are reasons for this: probably the early exposure to a few people who sabotaged their convention, plus my hobby of collecting fanhistories – which, inevitably, tended to mean more stories about things that went wrong, than things that went right – could have biased my outlook.

All of which raises some questions, which must be considered by fans who plan to resume conrunning after the epidemic. Who has good judgment, and whose judgment – whether financial, or interpersonal – is frankly bad? ***Are there enough*** fans in your community who will sustain their efforts for a convention over at least a year; work together, and not concoct a feud, under pressure; keep their heads when things get crazy busy, just before and at a convention; and to cart out the convention paraphernalia, clean up the function space, complete their bookkeeping and finish a financial statement afterwards?

Some communities have never had quite enough fans like this, and have always laboured with fewer understudies for different departments than were needed. Some fan groups have lost a lot of institutional memory about what the hotel industry, writers, or artists expected and accepted. Sometimes, we let ourselves be taken in by financially incompetent chairs. All that it took was a mass overturn in the membership, and a disproportionate loss of experienced fans who were frankly tired and overworked.

Is this a matter of demographics? That is, how many fans of any stripe will any city produce – and how many committee members does even a small convention require?

And has the whole situation changed in the last twenty years?

Enough speculation. I have spent so much time on Facebook and in APAs, my next fanzine is about a year late.

FANNSH FAILURES AND FOLLIES

(News from the World of Fandom)

Neo-Nazi Furies? – The full headline, in Newsweek of all places, reads “Neo-Nazi Furies are Trump’s Latest and Most Puzzling Alt-Right Supporters.” The title is a little misleading. Read wrong, you might think it implies that “Furies, well-known for being Nazis, are Trump’s etc.” i.e. that *all* Furies are Nazis. Turns out *some* Furies are proud, self-proclaimed alt-right fanatics. Such as the author of the “Furry erotic novel, *The Furred Reich*, about a young Nazi Officer’s encounter with an anthropomorphic female snow leopard.” Claims not to be a Nazi though, just “alt-Furry.”

Astonishingly, this is a growing problem at American Furry conventions. Though most of the Alt-Right views Furies as degenerates, some of the alt-right are looking at them as a huge reservoir of alienated misfits ripe for recruiting. As part of their program, they’ve begun to target perceived progressive or left-wing Furies. There have been death threats. Organizers now have to take this problem into account when planning and running their conventions.

I’m gobsmacked by this. I thought virtually all furies, like the vast majority of fans, are just harmless, fun-loving people with an expensive hobby (a full costume costs around \$3,000, Newsweek claims). But, on thinking it over, I’m not worried. This is just contemporary American politics spilling into yet another fan community. How things shake out in the Furry community will reflect how things shake out in America. How good or bad it will be remains to be seen. Part of what makes life interesting.

On taking a closer look, I realise this Newsweek article, posted online on May 4th, 2020, dates from November, 2017. If the subversion of Furrydom by Neo-Nazis has continued and perhaps grown, then the article is still relevant. Or perhaps not, if the trend has faded away. I haven’t seen any pictures of Furies wearing Nazi armbands.

Has the alt-right shown up in Canadian Furrydom? Perhaps some of the local Canadian Furies could write in and let me know.

UPCOMING CONVENTIONS TO PRETEND TO ENJOY

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

78th World Science Fiction Convention

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

George R.R. Martin is the Toastmaster, for Ghu's sake! Wowzers! *Mercedes Lackey & Larry Dixon* are the AGoHs. *Greg Broadmore* is ArtGoH. *Rose Mitchell* is FanGoH. Basic Adult membership rate currently (as of June 3rd,) \$300 NZD = roughly \$260 CAD. **Now a virtual con!**

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

Canadian Conventions

CAN-CON – (16th to 18th October, 2020) – Sheraton Hotel, Ottawa, Ontario. – “The Conference on Canadian Content in Speculative Arts and Literature.” Tends to focus on written SF&F and on Science. Volunteer-run but no gaming, cosplay, or media programming. Pretty close to being a genre writer's festival. *Fonda Lee* is AGoH. *Tricia NarWani* is Editor GoH. *Sarah Megibow* is Agent GoH. According to their web-site, **registration is now closed**. They reached their cap of 450 attendees. So, no price-at-the-door because maximum-capacity cap already filled.

For details see: < <https://can-con.org/> >

American Conventions

AMAZINGCON – (12th to 14th June. 2020) – **Virtual Con Held Online** – Sponsored by Amazing Stories Magazine. No membership fee! Free! But you do have to register to participate. Includes writing workshops, Author readings, and numerous panels. For example, your humble God-Editor The Graeme will participate in the following panels:

HOW TO GET OUT OF THE SLUSH

– 2:00 PM (EST), Shelley Room, Friday, June 12, 2020.

“It's easy to get in to the slush pile, but very few manuscripts survive the experience. Learn what first readers are looking for before passing one along for future consideration. With Michael Anderson, MJ Moores, JF Garrard, Elizabeth

Hirst & R. Graeme Cameron.

