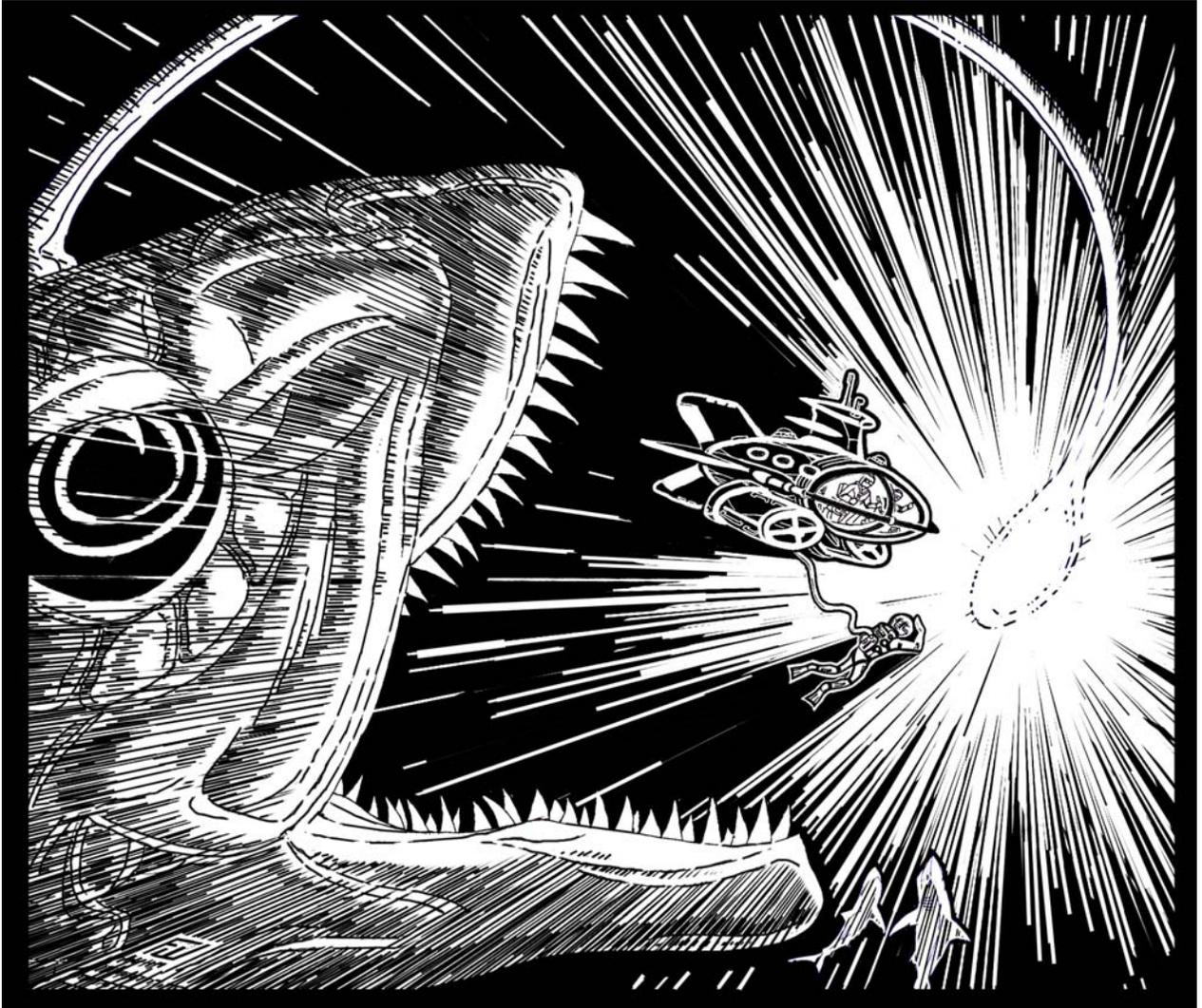


Argentus

2006: Issue 6
3.00 or the usual



Articles

Bob Blackwood
John Flynn
Christopher Garcia
Mark Leeper
Laurie D.T. Mann
James Nicoll
Dave Romm
Steve Sneyd
Kevin Standlee
Alex von Thorn
Ted White
Nicholas Whyte
Frank Wu

Mock Section

Matthew Appleton
Christopher Garcia
Alethea Kontis
Joseph T. Major
Steven Savile
Steven H Silver

Artists

Sheryl Birkhead
Brad Foster
Trinlay Khadro
William Rotsler
Steven H Silver
Steve Stiles
Taral Wayne
Frank Wu

with photos by Dave Romm

From the Mine

Presenting the sixth regular issue of *Argentus*, delayed longer than I would have liked because I keep forgetting that I've taken on more than I really should.

This year's distractions have included the regular con-running, both Windycon and the Chicago in 2008 Worldcon Bid, reviewing the publication of *Worldcon Guest of Honor Speeches*, edited by Mike Resnick and Joe Siclari, as well as the preparation of *Outbound*, a collection of short stories by Jack McDevitt which will be available at this year's Windycon. In addition to the Sidewise Awards, which have been around for ten years, I'm on the Novel jury for this year's Nebula. I've been asked to write a column for *Helix SF*, a wonderful on-line donation-funded 'zine edited by Will Sanders and published by Sanders and Lawrence Watt-Evans. To my surprise, they accepted a short story of mine, which should appear, I'm told, in the January issue, so look for "Les Lettres Paston" at the *Helixsf.com* at the beginning of the year.

On the other hand, I've finally entered the twenty-first century when Elaine and I decided to get cable internet at the end of July. This means that if you use my att.net e-dress, your mail won't be getting through. We're on Comcast, but you should send me e-mail at shsilver@sfsite.com.

This issue has a couple of travel pieces, first by Dave E Romm on his journey to the land way down under, Antarctica. When Robin was perhaps two years old, I brought home a small Rand-McNally globe from BookExpo America. She looked at it and we explained what a globe was. She immediately pointed to the large, light blue area at the bottom of the globe and announced that she wanted to visit there. Since then, as she's learned more about Antarctica, she's been very constant in her desire to visit (her father is more than willing to go with her, her mother, not so much). European correspondent Nicholas Whyte provides the second travel article with a fanciful look at Belfast.

The con-running aspect of fandom is covered by Kevin Standlee's examination of the purpose of badges and badge names as well as Christopher Garcia's con-report on BARTCon, a small convention which took place on the San Francisco subway system.

James Nicoll wonders just how much more depressing modern science fiction is that the works of the genre's past. Delving into collections from 1953, 1975 and 2005, he comes up with an answer that may have surprised him.

Steve Sneyd, whose entry would have fit into last year's *Alliterative Argentus*, has sent an exploration into the science fictional themes of the poetry of Edgar Allan Poe, demonstrating that in addition to creating the mystery and horror genres, also looked to the future.

In *Argentus 5*, the *Alliterative Argentus*, I included numerous images of people whose names share the

initials "SS." Frank Wu got the most correct, with 22/44 right.

Media, whether television or film gets heavy coverage from my own look at television shows that *should* be available on DVD, Mark Leeper's examination of the lies of Obi-Wan Kenobi, Alex von Thorn's look at the cross between space opera and westerns, and finally Bob Blackwood and John Flynn's debate on the ten worst big budget science fiction films. Artist Frank Wu wasn't able to send any art, but he did send a rumination on statistics that grew out of Gary Westfahl's *Biographic Encyclopedia of Science Fiction Film*.

I also weigh in on the recently demoted Pluto, talking about the Planet's history, my role in the Society for the Preservation of Pluto as a Planet, and my five-year correspondence and meeting with Clyde Tombaugh in the early 1980s.

And while you may know William Tenn, do you know Philip Klass? Ted White has sent an appreciation of Tenn/Klass, one of the fields foremost humorists. As a side note, Laurie Mann, who edited the three volumes of Tenn's work for NESFA Press, has announced plans for a documentary, *William Tenn: A Writer's Life*. Although mostly being shot in Pittsburgh, Mann's film crew also shot footage at LACon IV.

Index

From the Mine.....	1
Index.....	1
Feeling Badgered?.....	2
Kevin Standlee.....	2
Phil Klass: An Appreciation.....	7
Ted White.....	7
A Brief, and Incomplete, Bibliography of William Tenn.....	8
Phil Klass: If We Can Remember Half of What He Remembers.....	8
Laurie D. T. Mann.....	8
Whither the DVD-TV Revolution?.....	9
Steven H Silver.....	9
Quiz Answers.....	11
Starship Westerns Versus Science Fiction.....	12
Alexander von Thorn.....	12
Number Don't Lie.....	14
Frank Wu.....	14
Lies My Jedi Told Me.....	15
Mark Leeper.....	15
Requiem for a Planet.....	16
Steven H Silver.....	16
Is Modern American SF Depressing?.....	18
James Nicoll.....	18
BARTcon: An Experiment in Transit.....	19
Christopher Garcia.....	19
The Red Fire Of His Pain.....	21
Steve Sneyd.....	21
Northern Ireland in Science Fiction and Fantasy.....	23
Nicholas Whyte.....	23
Best Birthday Present Ever.....	25
By Baron Dave Romm.....	25
10 Big Budget Disappointments, Or.....	27
Dr. Bob Blackwood.....	27
10 Big Budget Disappointments, Or.....	29
John Flynn.....	29
Letters of Comment.....	33
Mock Section.....	39

Feeling Badgered?

Membership Badge Issues and Fannish Community Spirit

Kevin Standlee

Most SF conventions issue each member a badge when they register for the convention. Those badges often end up annoying at least some of the members. Sometimes, something about the badges becomes a major issue affecting the members' enjoyment of the event. Westercon became so excited about badges that it wrote badge specifications into its bylaws. Worldcon came within a few votes of doing the same thing, and to this day has a standing committee of the Worldcon Business Meeting whose tasks include reminding Worldcons how to design their membership badges. How can something so superficially simple cause so much trouble?

An issue related to badges is the practice of using a pseudonym, known as a "badge name," on one's membership badge. Some conventions routinely allow this, while others prohibit it and others have variations that print the "badge name" in large type while printing the "real name" in small type or on the back of the badge. While the original subject of this article was just going to be about badge names, the more I thought about it, the more I realized that there are a bunch of unstated assumptions almost anytime the subject comes up, and that it would be better to address those assumptions about badges first. Therefore, I am going to consider what the purposes of a membership badge are, and then later come back to badge names.

Note that by "SF convention," you should assume, unless I make it clear explicitly or in context, that this includes science fiction and all of the "fellow traveler" related conventions, including fantasy, horror, comics, gaming, and anime. In my opinion, all of these conventions share a common heritage, even when the people organizing them are unaware of it. I am by inclination an inclusive sort of person, which is why I'm fond of Worldcons and other "big tent" affairs, but a discussion of the distinctions between the different types of event is a subject best left to a different article.



Purposes of Membership Badges

I said at the start that most SF conventions issue badges or some other sort of token that confirms that the person is a member of the convention. I think that most conventions do not give enough thought to the purposes this token (I'll call it a badge hereafter, but it can take other forms) serves, and that most bad membership experiences or dissatisfaction with their badges stems from this lack of thought.