SF FILM THEN AND NOW

– 6:00 PM (EST), Shelley Room, Saturday, June 13th, 2020.

Join three film buffs and critics for a free-wheeling discussion of the good, the bad, and the BEMy in science fiction films. With Daniel M. Kimmel, Steve Fahnstalk, and R. Graeme Cameron.

For complete list of Amazing Con events, go to < [schedule-of-events](#) >

To register, go to: < <https://amazingcon.org/> >

Writing Festivals

WHEN WORDS COLLIDE – (~~14th to 16th, August, 2020~~) – **CANCELLED**. There will be an online Aurora Awards ceremony & possibly other virtual stuff, but the con itself is cancelled. For details see < <https://www.whenwordscollide.org/> >

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

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

From: **Garth Spencer** – (May 5th, 2020)

Dear Graeme,

Just a few remarks on *BCSFazine* #539 – April, 2020 ...

First, I apologize for missing the deadline to submit this loc to the May issue.

Second – in your editorial, you mention that most of fandom has never heard of BCSFA or VCON. You don’t need to convince me; I have met people, while I was on a convention committee and was promoting VCON, who hadn’t heard of the convention for a few years and assumed it was dead. This is one of the data points that made me think BCSFA members, or a larger cultural lens, tended not to do self-promotion particularly well. (At least that’s my excuse.)

[I agree. Part of the problem is that mainstream TV media is only interested in catchy visuals that reinforce public stereotypes. Fan Expo, for instance, with its huge

dealer's section, tight-packed crowds, numerous splendid cosplay outfits, and truly big name stars ('cause familiar to the general public) is manna from Heaven on a slow news day.

Whereas, as far as VCON coverage goes, I remember when a CBC camera crew, in desperation, grabbed a bunch of drunks from Hospitality, had them stand clustered together in the hall staring glassy-eyed at the camera, some of them clutching their beer cups to their chest, as backdrop to the person being interviewed. I witnessed this and was aghast. Negative publicity!

Even amateur reporters can't be trusted. I also remember when two reporters from the UBC student newspaper interviewed Michal Walsh and myself for two solid hours, recording every word on a cassette machine. Michael and I knocked ourselves out regaling them with amusing tales of past VCONs and local fen in action. We wanted VCON to come across as endlessly entertaining and fun to attend. Michael, being a professional reporter himself, knew only a fraction of material would be used. Both of us were determined to provide plenty of options to choose from. The actual article, when it came out, didn't make use of ANYTHING we said. Merely mentioned there had been a science fiction convention attended by a bunch of fans.

In other words, attracting media attention in itself does not constitute good publicity. It can prove a disaster. What's needed is a media-savvy PR person, at least one, who knows how to manipulate the media into presenting us in a positive light, and who is a real expert at providing a "Potemkin Village" image of VCON that news cameras will find irresistible.

The other big problem is advertising aimed at the public. Putting up posters in book stores and providing flyers to libraries doesn't cut it anymore. Besides, the term "VCON" is meaningless to people who don't know what it is. What's needed is a dramatic poster, clearly indicating that VCON is an exciting SF convention more fun than Fan Expo, on display at a high traffic site like the Metrotown Skytrain station. That would cost hundreds if not thousands of dollars. As far as I know, we've never spent money to place advertising. Nor can we afford to. What VCON needs is a patron willing to shell out sufficient bucks for this purpose.

But, yeah, poor publicity has always been VCON's Achilles Heel despite the efforts of many volunteers eagerly doing their best.]

The next major thing that struck me was that you had induced Robert Sawyer to submit an article for *BCSFazine*! Calloo Callay! Only what is this he's reporting, fans being fuggheads in record numbers? Um ... well. There have always been fuggheads. And I suspect that a lot of fans are still working out their adolescent issues when they hit fandom, often in their twenties. As I said elsewhere, we tend to bring some baggage and mistaken ideas with us, when we enter fandom. And then there's the Internet effect; for some reason, we still haven't quite gotten used to using our social inhibitions online, and descend very easily to uninhibited first responses, however base their motivations. This will change, so I really suspect the nastiness Sawyer reports will subside. But he may argue, and the argument has strength, that people are far better mannered face-to-face and in person and in contact with people in their

usual community—while the Internet, like metropolitan cities, are full of strangers to us.

Robert Sawyer can't be the only voice asking people to practice common decency, which I think is the bottom line. So I expect things to turn around.

[You expect people to moderate behaviour simply because people ask them to? That's like parents expecting their teenagers to behave. Not going to happen. Most people don't like being told what to do. Essentially, standards of human behaviour as actually practiced (as opposed to what they are supposed to be) are nothing but fads and trends that come and go for reasons sociologists get government grants to argue about for decades after. People will behave decently when they are good and ready to behave that way and not before.]