What are the purposes of a membership badge? Broadly speaking, the purposes of a membership badge include:

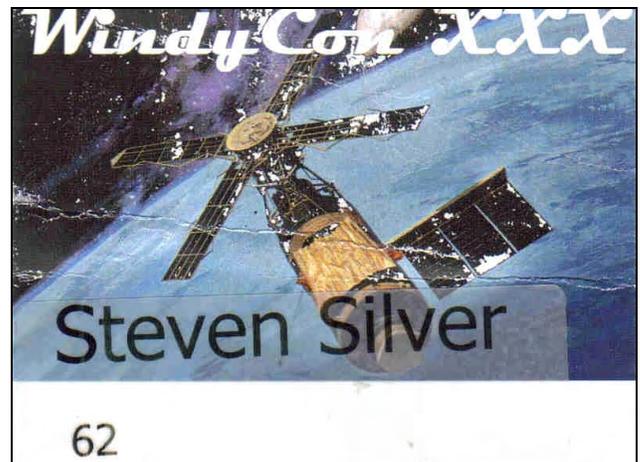
Identity: Identifying the person to the other members of the convention.

Ticket: Serving as an admission token proving that the person has the right to be present at the event.

Memorabilia: Acting as a collectable item or memento of the event.

Utility: Assisting the member in some way not directly related to the other purposes.

I think that the order in which a convention committee prioritizes these four factors will determine a lot about the convention and how it is perceived by its members. I'll declare my own biases up front by telling you that I've arranged these factors in the order I think they should be prioritized. Let's examine them in order.



Identity

Conventions are usually gatherings of people with a common interest who have gathered to socialize with each other. In many cases, this includes socializing with people whom you know by correspondence (through letters, e-mail, fanzines, web sites, etc.) but whom you may never have met. It is generally much easier to do this socializing if you can see the person's name. Ideally, you should be able to read this name without having to invade the person's "personal space."

Badges should include the member's name in large, legible, clear type, visible from a reasonable distance so

that two people standing talking to each other can read each others' names without having to stick their noses into each others' chests. The very fact that this phrase is often a standing joke about people using "I couldn't read your badge" as a (bad) excuse to invade someone's personal space—for example, a man poking his nose into a woman's cleavage—is a sign that failing to meet this design criteria is an all too common failure of membership badge designers.

Badges that do not include members' names damage our sense of community. Instead of making conventions a place where we can easily meet and talk to people whom we may not know already, they act as a barrier to communication, and send the wrong message about what kind of event we're holding.

Incidentally, I prefer that membership badges also have members' city/state/country on them, although generally not in quite as large a typeface as the name. When I designed the badges for SMOFCon 17 (SMOFCon being the annual gathering of SF convention organizers; the 17th such convention was held in New Orleans in 1999), I printed the members' names in 36-point bold type, and their city/state/country in 14-point non-bold condensed type.

Ticket

Generally speaking, our events are not open to just anyone. You have to have a membership to attend. We therefore need some sort of way of determining who has a membership (right to attend) and who does not. A membership badge is one way, but not necessarily the only way to do this. Some conventions, especially "gate shows" use hand-stamps or actual tickets. The 1976 Worldcon, MidAmeriCon, issued hospital-style plastic wristbands as right-to-attend tokens, a move that was widely criticized at the time and that I think would be similarly criticized today if anyone tried it, at least at a Worldcon.

Because the membership badge is a ticket-to-attend, many conventions spend a lot of effort making it difficult to counterfeit them. This is not necessarily a bad idea; after all, with a Worldcon membership costing \$200, making a badge that you can duplicate with a simple photocopier and a plastic holder you can buy at any office supply store is just asking for someone to go into the badge-making business for him/herself. However, it is important to remember that it is impossible to make a badge completely fool-proof. You can raise badge security to any arbitrary level of copy-proofing, but you can never make it perfect. Conventions should strive to achieve the level of copy-proofing that makes it difficult to copy the badge without spending more resources on the copy-proofing than they would lose on "pirate" memberships. It is, unfortunately, a fannish (in its negative sense) trait to pour vast amounts of resource into anti-counterfeiting measures—far more than the convention might lose if a handful of badges are copied by some relatively determined badge pirates.

Most badges include the membership number, but that tends to assume that the convention has assigned the member a unique identifier. This is such an obvious assumption that it can be very jarring when a convention does not do so. Westercon 44 (Vancouver BC, 1991) did not issue membership numbers until just before the convention, which led to a minor constitutional crisis because it technically invalidated mailed-in site selection ballots. The convention side-stepped the constitutional issue (I was the administrator; frankly, I ignored the technical reading of the rule because it led to a nonsensical conclusion) and passed a bylaw amendment mandating that conventions issue membership numbers in a timely manner and inform members of their membership numbers.



Memorabilia

Many people collect their membership badges. I had a display of most of my Worldcon membership badges in my Fan Guest of Honor exhibit at CascadiaCon, the 2005 NASFiC in Seattle. I have seen some fans with sashes containing past convention badges. Keith Lynch has strung his Worldcon badges together to make a super-badge that by now stretches to the floor. The badge should be something that members treasure as a memento of the event. If possible, it should contain artwork that is attractive, but such artwork should not detract from the more-important purposes of the badge.

Utility

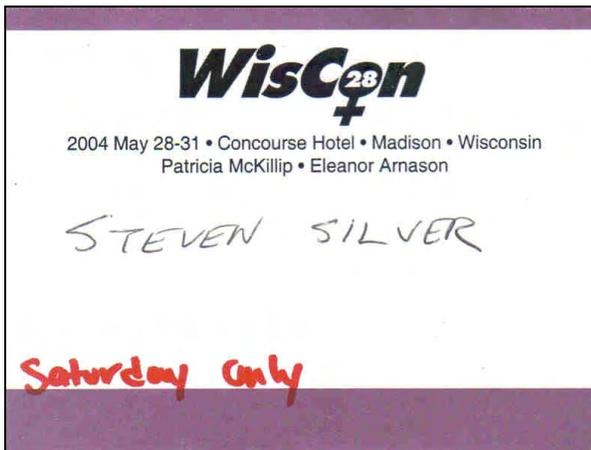
Membership badges may serve other purposes than simply identifying the member and proving that they have the right to attend. It is common to hand out stickers at convention parties and to put those on people's badges. Some conventions have issued fairly elaborate badges that included accessory space to hold additional items. While some members appreciate these utilities, others dislike having the extra bulk that this entails.

Getting Your Priorities Straight

I think one of the worst failings of membership badge design is that they put function 2 (Ticket) ahead of function 1 (Identity). That is, whoever designed the badge

considered the admission-token purpose the most important purpose of the badge. All too often, conventions assume the *only* purpose of the badge is to serve as an admission token, and you consequently end up with a badge that fails all three of the other criteria. Such a badge, if it doesn't actively annoy the members, will at the very least degrade a sense of community. Most SF conventions I attend are run by fans for fans. These are gatherings for our friends, including friends we haven't met yet. I think that it's much easier to meet someone when you can easily see their name.

While it seems obvious to me that you should be able to read your fellow-members' names on their badges, conventions continue to issue badges with names in unreadable small type. I cannot believe that convention committees consciously sit down and say, "What can we do to cause our members grief? I know! Let's print their names in eight point type and run them vertically instead of horizontally!" What I think must happen most of the time is that badge design tends by default to be left to whoever is doing convention registration, and that person's priorities are likely not going to be focused on what is best for the members or for the convention, but what is most convenient for Registration to provide. This can lead to badges being printed, for example, with names in tiny type because there happens to be one member with a huge long name, and in order to fit that 50-character name onto his badge, everyone else gets 8-point type. Or it may be even more thoughtless, with the database person simply taking the default generated by the database program without realizing how bad it is from most members' point of view.



I recently attended a convention whose badges, as far as I can tell, failed every one of the criteria. The 2006 World Fantasy Convention had large portrait-orientation clip-held laminated plastic badges with members' names printed in fairly small type near the bottom and most of the badge taken up with a fairly uninteresting piece of artwork and convention logo. It was difficult to read other members' names at any reasonable distance (failed Identity). It would have been trivially easily to duplicate with material available at any well-stocked copy shop (failed Ticket, which is ironic considering that the convention was more strict than most about checking for

badges everywhere you went). It has little collectible value except as an example of poor design (failed Memorabilia). It had no use other than as a large hunk of plastic catching the breeze when you went outside (failed Utility). It would have been difficult, although not impossible, to design a worse badge for a convention.

Other conventions deliberately design their badges to put item 3 (Memorabilia) ahead of all of the others. FanimeCon, for instance, appears to want all of its badges to be considered collectable items, and goes to considerable effort to produce memorable artwork for those badges. On these badges, the members' names are an afterthought, squeezed into the margins in tiny type. I used to attend FanimeCon before it moved to the same weekend at BayCon, and I'll never forget the answer I got from another member—as I recall, it was not a committee member, just some random attendee to whom I was discussing this while I sat behind a sales table trying fruitlessly to promote ConJosé. This person, who had never attended anything other than FanimeCon, said to me, "Why would you *want* to know other members' names?" To him, the Collectable and Ticket aspects of the badge were the only things for which he thought you'd use a badge. His badge got him into the event and was a neat piece of artwork, and he would never socialize with anyone at the convention whom he didn't already know by sight, so who cares if you can't read the badge. It made me want to cry, since such an attitude is anathema to the social aspects of science fiction conventions with which I am most familiar.

Lest you blow off this example as simply "not our kind of con," and assume that this kind of bone-headed mistake wouldn't be made at a "real SF" convention, I point to Westercon 50, held 1997 in Seattle. Now I have many friends in Seattle fandom, including the chair of that Westercon, and I'm sorry if I'm offending them, but that convention's badges, which apparently were modeled after Boeing employee badges, hung from a lanyard going through a hole in one corner of the badge so that no matter what you did, the name was going to be at an angle, even if it had been in sufficiently large type, which it was not, you were going to have difficulty reading it.

Westercon's Business Meeting got so fed up with badges containing tiny type that they passed the (now infamous) "24-point rule," which orders Westercons to print names on membership badges in no less than 24 point bold type. Fannish nitpickers and typography geeks have repeatedly jumped on this provision because of course you could pick an unreadable typeface. Such hair-splitting aside, at least half of the Westercons held since this rule passed have simply ignored it, and some committees, when they have been reminded that they were supposed to do this, have shrugged and said, more or less, "Who cares?" or "It was too difficult," or otherwise blown off the reply. This is, in my opinion, at least as bad an attitude as the person who assumed the only point of the badge was as a ticket and collectable.

One of the best membership badges I have ever seen was the membership badge for Noreascon 3, the 1989

Worldcon in Boston. N3's badges were larger than what had been traditional up until that time, and they used a significant portion of the badge space to print members' names in a very large, clear, sans serif bold condensed type. (I've been told that the font was actually custom-designed by a member of the committee who was into such things.) There is only one other Worldcon that, in my opinion, did a better job, and that may well be due to my own personal bias, but I'll come back to this later. Worldcons (and other conventions) that followed N3 kept the oversized badges, but they seemed to forget that the reason for the large badge was to print names in large type, and they mostly took members' names back down to small type and filled up the badge with a bunch of artwork or anti-counterfeiting measures.