It was interesting to see Stan Hyde revive the column I used to read in Victoria, when we were both living there, and were members of the same club. It is faintly surprising that he is depressed by the unawareness of many Star Wars fans about the anything-but-conventional outlook from which Star Wars, and Star Trek, were born. If we have learned anything from the changes in fandom, it is that there is little memory of the past, and a good deal of miscommunication. Let's face it: very young people enter what passes for fandom these days; the default state of a human mind is provincial, conventional, even authoritarian, sexist, and ageist; it takes broadening experiences to open up a mind, and relatively few people have such experiences. On top of this, we have had a half-century of conservative reaction against the opening of Western minds to alternatives, which was the core of the 1960s and 1970s experience. And Stan is *surprised* at how unenlightened Star Wars fans are?

[Fandom today is a multi-billion dollar industry for people who like the stuff, and who like to collect stuff. Young fen are particularly enthusiastic because they have the enthusiasm of recent converts to the "cause," i.e. books, movies, TV shows, etc. They're into the latest "thing," emphasis on what is current and all the rage among their peers.

Now, tell me, how many teenagers do you know like to hang out with a bunch of pot-bellied, overweight, balding old-as-fuck guys with bad teeth whose current interests are at least half a century out of date and treat newbie fen as ignorant scum beneath their notice? Why the hell would any kid want to hang out with a bunch of losers like that?

That is, of course, a horribly unfair description of the curmudgeons making up traditional fandom these days but, nevertheless, when you consider most young people instinctively consider people older than themselves to be "gross," why would they find people from several generations before their time worth getting to know?

Many an old-timer considers himself to be a "fannish ghod" and automatically assumes younger people will drop to their knees in awe in their presence. This is a sad fallacy on a par with assuming elders automatically receive respect. It's beyond sad. It's pathetic.

The terrifying truth is us old gits have to EARN the respect of newbies if we are ever to recruit converts to “our” cause. We do this by being enthusiastic, charismatic, eager to share what joy and fun it is to constantly seek out “sense of wonder” as the Holy Grail, and above all, intellectually exciting and inspiring to the point of being infectious. A tall order. Especially considering what we look like (to young people). But it’s worth a try. Even if we don’t succeed, at least we’ll have fun.]

Oh never mind I’ll have another drink. Onward.

Murray Moore and Mary Ellen had quite a curious Corflu trip, given the effects of the coronavirus restrictions. I am still evaluating the pandemic experience in Vancouver. No words as yet.

Thank you for including a review of eAPA in your article on APAs! I hope and trust that some more readers will be interested in joining us!

Conventions. Like you, I wanted to construct a list (for my website) concentrating on conventions in the Pacific Northwest, that most BCSFA members might reach; but since The Plague hit, I might as well put up a placeholder page, saying “So many conventions have been cancelled or postponed, I might as well not post a convention list until the evil days have passed.”

What is the next Big Thing? Hypertexted online publications with animated graphics? Four-dimensional hamster mazes where the tubes rotate and reconfigure when the hamster runs across pressure pads? Scaled-up versions for humans to run around in when they play laser tag? A 17th iteration of the “Leather Goddesses of Phobos” online game, now with human mazes that reconfigure unpredictably? Online universities with online student pranks? What will they think of next?

Yours truly, Garth Spencer

From: **Taral Wayne** – (May 5th, 2020)

Loc to BCSFAzine #540

The Graeme reaper speaks ... apparently.

Of course, I read all the same science articles that I presume everyone else does, so I won’t expect any surprises there. I wouldn’t believe any that were too good to be true, anyway. All you need is a neutronium moebius strip, and faster-than-light travel will only take a couple of years to develop, right? I see that article in FaceBook about once a month, on average.

The portfolio of my art was a bit of a surprise, however. But maybe we discussed it and I overlooked it during my too-many other preoccupations. In any case, it seemed appropriate, since you prodded me into drawing those particular illos in the first place. I sometimes wonder why I didn’t do more of this sort of random, mildly humorous cartooning over the years, but I suppose trying to make money from furry art might have had something to with it. Now I’m just tired out and not very interested in doing fanart anymore. I just want to collect my pension for as long as I

can, and blow it all on things that I could never afford when I had to work to earn the money.

[Sounds like a good plan, actually. Only do what you want to do, only what you enjoy doing. A good policy to maintain quality of life.]

I read Lisa's advice in a bit of a rush. I'm one of those writers who believe that you can't really teach anyone to write ... although you can assist them to improve. I was a firm believer in the old adage that you had to write a million works of crap before you know your business. Almost any advice that you can be given can be violated in six ways before you finish with the first paragraph, and yet still be called "good writing."

As well, I've preferred to avoid people who were eager to tell me how to write. Just a few months ago I was bemused by a FaceBook member who wanted to read something I had recently written, and asked if I would show the story to her. She then told me in great detail how inadequate it was, and how it should be re-written to her satisfaction. I quietly ended my "friendship" with her a while later, so that it was not so obviously because of getting a "bad review" ... but I suppose that was what it was. When I have an *actual* retired editor who works with me, why bother with just *anyone's* ill-informed opinions?

[Well, as I learned more than half a century ago, one of the secrets of accepting criticism is to know what to reject. Only take criticism to heart if it is useful. Ignore all the rest.]