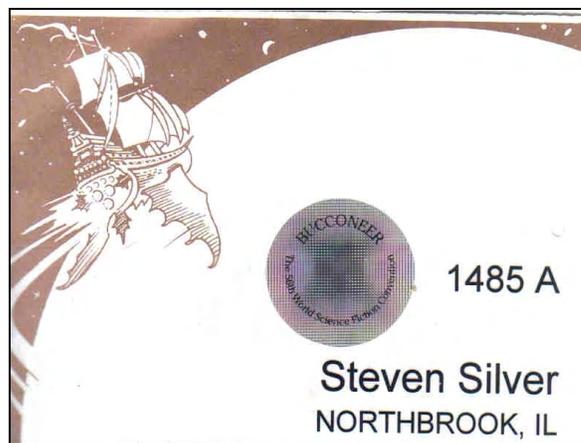
The nadir of this trend of "big badge, small type" trend may have been The Millennium Philcon, the 2001 Worldcon in Philadelphia, where the WSFS Business Meeting considered a variation of Westercon's 24-point rule. I drafted the original proposal, at the request of Bruce Pelz and Mike Glyer, who were grouching about the hard-to-read badges with me at the convention's Opening Ceremonies. Despite ample evidence with Westercon's attempts to micromanage committee design decisions by legislation, the WSFS Business Meeting came very close to passing this bylaw amendment, but pulled back at the last minute. Instead, they issued standing orders to the Nitpicking and Flyspecking Committee (a small committee of people who try to stay on top of the complexities of WSFS rules, and to whom WSFS tends to refer rules questions) "to remind each future Worldcon, early and often, that the WSFS Business Meeting believes that membership badges be readable, with members' names printed in no less than 24 point type." Since then, at least twice a year, the MPC sends e-mail reminders to Worldcon committees nagging them about this standing request. Has it helped? I'm not sure, but I know I thought the 2002 Worldcon's badge was the best balancing of the four factors, and I did not even design it.

Even if you did not attend ConJosé, if you've gone to many conventions, particularly Worldcons, since 2002, you have seen the badge, or at least the badge holder. ConJosé issued badges in a small pouch that went around the wearer's neck on an adjustable lanyard. This pouch was 5 inches high by 4 ½ inches wide, and had a clear plastic pouch on the front and two zipper pockets in the back. The convention name was printed on the back, and a printed card with the member's name, city/state/country/member number, and convention logo and artwork fit into the plastic front pouch. To this day, I continue to see people wearing that badge pouch, often putting the badge of the convention they are currently attending into the clear plastic front pouch. They were not perfect—it is practically impossible to design a badge that doesn't annoy someone, particularly at a Worldcon—and some members complained that it was too large, too bulky, and that they disliked lanyard-type holders (as opposed to clip or pin type holders). Nevertheless, I think the ConJosé membership badge was a superb balance of

prioritizing the factors: It was easy to read (unless you ignored the instructions on how to wear it, in which case it tended to flop wrong-side round), it was difficult to duplicate (getting such pouches on short notice and imprinting them would not have been impossible, just difficult), and it was both collectable and useful, as evidenced by the people still using them today.

More Than Just Registration's Responsibility

It appears to be common to leave all of badge design to a convention's Registration department. Indeed, Registration may become testy when other parts of the convention, including the top management, try to get involved in badge design. They raise the cry of "micromanagement!" and object to being told anything about how the badge should be designed. This assumes that the only priority for the badge is how easy is it for Registration to produce it (not one of the four priorities I mentioned above, but a consideration nonetheless). What the Registration department needs to realize is that a membership badge is something every member will carry with him/her throughout the convention. More than any other single object, including the convention's publications, the membership badge says *who we are*. I think that every committee should look at the four functions cited in this article (Identity, Ticket, Memorabilia, and Utility), and think about how they want to prioritize them, and why. Only once you have done this should you actually design your badge.



Badge Names

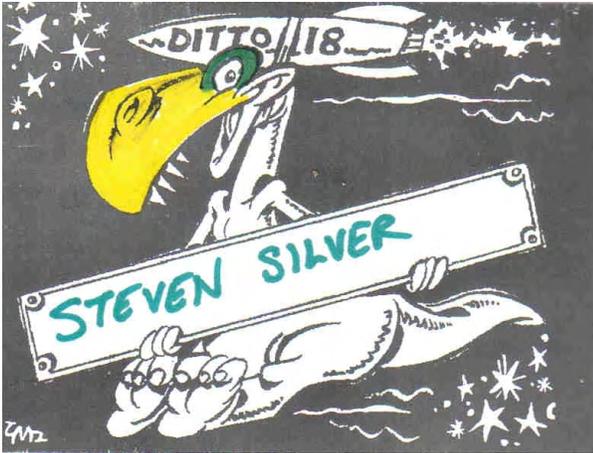
I've completely destroyed the projected word count for this article and only now have reached the subject on which I originally intended to write, which is the practice of printing pseudonyms ("badge names") on membership badges. Practice here varies considerably. Some conventions refuse to do so; others do so without including the members "real name," while others print both, with lots of variations.

The increasing popularity of LiveJournal and other on-line communities where people are known by their "handles" may be leading to an increase in the use of

badge names, but there are plenty of other reasons for people using them, some of which are good and reasonable and others of which are far less defensible.

What's a "Real Name?"

Typically, when a convention starts discussing whether they will allow alternative names, a lot of words get tossed around about trying to define what a "badge name" or "real name" is. Much is made about nicknames and common abbreviations, and usually much hair-splitting happens, when in my opinion, a little common sense should apply.



If your legal name on your birth certificate and identity papers reads "Robert Quincy Smith IV," is it okay to print "Bob Smith" on your badge even if the con has a policy of "real names only?" To give an example of someone who is probably known to many of the readers, what about Spike? Can we print "Spike" on her membership badge? My answer to both the hypothetical and actual cases is "yes, the 'nickname'" goes on the badge, because that is the name by which the person is most commonly known to his/her fellow members and to which s/he will answer.

What *does* annoy me are people who *hide* behind a badge name and won't answer to it. If you want your badge to call you "Xyopwzt the Bold," then unless you're including a pronunciation guide with your badge, I think you would be showing a bit of respect to your fellow members by including a name by which we can reasonably address you and to which you will answer. Remember, a convention is a gathering of mutual friends, not all of whom know each other. We are all here, or should be here, because of a shared interest, and socializing with each other is a *good* thing.

It's actually quite difficult to draw a hard-and-fast line about when to allow badge names and when to require something else. There are people who have real concerns about their "mundane world" identity being known. I understand that, especially in the UK, some fans are afraid that if their employers knew they attended SF conventions, they would be fired or at least downgraded or disgraced. That's an incredibly stupid attitude for the

employer to take, but it is apparently quite real. There are also people who are concerned about "stalkers" or other unfortunate real-world issues. These are not easy cases, and Registration people need to have some discretion in dealing with them.

Some conventions compromise on the "fan name" issue by printing the badge name in large type but the real name in small type. In most cases, this is not much of a problem, especially if SPACE TWINKIE doesn't mind you printing her real name in smaller type underneath. This, in fact, may be a good way to deal with electronic "handles" for people who want their (say) LiveJournal user names to be more prominent than their given names, but still want people to be able to read their given names.

The "print both" case has its own difficult situations. Suppose the person attending the convention really is a different persona than the person's "real world" identity. To give a plausible scenario, imagine some Joseph Phanboy who attends conventions dressed as a female named Jane Fangirl. It could be that Joe is in the process of becoming Jane, but maybe Joe just likes dressing up as Jane for convention-attending purposes. This person wants a badge that reads Jane, will answer to that name, and is not requesting this for any fraudulent purposes; however, Jane does not want Joe's name displayed on the membership badge at all. Would I grant this request? Almost certainly I would. Would other people do so? I think some would not. And if they would grant this gender-crossing request, would they grant one that we see in Furry Fandom, where the person wants to present him/herself as their furry persona for the weekend and does not want their given "real world" name displayed for all to see? I recognize that these cases are difficult, and I present them to make people think about what they are trying to achieve.

Conclusions

"What problem are you trying to solve?" was the theme of the Chicago SMOFCon of 2003, and that seems as good a place as any to end this article. Before charging off into designing your convention's membership badge and registration materials, put some thought into what your design goals are with your membership badges and how you plan to handle complicated cases. If you do that first, then it will be much easier to answer specific design and individual questions when they arise.

Design your membership badges well and they may go unnoticed, but will serve as a minor social lubricant that improves your convention. Set your priorities wrong, and your badges will act as sand in the social gears. Save yourself grief in the long run by spending some time at the beginning thinking about what you expect to accomplish with that piece of paper or plastic that every single member has in common with each other.

Phil Klass: An Appreciation

Ted White

It would surprise me if Phil Klass remembers me, or, indeed, remembers our encounter in 1962. But that only underscores the importance of my own memories of that encounter.

In 1962 I had yet to publish a single word of science fiction and I was still a year away from my first appearance on the masthead of *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* as Assistant Editor. In 1962 I was 24 years old, and I'd been living in New York City for three years. I was a kid; I'd come to New York to pursue a career in editing and publishing, and I'd been an active fan for over 10 years.

In 1960 Harlan Ellison had moved back to New York and had stayed in my apartment for several months until getting his own just up the same block. Harlan had tucked me under his wing and taken me to meet various editors and agents and, in the course of things, other writers in the field, like Bob Sheckley and Phil Klass (who was of course better known in SF circles as "William Tenn"). He introduced me to Phil in a Greenwich Village restaurant where a half dozen or more SF people were gathered. As was common when I was in Harlan's company, I stayed in the background, content to mostly watch and listen—more "audience" than participant.

So I was startled when, two years later, Phil Klass hailed me as I was crossing Washington Square Park.

It was a weekday afternoon, rather grey and overcast as I remember it. I had by then moved to Brooklyn, but still banked at my old Sheridan Square Chemical Corn Exchange Bank (the one to which James Thurber had once taken a bag of ears of corn and demanded to exchange them), and that may explain what I was doing in the Village; I can no longer recall. I do know that I was at loose ends. My first marriage had ended, I could see no future for myself in the jazz-critic business in which I had established myself (there just wasn't enough work to support me; *Metronome* magazine, for which I'd been a staff writer, had just folded), and I had begun trying to write science fiction but had yet to make my first sale.

And strolling across the small park I ran into Phil. I recognized him, of course. He looked younger, but not too different from the way he looks today: a dark van dyke goatee, and a somewhat stern visage which could crack into a warm smile. More startling to me was that he remembered and recognized me.

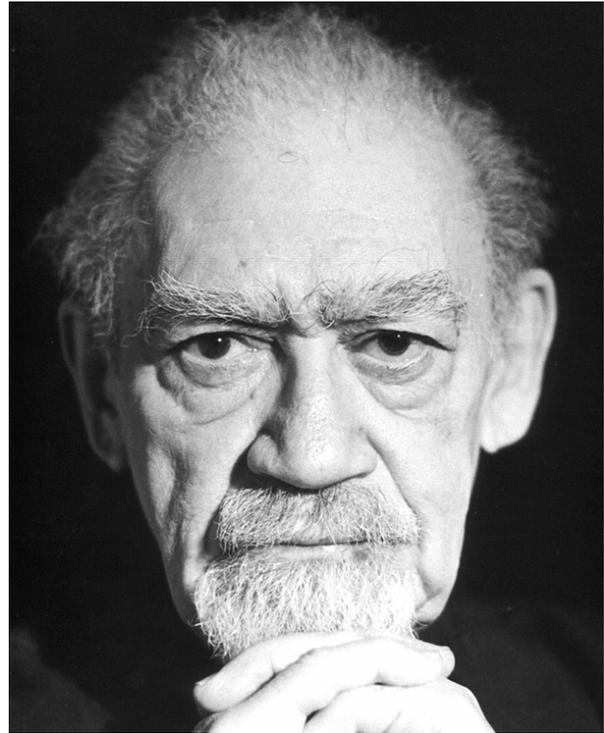
Phil must also have been at loose ends that afternoon; I can think of no other reason why he called out to me, greeted me cheerfully, and suggested I join him.