Doubtless, Lisa's advice was good, and I didn't intend to judge it for good or ill. My remarks reflect merely personal experience with writing.

The Tick was one of my favourite animated cartoons. Unfortunately, I don't have many good memories of the live-action TV show. There were two seasons on DVD, but—oddly enough—a *small* number of episodes were never included in the collections! I don't remember how many, or which ones.

As Lloyd mentioned, I underwent a painful bout of a disorder that perhaps would be indelicate to mention, that required the insertion of large and sharp implements in my unmentionable, and even now is a source of not yet un-relinquished discomfort. Fortunately, it was not life threatening, but I admit that my normally sunny disposition was sorely tried. I think I am slowly returning to normal, and have been able to—among other things—write a loc for no justifiable reason, and have even tentatively returned to a bit of fan writing. No art, however. That would be pressing my luck too far.

[You've had more than your share of physical difficulties. Wishing you the best of all possible recovery. Certainly at least to the point of being able to concentrate on this and that enjoyable task without being distracted and dragged down by pain and

discomfort. No need to emulate Job. Carrying on with the good stuff is much more fun. Hope you will soon be able to do that routinely and comfortably.]

From: **Garth Spencer** – (March 9th, 2020)

Dear Graeme,

Just a few remarks on *BCSFazine* #540 – May, 2020.

The older I get, the more I have to get real about things I will not accomplish. I had consented to review last year's Writers of the Future anthology for *BCSFazine*, but I now realize it just isn't going to happen. There are other promises I haven't kept, partly due to distractions and partly due to procrastination, such as transcribing David Malinski's taped interviews of conrunners in the 1980s, to help his gang prepare for a Vancouver Island convention. My sense of personal fault is not proportional to any objective importance of these projects. Onward.

[Actually, for me, the concept of things I cannot accomplish is more a source of pride than of guilt or anguish over "personal fault." Heck, it's quite the fun challenge to come up with a list. I know I'm never going to be mistaken for Casanova, for instance. Pretty sure I'll never have to choose between my villa in Cannes and my villa in Capri. Am almost certain I'm never going to absorb Penguin Classics into my publishing empire. Never going to build that summer cabin on Mars. And as for petty pish/tosh like missing deadlines, failing to review books I'd promised to review, or forgetting old friend's names even as I talk to them face-to-face, those are just mundane annoyances scarcely worthy of being noticed. I never regret a meal I haven't eaten. Having ANY sense of personal fault is out of proportion. If I bugger things up it is just me being me. Let others cope. Doesn't bother me in the least. I just carry on. Part of the joy of being old. Don't have time for regrets or self-blame.]

You mention plasmoids. I heard of plasmoids in terms of ball lightning, or things people see in the sky; in that instance I read a definition of a mass of ionized gas, held together (for however long) by whatever electrical or magnetic field the mass itself generated. Perhaps someone up on electromagnetic fields can expand on this, and tell us how plasmoids are generated and what applications they're good for.

You also mention the U.S. Space Force. Unless I misunderstand its mission and parameters completely, there is something farcical about declaring a "space force" when there are few or no space vessels, much less military space vessels, and no regular traffic yet, to and from interplanetary space.

[There are tons of military satellites, and both the Chinese and Russians have tested weapons in orbit capable of destroying satellites. As for the Americans, their unmanned military shuttle is a frequent flyer and nobody knows what the heck it does. I'm sure Trump has visions of Space Marines and Nuclear-powered flying battleships or

whatever based on movies he may have seen. Pretty certain the US military has something more practical in mind. Regardless, the overall trend is an international competition to militarize the near-Earth orbit region. This is worrisome. Seems laughable at the moment, but only because we don't know what's going on and refuse to take it seriously. There may come a day when it won't seem so funny anymore.]

You mentioned the first bagpipe performance in space, and indulged in a bit of Scots dialect. I want to create a character called the Mullah Kintyre, Canada's only Scots mullah, who preaches in Lallans and nobody realizes what he's saying. Is that laying it on a bit too thick? (Contemplating him being an ordinary Canadian driven mad, after the Great Big Earthquake, by the loss of his entire family before his eyes)

I really like Taral Wayne's illos. If there were any justice in the world, he would be an acclaimed comic book and graphic novel artist. He mentioned in correspondence that he generated whole story universes about recurring characters he called 'kjolas', or 'house gamins', or an alternate-history version of North America—none of which work I have ever seen. (Or maybe the graphic novels just didn't work out ... we should ask.)

This instalment of 'Literary Shenanigans' was educational. In fact I was embarrassed to realize I hadn't asked the next question about social distancing restrictions, to wit, 'what is this going to do to publishing?' So in this column, you covered more than one of the knock-on effects. Good to see your contributor Paula Johanson's name again.

I enjoyed your article about E.R. Burroughs' works. Just a thought about the Caligula novel: how many reasons have historians argued for, to explain the occasional insanity of emperors? I keep thinking of lead poisoning, as well as undiagnosed STDs; but this may be a twice-told tale.

[Lead poisoning is overrated. The water fed into Rome had a high mineral content. Such lead pipes as were in use quickly developed an interior encrustation that greatly reduced the amount of lead exposure.

Besides, the ancient histories were written by members of the upper class who resented emperors who shut them out of the Imperial monopolies on corruption and economic exploitation. As far as ordinary people were concerned, both Nero and Caligula were immensely popular.

Furthermore, there were very few sources of "official" information. Popular opinion was based on a) the latest rumours, and b) the latest perks handed out by the authorities. Both Nero and Caligula were particularly adept at appealing to the mob.

Some ancient written sources reveal that Caligula was strikingly intellectual and a brilliant orator in the opinion of his peers. But did he also screw his sisters? That was the rumour. Nobody knows the truth of the matter. He also had a reputation for a sardonic sense of humour many found exasperating. Did he really want to make his

horse a Senator? Or was he just expressing his opinion of Senators? One way or another, a very interesting fellow. Best not to live next door to him.]

Thank you, Lisa Smedman! I have been stalled in the middle of several stories, trying to figure out where the story goes; perhaps the 'Deal a Plot' game will help me finish them.

About Stormcrow Alehouse on Broadway ... Went there a few times, looked around, said 'Nope' and walked away. Guess I have a different notion of 'fannish' than Stormcrow management has. I wonder if there's a market niche (or will be) for oldfarts who don't want dance music blaring at them, don't want a TV tuned to a sports channel, just want a quiet place to drink, and eat, and talk with other people (that they can actually hear for a change), and maybe have a game of chess?

In 'Afterwords', you express abhorrence of publishing just lists of 'dry facts'. Back when I gave born-again Christianity a stab, I was struck by the journalistic tone in much of the Bible—stories that dispensed with a lot of emotional tone, especially in the Pentateuch and the Gospels, in several English editions (and I had a collection for a while)—so I guess that the meaning of much of the text was conveyed nonverbally, added by storytellers' and preachers' voices, or read into the text by readers. If just-the-facts-ma'am writing works in a similar way, then the writers assume the readers will just know what the associated overtones should be. Evidently you and I don't know and don't read them in. Ghu knows there are things I don't get, about a lot of convention listings.

[Interesting point you make about the lack of emotional tone in the old testament. A major feature of Jewish schooling is the habit of questioning and debating each and every line in religious writings. Collections of Rabbinic scholarly writing going back to the days of the Roman empire make it clear this approach goes back many, many centuries, and may date back as far as the exile in Babylon, if not earlier. So the emotional aspect, not to say passionate enthusiasm, lacking from the written text is to be found in ongoing debate, a sort of "devil's advocate" approach designed to enable each student to thoroughly think through and understand the meaning and significance of every line in the text.

Mind you, emotion is in the mind of the reader. Some may dispute your observation. All the same, I suspect my point that religious schooling, indeed a lifetime of intense study, adding emotion to the process of interpretation and understanding, is probably valid. Same would apply to Christian bible studies too, I should think.]

You didn't say anything about Belgians this issue.

[Of course not! You think I'm crazy? I don't want to incur their wrath!]

Yours truly, Garth Spencer

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

Dear Graeme:

As requested!; here is a letter of comment on the newest BCSFAzine, issue 540. It's a busy day, and a great day; today is our 37th wedding anniversary. We can't do much in this pandemic, but we will indulge with a pizza later today, and enjoy our balcony overlooking the highway.

If you really want to find out who's dying these days, File 770 is good, but Ansible is best. It is depressing, though, to see the numbers of our peers who are swelling the RIP section in Ansible. It is a sign of the times, plus the pandemic, and our ascending ages.

[I chose not to run obituaries. As you say, it can be depressing. I want to focus on stuff people might enjoy reading.]

Took a little time to celebrate our anniversary, and back to the issue at hand ... The death of book publishing? Looks like Rob Sawyer got his Oppenheimer book out just in time. We all seem to have a shelf full of books yet to be read ... the pandemic is the time to do it, but after this news, do it slowly.

And, the return of the Sad Puppies, who have decided that if they cannot make the Hugos look bad, or at least control them so that their own choices will reap the silver rockets, we'll start our own awards that we can control and give to their own choices. I wonder what they will call their awards, and how rocketty they will look? Someone's making too much of this, trying to control readers through a particular strain of the genre. We read what we like, and do not read what we do not like, and the point is moot, because of the death of publishing, see above.

Everyone says they want life to get back to normal after this pandemic, and I think they have no ambition. I don't want a return to normal, I want to go forward to something better. I suspect that many things will change a little bit, but some things should change a lot. Once Trump is gone in November, we should get much more sane, the world will like one another more, the right-wing snowflakes will all have strokes from their extreme temper tantrums, and this step will help reduce the continued impact of the coronavirus. With luck.

[I want to avoid politics in BCSFAzine as much as possible, if only because it's plastered all over the internet and impossible to ignore. I'd like BCSFAzine to be primarily an escapist bit of fun. So, I'll just say I'm not at all convinced the outcome of the US election is a sure thing one way or another and am somewhat fearful of the results. "Anticipation" is not the word I'd use to describe my feelings on the matter.]