I spent the next several hours with Phil. We sat in the park and talked. It was companionable conversation, full of shoptalk and gossip, but it was more than that. I got from Phil a sense of something—the same sense I got a

few years later from a correspondence with Ted Sturgeon—a feeling that he was passing something on, to the next generation perhaps. He was telling me things, things I needed to know.

I told him about my attempts to write fiction, my sense of exploration and inadequacy, my awareness of just how much I needed to learn. And he told me that this is an ongoing process, that there's always more to be learned, and not to let myself become overwhelmed by it all.

He told me about writing for *Playboy*. That magazine paid as much for a short story as most SF writers were paid for their *books*. Cracking *Playboy* was in those days the ultimate Big Time for any SF writer. "I know *how* to write for *Playboy*," Phil said. "The question is whether I



want to write for *Playboy*." He didn't want to become cynical about it.

We went into a coffeehouse. We continued to talk. Within that afternoon we compressed what could have been years of seminars. We were like the ideal teacher-pupil situation: each sitting on opposite ends of a log. It's impossible for me to remember all the things we talked about, but I still retain the *feeling* of that afternoon: That someone whom I respected had decided to spend time with me and to share with me some of what he knew about science fiction, writing, and the milieu we both inhabited. It had a profound effect on me.

Since then I've come to know and work with many others in the SF field. I greatly valued my ongoing friendship with Avram Davidson, for example—who got me that position with *F&SF* when he was that Magazine's editor. And Harlan, who in addition to being a friend whom I'd made when we were both still just fans, helped me make my first sale to *Rogue*. Larry Shaw was not

only a personal friend, but bought three of my books for Lancer Books. Marion Zimmer Bradley lent a collaborative hand to help me sell one of my first SF stories to *Amazing*, after years of correspondence and friendship. And my buddy and fellow fan-turned-pro, Terry Carr, with whom I also collaborated on my early SF sales and first book.

But Phil Klass stands out for me uniquely for that moment, that afternoon in 1962 when he gave me freely of his time and himself in a wholly altruistic gesture.

It meant a lot to me then. It still does. Fired up by that encounter I went back to Brooklyn that evening and began writing, convinced that I *could*. Within less than a month I'd made my first sales (to *Amazing* and *If*).

Within a year I'd sold my first book, and was working at *F&SF*.

I don't owe *all* of that to Phil, but I owe a good chunk of it to him. He put me on the right track. He gave me confidence in myself. He took me into his world and told me I was a part of it. And that was an invaluable gift.

Now, more than 40 years later, my thanks to Phil is long overdue. But no less heartfelt.

A Brief, and Incomplete, Bibliography of William Tenn

Children of Wonder, anthology, 1953

Of All Possible Worlds, collection, 1955

The Human Angle, collection, 1956

Time in Advance, collection, 1958

Of Men and Monsters, novel, 1968

The Seven Sexes, collection, 1968

The Wooden Star, collection, 1968

The Square Root of Man, collection, 1968

A Lamp for Medusa, 1968

Once Against the Law, anthology, 1968

The Immodest Proposals, collection, 2001

Here Comes Civilization, collection, 2002

Dancing Naked, essays, 2004

1966: Nebula nomination: Best Novelette for "The Masculinist Revolt"

1999: SFWA Writer Emeritus

2004: Worldcon Pro Guest of Honor, Noreascon IV

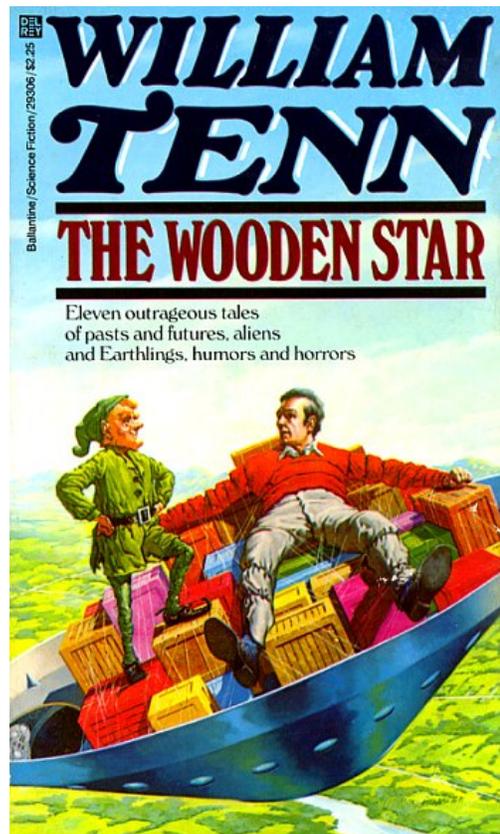
2005: Hugo nomination: Best Related Book for *Dancing Naked*

Phil Klass: If We Can Remember Half of What He Remembers...

Laurie D. T. Mann

Ted White's warm essay about Phil is fairly typical of Phil. Phil is now 86. I'm routinely surprised by how good Phil's memory still is. Not perfect, of course, but still pretty sharp.

I didn't get to know Phil until the mid-90s. I'd read and enjoyed some of William Tenn's stories over the years, but hadn't met Phil. He didn't tend to go to too many conventions. When Jim and I moved back to the Pittsburgh area in 1993, it turned out we bought a house about four blocks from Phil and Fruma. We tended to see the Klases at Confluence, and then, from time to time, at PARSEC (the local SF club) gatherings. Phil was always very funny and always had a story to tell about living and writing in New York City in the '50s and '60s.



My favorite story about Phil and writing was how he helped rescue the story "Flowers from Algernon" from an awful fate. Daniel Keyes was told by his editor to give the story a happy ending and let Charley live. Phil had read the original story, and told the younger writer "If you change one word of that story, I'll go break the editor's kneecaps." The story remained unaltered, and was later published to great acclaim. And no one's kneecaps were broken in the publication of this story.

Phil's memory is particularly strong when he recites poetry. Once, when we were driving Phil and Fruma to a Capclave, they recited poetry from memory to one another all through Maryland!

I wish my memory was half as good as Phil's, and I haven't quite hit 50 yet.

Whither the DVD-TV Revolution?

Steven H Silver

With the popularity of television series being released on DVD, there are numerous shows that I would love to be able to watch again (and even own), that were cancelled before their time. Alas, many of these shows show no indication of being released on DVD, although you can easily pick up seasons of *Hee-Haw*, *Petticoat Junction*, or *Three's Company* on DVD.

Now lest you point out (correctly) that those shows were all much more successful than any of the series I discuss below, I'd point out some short-lived series which didn't make my list for the simple reason that they have already been released on DVD, indicating hope for my list. *Dilbert* (30 episodes, 1999-2000), *The Adventures of Briscoe County, Jr.* (27 episodes, 1993), *The Flash* (21 episodes, 1991), *Firefly* (14 episodes, 2002), and *Wonderfalls* (13 episodes, 2004).



Doctor Doctor (39 episodes, 1989-1991) starred Matt Frewer, who also was responsible for *Max Headroom*, the latter more successful, but extremely annoying for its incessant and ubiquitous appearance in 1985. In *Doctor Doctor*, Frewer played Mike Stratford, a family physician in partner with Abe Butterfield (Julius Carey), Dierdre Bennett (Maureen Mueller), and Grant Linowitz (Beau Gravitte). In addition regular characters included Mike's gay brother Richard (Tony Carreiro) and the practice's nurse, Faye (Audrie Neenan).

While the characters were superficially stock caricatures (black doctor, woman doctor, Yuppie, gay English teacher, nymphomaniac, each had much more depth to them than would first be apparent. Using off beat humor, from the beginning the series dealt with serious issues in a humorous way, from malpractice insurance to the growth of HMOs to homosexuality. All the characters and actors could be relied upon to give strong performances and the laughs were shared by all.

As it happens, I have 38 of the episodes on video tape, but many are second or even third generation and even the first generation episodes are degenerating after fifteen years. Another note is that one of the stars of this show, Julius Carry, also appeared in *The Adventures of Brisco County, Jr.*, which only failed to make the list because it was recently released on DVD. People appearing in multiple series seems to happen relatively often on the list.

After MASH (29 episodes, 1983-1985) was a sequel to MASH, created when three of the actors from the series, Harry Morgan, Jamie Farr, and William Christopher, decided that they wanted to continue when the rest of the cast decided the show had run its course. Set in a VA hospital in Missouri, General Pershing General Hospital, Morgan's Potter was hired as Chief of Staff, Farr's Klinger moved to Missouri to escape a charge of running a phone in a book shop, and Christopher's Father Mulcahy remained as hospital chaplain after having his hearing problem cured. Additions to the cast included Klinger and Potter's wives, a wiseass surgeon, and anal retentive hospital administrators.

Having recently watched the final season of MASH on the newly released DVDs, I dragged out an old video tape that includes the first couple of episodes of *After MASH*. While they are nowhere near the quality of MASH, they are still enjoyable. It would make sense to release *After MASH* (with the pilot for the failed show *W*A*L*T*E*R*) on DVD for the completists among us. I'm not, however, holding my breath.

Best of the West (22 episodes, 1981-1982) placed Joel Higgins as store owner Sam Best into the role of marshal of Copper Creek. While Sam had a very romantic view of the West, his wife, Elvira (Carlene Watkins) and son, Daniel (Meeno Peluce), don't share. Instead, they see the West as a place where bullies run amok and the basic necessities of life are difficult to come by. The head bully was Parker Tillman (Leonard Frey) and his lackey, Frog (Tracey Walter). As with many of the shows I seem to remember fondly, *Best of the West* has a metafictional quality to it.

Voyagers! (20 episodes, 1982-1983) once again features Meeno (*Best of the West*) Peluce, this time as Jeffrey Jones, a young boy caught up in a time traveling adventure with Phineas Bogg (Jon-Erik Hexum). This series had the same general idea as the later, and more successful, *Quantum Leap* in that Bogg traveled through time repairing the time stream where it went awry. The series was fun, although didn't always make sense. For instance, Bogg had only a rudimentary knowledge of history and had to rely on twelve year old Jones to help him make things right. In the pilot episode, Jones's dog ate Bogg's guidebook, putting him in a TARDIS type situation where he couldn't control where he went.

Salvage One (19 episodes, 1979) starred Andy Griffith as junkyard owner Harry Roderick. In the pilot episode, he came up with the idea of the greatest salvage project the world had ever known, retrieving the artifacts

left on the Moon by the Apollo mission. Seeking out the help of former astronaut Skip Carmichael (Joel (*Best of the West*) Higgins) and Melanie Slozar (Trish Stewart), they build a spaceship from parts in his junkyard (including a command module built of a Cement Mixer) and fly to the moon. The pilot showed them dealing with the US bureaucracy, but later episodes had them salvaging things closer to home, including bringing an iceberg to a drought stricken region or retrieval of Confederate gold.

When Things Were Rotten (13 episodes, 1975) was Mel Brooks's satire on the Robin Hood legend eighteen years before *Robin Hood: Men in Tights*. In this television series, Robin was portrayed by Richard Gautier, and the Merry Men included Dick van Patten (Friar Tuck), Bernie Koppel (Alan a Dale), David Sabin (Little John) and Misty Rowe (Maid Marion). The forces of evil were led by the Sheriff of Nottingham



(Henry Polic II) and Prince John (Ron Rifkin). The show was extremely silly, placing the Merry Men into anachronistic situations, such as the conga line they formed to rescue Robin in the pilot. The final episode, drew directly from the traditions of the Western when the sheriff brought in a gunslinger, well, a bow slinger, to take out Robin.