I never did get to the Toronto Storm Crow Tavern. Too nerdy for me, I suspect, and far too expensive for our pensioned tastes. It has closed down too, and to be honest, I know of at least a few people who loved it, but found almost too late that it was a serious drain on meagre funds.

My loc ... One fandom I recently read about is having its own toxic peak because one fan got pissed off with the creator, and sent to him a picture of someone pointing a gun at the camera, with the implied threat of change what you're doing, or else. I hope you're right, that fandom will carry on, but the idea of 'fan' or 'fandom' is so repellent to some, the community may carry on, even if the name or appellation doesn't.

I still haven't found any regular full-time office work, not that anyone is hiring right now, but I am juggling my time with paying editorial work and paying voicework. We're starting to get into some decent shape right now, but I know that the paying work will end shortly. The resumes keep going out, and someone's got to start hiring soon. Help me, 6/49, you're my only hope, as I slide my 6/49 slip into the R2 unit ...

I need to learn more about Zoom, especially to see if it is usable, and if it the new software for the cool kids. Hurry up webcam ... Olden times were not simpler, but at least they were more familiar.

The mention of Barf in *Spaceballs*, played by John Candy, nostalgically reminds me of something I see most evenings. TV Ontario is the province's educational channel, and it is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year. Often, they play a short montage of the various programmes they produced in-house ... we see references to the legendary *Prisoners of Gravity*, but if only for a short second, we also see a snippet from a 1970s children's show called *Cucumber*, and a very young John Candy guest stars as the character Weatherman.

Yes, I did read to the end! Many thanks for yet another issue. I hope this is being spread much farther than just the assorted members of BCSFA and other fan across the country. I hope much of the fannish fanzine world can be induced to participate here. Definitely worth a shot. Thanks, and see you nextish.

Yours, Lloyd Penney.

From: **Felicity Walker** – (May 31st, 2020)

Comments on *BCSFazine* #540.

Cover: *The Cave Girl* cover art looks like those weird alternate European posters for bootlegs of North American movies.

"Submission Deadline": Midnight, May 31st. Good. I'm still in time even though I've been busy procrastinating! I hope to write a LOC for each issue of the new *BCSFazine*.

"Void Breather Bombast": I like the idea of colliding galaxies as sumo

wrestlers.

“Taral Wayne Art Portfolio”: Cool vehicle designs in the first drawing!

“Literary Shenanigans”: “Free Web Seminars for Writers”: I’ve had to watch some “webinars” for my day job and I found them surprisingly exhausting. They’re only one hour, twice a week, but I always have to lie down for a few hours afterwards.

Incorporating “the latest discoveries in brain science” into the “Characterization and Character-Driven Conflicts” webinar by Ron S. Friedman sounds like it would be up Michael Bertrand’s alley!

“Books to Unburden Your Mind”: *I Am a Barbarian*: I was surprised to see the name “Cingetorix” used for a Briton, as it sounds like a Gaul name. “Pandemix” and “Gooleanalytix” would be good modern *Asterix* character names.

[If I remember correctly, the cultures of Britannia and Gaul in the time of Caesar were essential identical, in that both were Celtic in origin.]

Your article is also the first time I’ve heard *why* Gaius Caesar was nicknamed “Little Boots.” It sounded to me like something you’d name a kitten, not a depraved and sadistic emperor.

[Well, even apex predators are cute when they’re young.]

I bet you could write a Harold-Robbins-style pulp novel about ancient Rome!

“The Randomness of Storytelling” by Lisa Smedman: I use a random word generator to help me write new stand-up jokes. (The one I use is at <http://watchout4snakes.com/> .) Otherwise when I try to think of “random” topics my mind tends to come up with the same “random” words and they lead to the same “random” free-associations.

I also invented a game several years ago, when I first got a car and was enjoying the freedom to drive anywhere I wanted, where I would take the name of the sender of the last piece of spam I got in my e-mail, look up the address for that name in the phone book, and then drive to that area. Not to make trouble, mind you; this wasn’t the spammer, after all, just someone who happened to have the same name. Just to randomise the direction I was driving in, so that I didn’t zen-navigate the same paths of least resistance every time. Sometimes I would look around whatever neighbourhood I’d found myself in and see if there was a restaurant to try.

I agree that random writing prompts can lead to some fun rabbit holes of research. Using a random word generator you can also discover new music. Generate a random word and then search for it in YouTube but add the phrase “provided to YouTube by” (including quote marks). This will return only music results. You can also try it with your name! I found all these songs either titled “Felicity” or composed or performed by someone named Felicity. My favourite so far is the song “Felicity” by the band Orange Juice.

I bought and read *Dragons of Autumn Twilight* (1984) back in the eighties! I didn’t

know it was based on actual gaming sessions. No wonder there's a scene in a tavern at the beginning.

"Random Musings" by Robert J. Sawyer: I've been watching a lot of *Columbo* (1968–2003) lately and reading reviews of it online. The consensus seems to be that the show peaked around season four, and that *most* shows peak around seasons three or four. Why is this? (I also love the revived *Columbo* from 1989 onward, which is seasons eight to ten, though the rest of *Columbo* fandom doesn't seem to like it as much as the "classic" episodes.)

I agree that the third season of *Star Trek* (1966) is underrated. The budget was lower but there were some great stories in there. "Spectre of the Gun" makes up for its low budget by having minimalist, atmospheric sets that somehow manage *not* to seem "stage-y." That's impressive considering how many corners they had to cut.

George Takei circa 1989 could have starred in a *Star Trek* series, in my opinion. It was always nice when Sulu had scenes in the *Trek* movies that spot-lit his character, like the "Don't call me 'Tiny'" scene in *Star Trek III: The Search for Spock* (1984) or the helicopter-buying scene in *Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home* (1986). Also, check out his fun portrayal of Emperor Yoshiro in the cut-scenes in the video game *Command & Conquer: Red Alert 3* (2008).

"Tonight's Animated Show—*The Tick*" by Michael Bertrand: The animated *Tick* (1994) was the best of both worlds, taking only the good parts of Ben Edlund's sense of humour, and adding warmth. One of the writers was Christopher McCulloch, who would go on to co-create *The Venture Bros.* (2003) under the pen name "Jackson Publick," and you can see a similarity of both style and subject matter between the two shows. Wow, McCulloch is almost the same age as me. That means he was in his early 20s when he was writing *Tick* episodes. I have failed at my life.

"Armless But Not Harmless": Gerrit Graham as Milo is doing a similar voice to what he used as the father of the main character in *The Critic*.

Interesting note of trivia: that "Eat this kitten!" scene is coincidentally prefigured in the classic Bruce Lee movie *Enter the Dragon* (1973), in which the evil mastermind Han tests new recruit Roper (John Saxon) by starting to kill a helpless kitten. When Roper can't resist saving the kitten, Han knows that Roper isn't really evil.

Some Americans seem to think the Minnesota accent (Edie McClurg, Jesse Ventura, and *Fargo*) sounds like the Canadian "hoser" accent. It doesn't to me, but maybe there's some overlap because both come from the north-central part of the continent.

"Leonard da Vinci and His Fightin' Genius Time Commandos": Paul Williams may have been cast as the Mother of Invention because he was already working at Fox Kids portraying the Penguin in *Batman: The Animated Series* (1992).

All these years I've been thinking that Jim Cummings was the voice of Richard Nixon in the Hunter S. Thompson movie adaptation *Where the Buffalo Roam* (1980), but upon checking IMDB, it turns out that was *Brian* Cummings (no relation).

"The Light-Hearted Vituperator and Jolly Reviler" by Stan G. Hyde: Sam

Seder of online news show *The Majority Report* pointed out that this is the first time in a long time that everyone has been experiencing the same thing. He didn't mean this in the sense of shared adversity, but rather in a cultural sense: like when he was a kid, he said, and everyone in the country watched the last episode of *M*A*S*H* (1972) together. For our atomised generation, that's a heartwarming thought.

I liked what Jennifer Hartley wrote, but I hope that things go back to normal at least in the sense that I can shop at Save-On Foods again. Currently, with the store rearranged for social distancing so that the line-up for the cash register stretches all the way to the back of the store and there is no way to avoid it by using self-check-out, my disabilities mean that I'm limited to using drive-through and shopping at smaller stores. My tax refund just arrived and for the first time ever, I was glad I had direct deposit, because I wouldn't be able to survive the marathon lines at the banks.

"It Is What It Is (Mansplaining the State of Fandom)" by Garth Spencer: I feel like we were amazingly fortunate to have VCON for as long as we did, that there were people who volunteered to run it year after year, and there were hotels that could accommodate us. If I was born just in time to have experienced the end of the era, I'm grateful that at least I got to have that much.

[VCON may not be permanently dead, but rather on the verge of resurrection. See my "Afterwords" comments below.]

"Fannish Failures and Follies": Although the two Storm Crows had the advantage of not being sports bars, they still might not have worked for FRED; neither location had parking, and both were loud and crowded. It's difficult to find a place that's central for people who are taking transit, and has parking for people who drive, and is quiet enough to have a conversation, and has "normal" food at affordable prices. If any of us had living rooms that were large enough, I would suggest just having FRED at someone's house.

However, I wish the Storm Crow well. On a related note, the Stand-Up for Mental Health program had one of its graduation shows at La Fontana Café on Boundary Road and Hastings Street a few years ago. The décor was enjoyably nerdy (including some Transformers!) and the service was friendly. I got a good vibe from the place. There was no parking, however, which discouraged me from going back.

"Ook! Ook! Slobber! Drool! (Letters of Comment)": Don't judge your computer by how it handles Facebook. Facebook is very bloated and has a tendency to crash your browser as soon as you scroll down more than a page or two. Also, most video and audio attachments don't seem to work on Facebook.