Legend (12 episodes, 1995) was a short lived Western starring Richard Dean Anderson as Ernest Pratt, a dime novelist. The people of Sheridan, his home town, however, continuously confuse him with Nicodemus Legend, the hero of his books. Local professor Janos Bartok (John de Lancie) took advantage of this dichotomy by having Pratt take on the persona of Legend and using Pratt's inventions to help solve crimes and mysteries throughout the West. Legend's adventures brought Pratt into contact with historical figures such as Ulysses S. Grant, George A. Custer, and Wild Bill Hickock.



Quark (8 episodes, 1977) was the story of a space-going garbage scow starring Richard Benjamin as Adam Quark. His crew included the transmuted Gene/Jean (Tim Thomerson), an intelligent plant, Ficus (Richard Kelton), a pair of gorgeous clones (Patricia and Cyb Barnstable), both named Betty, and Andy the Android (Bobby Porter). Misty Rowe, who appeared in *When Things Were Rotten*, also made appearances on *Quark*.

Interestingly, despite its short run and the seven intervening years, Gene Wolfe mentioned *Quark* as a sample of quality science fiction television in his 1985 Worldcon Guest of Honor speech in Melbourne, Australia.

While searching for images of *Quark* to run with this article, I did come across the website <http://www.quark.name>, which not only includes an Online petition (cue Rocky voice: "That trick *never* works!"), but also all eight episodes in simple to download wmv format.



The winner for the shortest run on this list, however, is **Q.E.D.**, which ran for only six episodes in 1982. It starred Sam Waterston as the titular Quentin E. Deverill, an American professor living in Edwardian England. Deverill was the quintessential steampunk inventor, making this series reminiscent of the earlier *Wild, Wild West* or the later *The Adventures of Brisco County, Jr.* Deverill's nemesis was Stefan Kilkiss, portrayed by Julian Glover.

Unfortunately, many of my memories of these shows are less of the shows themselves than they are of the feeling the shows engendered. Other than *Doctor, Doctor*, I've only seen a few episodes of them since their original airing, most notably *When Things Were Rotten* and *Salvage One*. It may well be that there is a reason these shows remain unavailable on DVD, but I'd love to see them and give them another chance.


ABE LINCOLN, IN VERY DEEP SNOW

Quiz Answers

Cover



Silver Surfer is a Marvel comic character who made his first appearance in 1966.



Soupy Sales was an American comedian and host of a children's television show.



Sachiko Shibano is a Japanese SF fan who was the fan GoH at LA Con III.



Sammy Sosa is a baseball player who has played for the Rangers, White Sox, Cubs, and Orioles.



Septimius Severus served as Roman Emperor from 193-211.



Somtow Sucharitkul is a science fiction author and conductor (also S.P. Somtow).



Susan Sarandon is an actress who appeared in "The Rocky Horror Picture Show."



Svetlana Savitskaya is a Russian cosmonaut who was the second woman in space.



Sharon Stone is an actress who appeared in "Total Recall" and "Basic Instinct."



Page 5



Steven Soderbergh is a producer and director whose films include "Traffic" and "Ocean's 11."



Stephen Stills is a guitarist who has performed with "Buffalo Springfield" and Crosby, Stills and Nash.

Page 7



Sam Shellabarger is the author of *Captain from Castile*, *Lord Vanity*, and other historicals.



Samuel Steele was the third officer sworn in to serve in the North West Mounted Police (Mounties).



Samuel Skinner was Secretary of Transportation and Chief of Staff to George H.W. Bush.



Sargent Shriver ran for Vice-President with George McGovern. He married Eunice Kennedy.



Sean Stewart is the author of *Mockingbird*, *Perfect Circle*, and other SF novels.

Page 8



Sholom Schneerson was the fifth Lubavitch rebbe. He's referred to by the acronym Rashab.



Stu Sutcliffe was one of the Beatles. He remained in Hamburg and died in 1962.



Sirhan Sirhan assassinated Bobby Kennedy at the Ambassador Hotel in 1968.



Sissy Spacek is an actress who appeared in "Coal Miner's Daughter" and "Carrie."



Solomon Schechter was a rabbi who helped create the American Conservative Jewish movement.

Page 10



Sylvia Saint is a porn actress who appeared in the Nebula-nominated OG film "Uranus Experiment 2."



Sylvester Stallone is an actor who has appeared as Rocky, Rambo, and Oscar.



Suzanne Somers is an actress who became famous for "Three's Company."



Susan Sontag is an author who wrote *The Volcano Lover* and numerous essays.



Sally Struthers is an actress best known for her role on "All in the Family."



Shel Silverstein was a poet and songwriter, known for his collection *Where the Sidewalk Ends*.



Salizhan Sharipov is a cosmonaut who has logged more than 211 hours in space.



Steven Stucky is a composer and professor of music composition at Cornell University.



Steve Saffel was an editor at Del Rey Books.



Samantha Smith was a school girl whose letter to Yuri Andropov got her invited to the USSR.



Sam Shapiro served as Governor of Illinois from 1968-1969.



Sam Snead was a golfer and the only man to hit a ball that struck the scoreboard at Wrigley Field.



Sly Stone is the lead of the music group Sly and the Family Stone.



Sharon Shinn is the author of *The Shape-Changer's Wife* and numerous other novels.



Seattle Slew was a racehorse who in 1977 became the 10th horse to win the Triple Crown



Seth Shostak is an astronomer involved with SETI who has also worked in cosmogony.



Sharon Sbarsky is a Boston fan and conrunner who maintains the NESFA website, and others.



Sherwood Spring is US Colonel and NASA astronaut. He has more than 12 hours of EVA.



Sidney Sheldon is the author of *Windmills of the Gods*, *Memories of Midnight* and others.



Siegfried Sassoon was a poet and author who wrote anti-War verse during World War I.



Simeon Stylites was a fifth century saint who was known for his asceticism and living on a pillar.



Steve Stirling is the author of many novels, including the Nantucket series and *The Peshawar Lancers*



Susan Shwartz is the author of many novels, including *Shards of Empire* and *Queensblade*.



Starship Westerns Versus Science Fiction

Alexander von Thorn

Margaret Atwood once said that her story *The Handmaid's Tale* was not science fiction because it did not include “Martians and space travel to other planets.” I think she’s wrong, and the corollary is wrong too: just because a story includes spaceships doesn’t make it science fiction. A recent trend towards character-driven stories has a new category of story which has heroes flying around in spacecraft without any real science in the fiction. It raises a new twist of the old question: what is (or isn’t) science fiction?

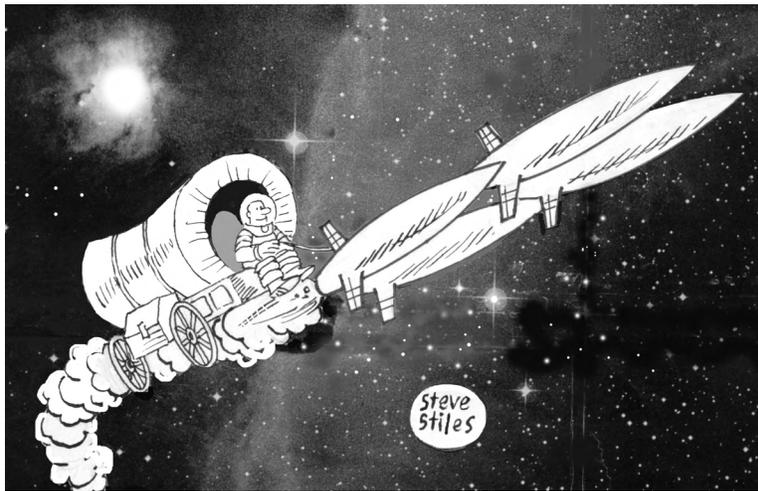
The most obvious example of this is *Firefly*, the series produced by Joss Whedon (also done as the movie *Serenity*). The show is explicitly set in a milieu which owes more to the genre of westerns than science fiction: the actors wear western-style clothing and speak in period dialects. They are armed with six-shooters and other nineteenth-century weapons, without so much as a Gatling gun. (The one laser pistol seen does not actually work.) At one point, they go on cattle drive, elsewhere, they attend a cotillion. As a storytelling conceit, it’s all very amusing. The show even has a darker undertone from the western genre: the protagonist was a rebel soldier in a failed civil war which was won by a technologically advanced “Alliance” government and in the time of the story is scratching out a living on the new frontier, beyond the reach of Alliance law. Of course, the notion of the frontier is also central to science fiction, so it’s not out of place here, except that the spaceship *Serenity* doesn’t actually explore the frontier, it just travels around among remote outposts. But the question is, is *Firefly* science fiction?

Arguably, it is not. There are a couple of episodes with minor elements of science; in one episode, a character is smuggling a set of super-organs for delivery, and in another, the spaceship needs a part for repair. But these are just maguffins, elements to create plot to give the characters reason for action. Even in the film *Serenity*, in which a secret formula or biotoxin is a major plot element, the focus of the protagonists is not to find a technical solution to help any of the victims, but merely to tell what has happened, so that the actions of tyranny can

be thwarted by the people. One of the characters has advanced powers as a result of genetic manipulation or brainwashing or whatever, but, significantly, River’s powers are not defined in terms of limits, but merely in terms of an internal process of self-discovery that allows her to express them, ultimately to defeat an unlimited number of opponents regardless of their skill or firepower.

Another example of spaceships without science fiction is the series *Battlestar Galactica*. The remade series is updated from the ‘70s-era series with postmodern cinematography (or what I simply call “annoying camera angles and pretentious zooms”), and surely with better actors and more well-developed characters (who knew Richard Hatch could act?), but from the perspective of technology and science fiction, the new version of this

series is less technologically advanced than its predecessor. One premise of the show is that “networked” computers are somehow vulnerable to Cylon infiltration, so only the more retro technology can survive, though in practice using much less advanced technology would leave humanity at a crippling disadvantage. The characters



communicate using phones that have thick cords, something you really never see in shows set in the 21st century, let alone a society advanced enough for interstellar travel. But again the question arises as to whether this is science fiction. First we examine the Cylons as artificial intelligence beings. The Cylons appear to possess many strange abilities, but what they do not have, similar to River in *Firefly*, is any kind of quantifiable limits. In fact one gets a strong sense that any time the humans win, it is in large part because the Cylons allow them to. The space battles have the same carrier-battle structure of some World War II movie action sequences; the most serious weapons the Cylons use are nuclear bombs. Even in episodes where the plot has a technical element driving the plot, it’s not really science; in “33,” the 33-minute cycle of Cylon attack is merely an arbitrary drumbeat apparently designed to deprive characters of sleep, like the 108-minute cycle in *Lost*. Again, the problem presented to the characters is moral, not technical.

Speaking of *Lost*, it has stepped over the line into the speculative area, with its talking birds, strange fog, and geomagnetic anomalies. However, even for the element which has the strongest effect on the plot, the strange magnetic force that requires the button-pressing ritual,

this is not so much about science as faith, whether the act of pressing the button itself has meaning, and who is lying to whom about what. The basic geek instinct is to deconstruct a system or device, physically or at least logically, to understand how it works and how it is put together, but nobody in the show really does that.

This absence leads us to a reliable indicator of science fiction: someone in the story has to act like a scientist or engineer. Someone is explaining the background, trying to apply science as a solution, or at least trying to discover what scientific principles are in play. One looks for a Scotty, a Spock, maybe a Dr. McCoy on his good days, or at least a Wesley Crusher trying to understand what's going on. In SF, you will see one or more characters playing the role of mentor/professor, engineer, researcher/explorer, and/or student. If you have these archetypes, then a science element can become a plot element. If no one really understands how things work, the science elements are reduced to mere *deus ex machina*. *Lost* is more like *Twin Peaks*, where the odd things going on are presented to shock the audience, not have them evaluate logically the story elements to understand what is happening.

Sometimes the boundary is less clear. The *Star Wars* films use a lot of spaceships, but many argue the story fits more into the fantasy category than science fiction. While the later films (episodes I to III) bog down in a volume of detail, the technology is not quantified much. There aren't many engineer types here; in fact, it is telling that the two characters most known for working with the guts of machines, R2D2 and Chewbacca, have no verbal dialog. It seems like a deliberate approach to make the technology a black box inaccessible to the audience. The important plot mover in the films is not technology, but the Force, and this is very much a matter of belief and strength of will. The telling moment is the training scene in *The Empire Strikes Back* with Luke and Yoda in the swamp. "Do or do not," Yoda says, "there is no try." Luke fails to lift the ship from the bog, but Yoda raises it up, simply because he knows he can. The clear implication here is that the limiting factor of the Force is merely the belief and focus of the user, not of any external physical constraint. It puts this story element clearly in the fantasy category.

Not that the boundaries between genres are clearly defined. Sometimes the tropes of one category can enliven a story set in a different setting; certainly this is how western elements were used in *Firefly*. Though some shows have successfully incorporated science fiction elements into the western milieu. The classic *Wild Wild West* incorporated SF elements into several episodes, though it also indulged in anachronism masquerading as science. Using anachronism in a story is a kind of pseudo-SF in which 20th or 21st century technology is injected into a historical setting; it superficially makes the scientist seem more intelligent and advanced than his peers, but it doesn't present anything new to the reader or viewer, and this technique often ignores the intermediate advancements that enable features of a given technology.

(Captain Nemo's automobile in *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* is one of the worst examples of this.) However, it can be done well. The series *Legend* with Richard Dean Anderson and John de Lancie incorporated wacky but genuine SF elements (and lasted about as long as *Firefly*). *Dead Man's Gun* used a western setting for a chilling horror serial comparable to the better episodes of *The Twilight Zone*.

The original *Star Trek* had been pitched in Hollywood as "Wagon Train to the stars," but I believe this was more a case of dumbing-down for that audience than an accurate critical delineation. Setting aside the "Shootout at OK Corral" episode, the series did not feature western settings. One might see Captain Kirk as a lonely lawman who stood tall in the saddle and faced down a lot of bad guys, including Klingons and Romulans who could have been iconic stand-ins for Indians and Mexicans. But *Star Trek* was clearly more than a western; science (or speculative variations of it) played an important function in the plot of many stories, and the main SF character archetypes were certainly present. The audience was allowed to empathize and think along with characters who had to puzzle out a solution to their situation.

As readers and viewers of speculative fiction, we should not criticize creative story-telling, including the use of elements from other genres. If the next George Lucas wants to put princesses and wizards in flowing robes onto the decks of starships, we can appreciate those stories for their mythic structure without having to "look under the hood" and try to understand technological trappings that aren't really quantified. Half a century of seeing them in movies and television has injected the starship trope into mainstream culture. But we can still make a meaningful distinction between science fiction and the "starship westerns."

We don't want to have to have advanced degrees to understand a story and we don't need characters to spout equations in dialog. But science fiction is the literature of change and new ideas; it shows characters facing new problems or finding new solutions to the problems of the day. No matter how interesting the characters or how dynamic the conflict, if the ideas aren't creative, it isn't science fiction, whether the story is set on a starship or not. One thing that sets science fiction fans apart, one important role we play in society as a whole, is that we think about how things could be, how different kinds of change will affect us and how we need to adapt. There's nothing wrong with watching shows like *Firefly* or *Battlestar Galactica* for entertainment, or *American Idol* or *Survivor: Guatemala* for that matter. But science fiction is supposed to engage our reasoning faculties, not just our emotions. As the "starship westerns" and their ilk start taking up program time slots, we may want to save some of our time and attention for shows and stories that still make us think.

Number Don't Lie

Frank Wu

I rejoice that Gary Westfahl has resumed adding to his online Biographic Encyclopedia of Science Fiction Film <http://www.sfsite.com/gary/intro.htm> His is not just a dry recitation of movie credits and birthdates, but a philosophical summation of lives in the cinematic arts. Mr. Westfahl had taken a break from this project to write *The Greenwood Encyclopedia* and a book of *Science Fiction Quotations*. Now he's back, writing critiques that are insightful and sometimes incite-ful.

One of my favorite entries is about Peter Cushing, who played Dr. Frankenstein more often than any other actor. Some have joked that the old Hammer movies were "horror films made by accountants." But, in a way, Cushing's horror movies are *about* accountants. "Accountants," Mr. Westfahl points out, "are not boring people; rather they are people who happen to be fascinated by phenomena that most people find boring, namely, the endless minutiae of *process*." Cushing's Frankenstein twiddles knobs and slices up dead bodies and stuffs organs into them, simply because he enjoys stuffing new organs into old bodies. He repeats the same mistakes because he can't see the big picture. Like many of us, he is unable to extract himself from the to-do lists and mechanical contrivances that rule his life, unable to zoom out to get perspective on his life.

Mr. Westfahl's entire project is an accounting of lives, a measuring of the shape and forms of human existence. What have we done with our God-given talents and opportunities?

Consider Glen A. Larson, who had finagled his way into producing TV show after TV show, a chance many fanboys would give their right arms to have. But what did he do with a life spent making up dreams? He never wrote for the best science fiction shows—his name appears nowhere in the credits of *The Twilight Zone* or *The Outer Limits* or *Star Trek* or even *Lost in Space*. No, he paraded before us such inanities as the original *Battlestar Galactica* and *Buck Rogers*. What a waste. Westfahl's conclusion? "The only thing Glen A. Larson knew about science fiction was that other people were making money off it."

I wonder what Mr. Westfahl would think of my favorite TV-producer villain: Fred Freiberger. Mr. Freiberger presided over the third and final season of *Trek*, the second and final season of *Space:1999* and the fifth and final season of *The Six Million Dollar Man*. Do we detect a pattern here? How would Mr. Freiberger account for himself?

Mark Twain once said, famously, that there are three kinds of lies: Lies, damn lies and statistics. But this is a too-facile dismissal of a powerful analytical tool. The truth will out, if we count the hits and misses, if we follow where the pennies flow.

I'd like to leave the science-fiction ghetto for a moment (sorry) and cautiously venture into the "real"

world. Accountants are heroes, uncovering profundities through painstaking examinations of other people's lives.

In the late 1880's, King Leopold II of Belgium embarked on an international effort to "civilize" and "enlighten" the Congo River region of Africa. He recruited the great explorer Henry Morton Stanley for PR purposes, and convinced the crowned heads of Europe to pony up funding for his humanitarian efforts. But one man heard horrifying rumors coming from out of Africa. This man, E.D. Morel, a journalist and shipping agent, looked at the numbers. Ship after ship was returning from the Congo laden with rubber and ivory. And ship after ship went there, laden only with guns, explosives and chains—no commercial items whatsoever. His conclusion? Belgian Congo was a sham and a slave state. And so he spent years proving his allegations and campaigning to end the atrocities. (These atrocities are detailed in Joseph Conrad's horrific novel, *Heart of Darkness*, which author Adam Hochschild in *King Leopold's Ghost* demonstrates is more fact than fiction.)

If there is a conspiracy of lies, or a corporate house of cards, the accountant will find it.

The dot com bust was entirely predictable to anyone who paid attention the P/E (price/earning) ratios. How could a company that made no money and sold no product have a stock worth 50 or 100 bucks a share? The smart investors saw the numbers—published every day—and got out before it was too late.

Accountants are Cassandras.

"I am incredibly nervous that we will implode in a wave of accounting scandals," a vice president of corporate development once wrote to her boss. "My 8 years of...work will be worth nothing on my resume, the business world will consider the past successes as nothing but an elaborate accounting hoax." That VP was Sherron Watkins, and her boss was, of course, Kenneth Lay of Enron.

I shudder to think how far-sighted accountants consider the vast personal and national debt Americans carry (to say nothing of the trade deficit or the coming Social Security crisis). These are frightful imbalances, sustained only by a continual, monumental influx of foreign capital. What if this money just...went away? What if the world decided that the American economy was too tied to a non-renewable energy source, like a dead soldier, dragged by a foot in the stirrup of a dying horse? What if the world saw our economy as a shell game—our resources and ingenuity frittered away, our riches squandered on a pointless war—and they all decided to invest in Euros or Chinese Renminbi instead?

At the end of the day, the end of the quarter, the fiscal year, the lifetime, we must give an account.

About Peter Cushing, Mr. Westfahl concluded, "his good performances far outnumbered his bad ones, and he made his films better far more often than he made them worse; thus, by a strict accounting, one must conclude that his career was a success."

But what of the rest of us?

How will we sum up our hits and misses, the use of the talents and opportunities given to us? Did we live in selfishness and spiritual penury, or did we increase the sum total of Love and Good whiles yet we spent our numbered days on this gentle earth?

Lies My Jedi Told Me

Mark Leeper

I have to admit to being in some respects somewhat slower than the general population. That is only in some respects. Most people in our society learn the cold, hard facts of life when they find out that Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny are really mythical and do not literally exist. Being Jewish I never had such illusions and so I never had to face being disabused of these illusions. You know Jewish kids don't get brought up on many myths. Certainly not myths that anyone becomes really attached to. Someone says Egypt's first born didn't die in a single night??? It makes it a better story. There's less guilt. Oil lamps don't miraculously become more fuel-efficient??? Have it your way. So they skimped on the oil.

No, disillusionment came late to me. I maintained my innocence a relatively long time. I got my introduction to the Cold Hard Facts of Life when I was 30. That was when the film *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back* was released and I found out the first of what was to be the whole sordid story of Luke Skywalker's parentage. Even that story would not have bothered me. The Grand Disillusionment came when I realized that that I, along with Luke Skywalker, had been misled and--yes, I'll use the word--betrayed by Obi Wan Kenobi. After seeing *The Empire Strikes Back* I went into a period of inconsolable depression. If one cannot trust the Obi Wan Kenobis of this world (okay, of *that* world), just who can you trust? And Obi Wan had been played by Alec Guinness too. That was the worst part. Alec Guinness for Chrissakes. It would have been one thing if he had been played by Michael Ironside. Nobody trusts a Michael Ironside character. Or if you do, you deserve what you get. Arthur Kennedy would have been okay too. But if an Alec Guinness character can lie with a straight face, and he does have a *very* straight face, who is there left to believe in? What is there left to believe in? What is going to come next? Morgan Freeman pitching for the Psychic Network? I mean, come on.

What does Obi Wan actually tell Luke? He says, "A young Jedi named Darth Vader, who was a pupil of mine until he turned to evil, helped the Empire hunt down and destroy the Jedi Knights. He betrayed and murdered your father. Now the Jedi are all but extinct. Vader was seduced by the dark side of the Force." Those are his words, not mine.

Now the obvious question is whether Obi Wan was telling the truth when he said that Darth Vader betrayed and murdered Luke's father. The obvious answer on first thought is no. But on reflection it becomes "no, dammit." What does Obi Wan say in his own defense? I had to wait another three years to find out, but I got it. I was sitting there in the theater with my heart in my hand

(and my candy in my other hand) waiting to find out the Truth. It wasn't worth the wait.

Luke: Why didn't you tell me? You told me Vader betrayed and murdered my father.