Re: the font, all you would have to do is install Bookman Italic once (double-click on the file, and click "Install" and it will copy itself to your "Fonts" folder) and it would solve the problem without requiring any extra clicks when composing future *BCSFAzines*. However I respect your prioritisation of speed, and admire your timeliness.

It looks like you experimented with starting a Zoom FRED, but I didn't find out

about it in time to attend. We have lots of time to figure something out, though. The pandemic isn't going anywhere.

[My Zoom experience is beginning to add up. See "Afterwords" below for further comments.]

I know that historical old times were not simpler or more innocent for the people living in them, but our own lives were definitely more innocent the younger we were, and popular culture has become more jaded, cynical, and reflexively ironic than it used to be. As I get older, it hurts to be alive, and I miss being innocent of knowing that experience.

I still haven't seen *The Producers* (1968). It's on my list of great works I've somehow managed to miss.

[I consider it Mel Brook's best comedy. I still find it hilarious.]

From: **Guy Lillian III** – (April, 2020)

Note: This is actually a review of *BCSFazine* #539 which guy printed in his *Zine Dump* #49 out of Merrit Island, Florida, in April.

"*BCSFazine* #539 / God-Editor R. Graeme Cameron / New editor and new style to the British Columbia SF Association's monthly clubzine: a 77-page genzine. The cover depicts Whitman Publishing's *Assignment in Space* with Rip Foster, of which I had two copies. After this welcome nostalgia, the new God-Editor opines on his club, and it is sad:

"A stray strand of fossil DNA embedded in the super-organism matrix. Remarkably self-aware, if only because its components share common interests including a ghost memory of the way things used to be. They're scattered now, their fanac reduced pretty much to zero, but when reminded, can still recall how much fun they used to have at *BCSFazine* collation parties and other club events. They were young then, inclined to drink continuously at parties where everybody did silly things, like argue over the latest books and films, participate in trivia conquests or group story writing, form competing cabals plotting to rule VCON, and mainly, drink and talk, drink and talk. It was loads of fun. Now? Aging former BCSFAans prefer to spend sober evenings at home where they can relax and avoid stress."

Cleverness continues as Cameron relates recent news of the solar system as captured by science but passed through his quirky sensyuma. Turning serious, he eulogizes astronaut Al Worden, whom I photographed in 1971 with his crewmate, David Scott. Taral Wayne does the same for an artist friend, followed by a fine portfolio of Steve Stiles' 'toons. Robert Sawyer chimes in with a rumination on the nastiness of some fans. Reviews of novels and a Canadian zine of note. Lots of

movies. A piece on Trek fandom. Garth Spencer on the state of fandom. Murray Moore on Corflu Heatwave. Apas. Conventions. It is clear that Graeme is pulling out the stops, as they say, creating a righteous genzine, and we look forward to watching him do it again and again.”

AFTERWORDS

This (to use a fannish term) not as complete as I wanted it to be, but I have looming deadlines for other projects so must go with what I’ve put together so far.

Zoom meetings are part of the problem. Spent about 10 or 11 hours on just one meeting involving North American and British fen the other day. It was so much fun I couldn’t break away.

Every Tuesday I host a meeting limited to members of SF Canada, which is a sort of writer’s union (which includes some publishers and editors like myself). People dropping by have included Donna McMahon, Peter Halaz, Craig Russell, Rhea Rose, Allan Weiss, Diane Walton, etc. We talk shop, but also cover a wide range of topics. Pretty free-wheeling, actually. I consider it great fun.

And every Monday, starting at 6:00 PM (PST) = 9:00 PM (EST), I host what I call “Graeme Cameron’s FRED SF Fen Confab” aimed specifically at current and former members of BCSFA and VCON veterans but actually open to any interested SF fan worldwide.

The first was a disaster. Nobody showed up. The second was another disaster, in that my internet was down for 24 hours and I was unable to host the event.

Third time lucky, in that 7 people showed up in addition to myself, namely: Julie McGalliard, Paul Carpentier, Steve Forty, Craig Russell, Andrew C. Murdoch, Chris Sturges, and John Mansfield. Quite a mix of fannish veterans. The conversation was at times quite lively. Many differences of opinion but also fascinating stuff I’d long forgotten or never knew in the first place.

Of particular interest to VCON supporters, Chris Sturges had much to reveal about the state of VCON. It does look as if there will be a VCON in 2021, and probably 2022 as well. Even a potential bit of business later this year. Chris asked me if I was willing to moderate three workshops circa October 2020, either in person or through a Zoom conference. I said “Yes!” But nothing set in stone yet. Everything still in flux.

All the same, things are happening within WCSFA. It seems the whole concept of VCON, in terms of its function structure, is being totally revamped. Something new is going to be tried, something that will at least partially resolve the lack of continuity problem. A new focus is under consideration. Specific guests are being considered. New policies. It is not my place to reveal what is being contemplated. WCSFA will announce developments in due course, and actively seek participants to get involved when appropriate. Point is active planning has begun. VCON has a future!