Obi-Wan: Your father...was seduced by the Dark Side of the Force. He ceased to be Anakin Skywalker and became Darth Vader. When that happened, the good man who was your father was destroyed. So what I told you was true...from a certain point of view.

Luke: A certain point of view?

Obi-Wan: Luke, you're going to find that many of the truths we cling to depend greatly on our own point of view.

Oh, so that makes it okay. What a load of duck tires. And Luke, who up to this point I respected, just stands there with an "oh, yeah, a certain point of view" look on his face.

A change of heart on Anakin/Vader's part means that his new self betrayed and murdered his own self from *a certain point of view*??? What point of view is that? It sure wasn't an overhead shot. It would take more than that. Who does he think he is? Tevye the Milkman disowning his daughter? He is saying "your father is dead to me and, by the way, he is dead to you too." What he is saying is that if his pupil chooses the wrong side of the Force he is a dead man. He is worse than being a dead man. And he is not just dead to Obi Wan, he is dead to his own son, whether his son would agree or not. His son does not even get a choice. I guess it is only fair that Lars tells Luke that Obi Wan is dead. Everybody on the whole dang planet seems to adopt a certain point of view and then lies through his teeth. Hey, you know I own the Brooklyn Bridge from a certain point of view. You want to buy it from me?

That is not all the claims that Obi Wan makes that are no longer operative after seeing *Episode III*. There is the issue of Anakin's legacy light saber. Obi Wan tells Luke that Anakin wanted Luke to have his light saber. It seems that Anakin does not want to give up his light saber till the very end of his fight with Obi Wan. Now it is possible that he had told Obi Wan before that he would leave his light saber to his son, but there is no evidence of this. It seems more likely that Obi Wan is just trying to manipulate Luke with the romance of being a Jedi.

The wise old Kenobi says that he has not gone by the name Obi Wan since before Luke was born. Actually we see him called Obi Wan by Padme just before she dies and after Luke is born. But perhaps he does not count Luke as being born until he can stand on his own. That would mean his claim is right from *a certain point of view*. I don't suppose that it has occurred to old Benny the Dip that nobody can have any sort of discussion if nobody is telling the truth and instead everybody is talking from a certain point of view.

Well, that was the message that a whole generation got from watching *Star Wars*. They grew up and many went into politics. And everybody told the truth from a certain point of view. And that explains the mess we are in right now.

Requiem for a Planet

Steven H Silver

On February 18, 1930, Clyde Tombaugh sat in an office in the Lowell Observatory in Flagstaff, Arizona comparing photographic plates taken on January 23 and 29. When he found a small point of light that appeared to jump back and forth, he pulled out a third plate of the same region of the sky from January 20 to use for confirmation. According to Tombaugh, he then sat stunned for most of an hour with the realization that he alone on Earth knew that there was a ninth planet.

After informing his boss, V.M. Slipher of the discovery, Tombaugh went into town and saw the film "The Virginian." Tombaugh says that he has no memory of the film, but sat in the dark of the theatre thinking about the world he had just discovered.

Eventually, the discovery of a new planet was announced to the world on March 13. The following day, Falconer Madan read a newspaper article about the discovery to his eleven-year-old granddaughter, Venetia Burney. Venetia suggested the name Pluto for the planet. Falconer, whose brother Henry had named Phobos and Deimos, forwarded the suggestion to H.H. Turner (who coined the term "parsec"), who passed the it on to his American

colleagues. The name, of course, was eventually made official, in part because the first two letters, "Pl" could be seen as a reference to Percival Lowell.

From 1979 through 1984, I carried out a correspondence with Clyde Tombaugh. In one of the later letters to him, I asked why he was credited with the discover of Pluto instead of Lowell. I pointed out that John Couch Adams and Urbain Le Verrier, who did the calculations were credited with Neptune's discovery. Johann Galle, who did the observational work, is not credit as one of the discoverers.

Clyde responded by writing, "visual identification by Galle of Berlin was a 'push-over' requiring about 1 hour of time, and checking only a few dozen stars." He went on to state "Lowell's prediction was of very little help...When I got to Gemini, I had already made a thorough search through 1/3rd of the entire Zodiac. This

is why other astronomers have stated that 'the discovery of Pluto was the result of Tombaugh's thorough search.'"

Shortly after beginning our correspondence, I had the opportunity to meet Clyde when he was in Chicago celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of Pluto's discovery. The Adler Planetarium not only had Clyde and his wife Patsy, but also Robert Harrington, who went on to predict a series of Plutonian-Charonian occultations and eclipses that would start in 1985. Although the moon's discovery James Christy has proposed the name Charon in 1978, it wasn't officially announced until Harrington's calculations were proven.

Obviously, I have long had an affinity for Pluto, even after it became very clear that I would never be an astronomer. When the web came along, one of the things I did was create a bibliography of science fiction which was set, in whole or in part, on Pluto.

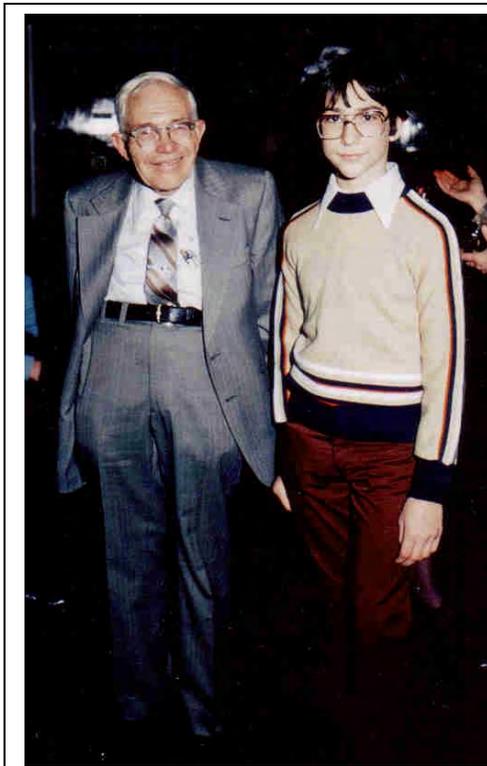
In 2005, the International Astronomical Union, or IAU, announced it would reconsider Pluto's status as a planet. This was due, in part, to the decision by Neil deGrasse Tyson at the Hayden Planetarium in 2001 to remove Pluto from a display of planets. This alone would not have been enough to spur the IAU to action, but combined with the discovery of several other objects in the distant solar system, most notably 2003 UB313 by Michael Brown. Other TransNeptunian Objects (TNOs) had been discovered but were smaller than Pluto (even if only marginally). Indications are that 2003 UB313 is larger than Pluto and the IAU decided that until it settled on a definition of a planet, it wouldn't be given a name. Brown's team nicknamed their discover Xena and its companion Gabriella.

When the IAU first met, it announced a draft proposal that would have not only included Pluto in the ranks of the planets,

but would have allowed Ceres to rejoin the ranks of the planets, and added Charon and 2003 UB313. While most people could understand 2003 UB313 and Ceres, Charon was confusing to many people.

The logic for calling both Charon and Pluto planets is that Charon is large enough that the barycenter of the Pluto-Charon system is not, in fact, within Pluto. The two objects orbit a point just above Pluto's surface.

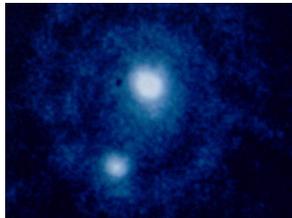
Ceres, the first asteroid discovered and still the largest, was found by Giuseppe Piazzi on January 1, 1801. Piazzi first described his discovery as a nova stella, but after three days of observation decided it was not a fixed star. Initially he announced his discovery as a comet, but since it lacked any nebulosity and it had a slow and uniform movement, he decided it might be a missing planet. However, it soon became lost in the glare of the sun. Carl Friedrich Gauss worked out its orbit and when



Clyde Tombaugh and the author
January 21, 1980

it was found by Franz Xaver von Zach where Gauss predicted it would on December 31, 1801, Ceres was declared a planet by the scientific community.

As scientists continued to discover objects in the area between the orbits of Mars and Jupiter, each was added to the lists of planets, although the nomenclature changes back and forth between minor planets and William Herschel's suggestion of asteroids. By the middle of the nineteenth century, it was generally agreed that the asteroids were not actually planets and they were demoted and removed from the ephemeris of planets, although their name didn't stabilize as "asteroids" until 1929, the year before Pluto was discovered.



Shortly before the IAU met, Michael Burstein decided to form the Society to Preserve Pluto as a Planet and asked if I would agree to be one of its officers. I said yes and the website went on-line. Today, August 24, 2006, the IAU announced that Pluto would no longer be considered a planet, but rather a "dwarf planet." I heard the news as I was driving in to work. The decision came as something of a surprise.

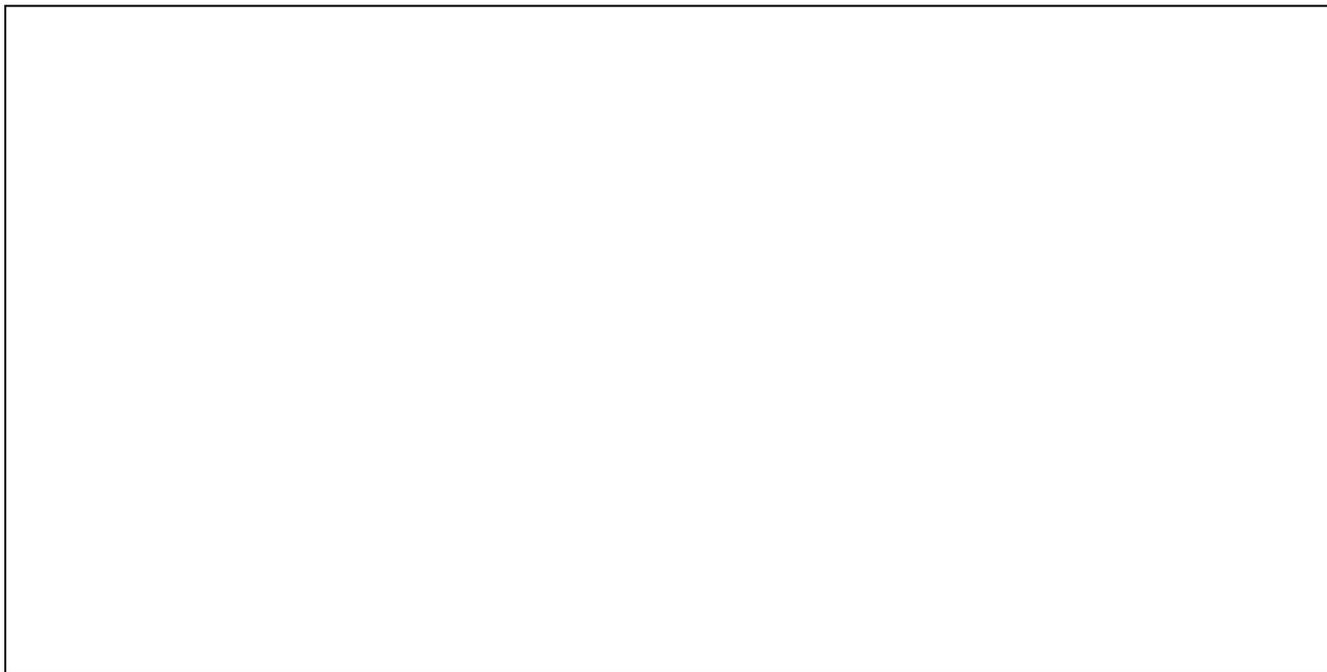
A couple of hours later, I received a call from Michael letting me know that I should expect a call from a reporter from the CBC (Canadian Broadcast Corporation). The reporter called me at 10:15 and asked if we could talk. I told her I really didn't have the time until 11:30, when I generally took my lunch and invited her to call back then. She told me she would, and they would aim to have me on the radio for an 11:45 interview.

talked on the phone for about half an hour, with me giving her the historical background not only about Pluto and my interactions with Clyde Tombaugh, but also an explanation of the demotion of the asteroids as more were discovered. At the end of the interview, we arranged for her to call me back for a 2:40 phone in interview to a television show. After hanging up, the guy in the cubicle next to mine commented that I very much sounded as if I knew what I was talking about.

Jennifer called me back a little while later to tell me that they had booked a studio at the NBC Tower in Chicago and asking if I could make my way over there to be filmed for the interview instead of just doing it over the phone. I explained that I could give them the time for a ten minute phone interview, but getting down to the NBC Tower would take up at least 2½ hours of time that I couldn't afford to be away from work. She checked with her producer and was informed that if I couldn't appear on television, they were just going to find someone else.

About ten minutes later, she called again. When they booked the studio, they had agreed to pay for it. Rather than waste the money, they were now looking for another Chicagoan to take my place in the studio. I recommended one of the astronomers from the Adler Planetarium and will have to find out if he was able to do it.

The Society for the Preservation of Pluto as a Planet will eventually have a plan for moving forward and turning the whole Pluto demotion into an educational experience, but Michael, Nomi, the rest of SP3 (<http://www.plutoisaplanet.org/>) and I are only in the beginning stages of figuring out exactly what that will be. Suggestions are welcome.



When she called back at 11:30, she told me that they had already booked the radio show, but they would like to have me on (possibly) at 2:40 on a different show. We

Is Modern American SF Depressing?

James Nicoll

More precisely, is it more depressing than it used to be? I think so (although I may not by the time I finish this article—I promise not to rush back and change my claim if it turns out I am wrong). In fact, I've often blamed the relative decline of the sales of SF to Fantasy on the dismal world-views of the SF that is available. What I haven't done is sit down with some representative sets of SF to see if there is a trend and if so, what that trend might be. After all, every period has issues that people fear will overwhelm them and these concerns should be reflected in the fiction of the time. The only way to see if the depressing material is dominating the mix in a way that it did not before is to actually compare the SF of various periods.

For my samples, I want something relatively unbiased, which means not my personal library (because that only reflects my tastes) and not any publishers like Del Rey or Ace, where there's mainly one editor selecting the original work (It also means not Tor, because they are too young). I decided to use the SFBC (despite the fact that it has tended to have only one or two Senior Editors at a time) in the hope that because their offerings draw from a variety of original publishers it would provide a broad view of the field at the time and also because I happen to have handy lists of the books the SFBC published all the way back to 1953. I've selected three years at random: 1953, 1975 and 2005. I've discarded all the fantasies and all of the books and anthologies that reprint material more than five years old at the time of publication. I will also discard all SF by non-Americans.

The next problem is to define "depressing." I will admit that this is to some degree dependent on the person who is reading the book. For example, one person might see a fictional society arranged along strict eugenic lines as inherently depressing but another might see it as a welcome development. My arbitrary definition is a story counts as depressing only if the characters in the story are worse off in terms of material or social options than Americans would have been at the time the story was published and if the prospects of recovery are dismal. This means that I would count *The Earth Abides* as depressing but *Star Man's Son, 2250 AD* as not depressing, even though both use as part of the background the total collapse of modern civilization. One novel has little or no hope of recovery while the other may be the beginning of a renaissance.

I chose to consider each work on its own merits. This means that if, for example, H. Beam Piper's *Space Viking* was in the samples, I would count it as not-depressing on its own terms, even though I know that in the greater

context of Piper's work, nothing much came of the grand designs at the end of the book.

I suppose I could rate the stories in my samples with a sophisticated ranking system but frankly, the sample sizes can't justify that. Instead, I will rate each story that I am familiar with on a two-value scale: depressing or not depressing (-1 or +1). It seems to me that I can just sum the ratings and divide by the number of books in the sample to get dimensionless values to compare and if I then multiply by one hundred, I avoid ugly decimals. The lower the rating, the more depressing the year was.

Unfortunately, I can't rate stories I have not read and I admit up front that this is a serious source of bias. Also, the field was tiny fifty years ago and so even a broad sample is a small sample.

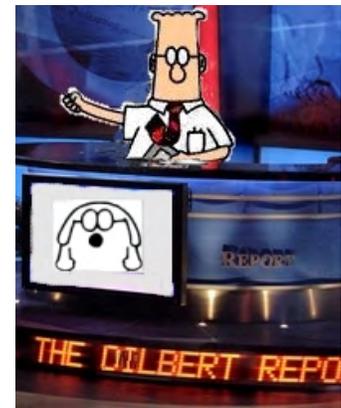
SFBC 1953: The first thing one notices is that in 1953, it was possible to have read everything the SFBC published. Even though I only became a serious fan of SF in the 1970s, I have read eight of the ten works published by the SFBC in 1953. Of those eight books, I would rate seven of them as non-depressing, for a net value of 88.

SFBC 1975: By coincidence, this is more or less the year of my personal SFnal golden age. As far as I can tell, the SFBC published 30 works that year. Once I eliminate the fantasy, the works by non-Americans, the works I have not read¹ and the reprints of older material, I am left with just eight books, of which I can only call two depressing, for a rating of 75.

SFBC 2005: Here I will switch to a slightly different kind of sample. I began freelancing for Bookspan in 2001 and the handiest sample I have is the list of manuscripts I read for them in 2005. Unlike personal purchases, what I read for Bookspan isn't filtered by my preferences but by what they need read. I see 49 works of SF that meet my criteria, of which seven are depressing. That works out to a rating of 86, *almost the same value as 1953*.

Based on these (admittedly small) samples, there's no evidence I can see that SF really is more depressing now than it was 30 or 50 years ago. Much as admitting the following goes against every tradition of middle-aged men and their strongly-held views, what the numbers say to me is that when I claim SF is more depressing than it used to be, I am wrong. If anything, the American SF of the 1970s, the SF that hooked me on SF, was more down beat than the SF of the present.

Stupid facts.



¹ I am very weak on the anthologies of the period. This is probably a fatal flaw in this article or at least one of the fatal flaws.

BARTcon: An Experiment in Transit

Christopher Garcia

One in a while, I'll have an idea and a few folks will get involved. One of those ideas came to life when some friends from out of town came to visit. I was in and out of fandom for most of the 1990s, but one of those periods featured a visit from friends who were apt to be up for strange events. While we were talking over Denny's one night, we came up with an idea: What if we held a moving con?

That was it. You see, a moving con is a good idea, if you have the right method for doing it. The back of a U-Haul Truck isn't a bad idea, though they discourage it and even have something in the liability waiver that says you shouldn't let people ride back there. You could always try and have a small con in your car. I've been to relaxacons with twenty or thirty people and you could probably fit that many into my old 1963 Impala.

Now, I've been a Bay Area boy since I was born to a fan and his long-suffering wife in 1974. About that same time, a public transportation system called Bay Area Rapid Transit, or BART, came on-line. BART was the first computer controlled transit system in the world (powered by Digital Equipment PDP-8s that currently live in the Computer History Museum where I work) and had so many problems that Washington DC designed the Metro system which solved many of them specifically to thumb their nose at us loony Left Coasters. With BART still operating, my friends and I decided to hold a convention on a BART train.

Now, I can hear those magickal people who call themselves SMOFs saying 'Well how would one hold a con on a train?' and it's a lot easier than you'd think. It actually turns out that the very first cons of the 1930s, such as the visit of New York fan to Philly fandom that is the first con ever (and quiet down all you Brits who disagree!) could easily have fit in the back few seats of a trolley car. I had gathered a few of my friends, M Lloyd and Judith Morel, my dear friend Caswell, and a couple of their friend, and we spent a couple of night making signs, preparing badge blanks and making the Program Guide. Caswell, an interesting LA-based artist, was the only Guest of Honor, much like Frank R. Paul was the only guest at the first WorldCon. Despite not knowing so, we were all sorts of Retro. The cover was a beautiful full color picture of a BART train being infested with fan that had been poorly photocopied in black and white leading to a large series of smudges that I kinda liked.

The event started at nine on a Sunday morning. We gathered on the platform for a Daly City-Dublin-Pleasanton train and when it pulled up, we gathered in the last car of the train, a six car train, and hunkered in the very back. We took over four banks of seats and set up our sign: *BARTCon: The New Fannish Movement*. The title wasn't my idea, but it grew on me. We had seven

people in the area when we started. I handled registration by writing their names on the pre-drawn Hello My Name Is stickers I had bought and Caswell had decorated. The seven of us gathered and sat down for the opening ceremonies.

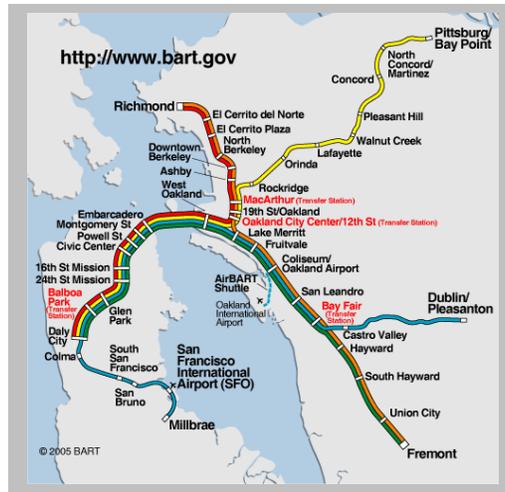
Now, there were maybe four other people in the car with us, all at the other end. We started with M, who had appointed herself Chairperson, giving a short speech that probably could have been heard at the other end, but no one paid any attention. She talked about how this was a wonderful event and then she introduced Caswell. He

had brought a computer and used the time to give a very long presentation on the nature of his art and why he used Science Fiction imagery when dealing with pieces about hunger in Africa and so on. It was an interesting piece of work, and since it lasted all the way through San Francisco, the train had started to fill a bit and people who weren't with us started to listen in. One in particular, a lady wearing a massive purple and green muumuu, actually asked questions. I rewarded her with a name badge and the member number 8. She stuck around with us all the way to the end of the line and then headed back the other direction in the next train going towards Oakland.

When we got to Dublin/Pleasanton station, we got out, shook our legs and met the rest of our planned party. Jay Crasdan and Manny Sanford, two of my best friends who had spent the early part of the morning recovering from their pre-con drinking battle, came and brought the art show with them. This was a bold move and the one that we knew would probably get us in trouble.

The art show featured about 15 pieces that M and Jay had printed out over the last few days from Caswell and M and SaBean. They were all on 8 1/2 x 11 paper and had been given these cheap little cardboard frames. We got on and Jay and Manny spent a few minutes taping them to the sides of the seats. We had grown a bit in size, so we had six banks of seats, all of which had a picture taped to them. We had built some relaxation time and even other folks started to get into the act and would come up and take a look at the various print-outs. M's best piece, an ASCII art work called Six-Guy Fucking a Dragon, was scandalous but well made, even in the tiny format.

After an hour or so, we were back in SF and a BART cop arrived. BART has its own police force and they're known to be rather hard assed. He immediately saw us



and came over as we were in the middle of our discussion of why William Gibson is the worst writer of the 1990s (a

about an hour later by another BART cop, but he was much cooler and started asking about the art on people's



loud argument started between Jay and a guy who had joined us and been given badge number 13).

“Wat’s goin’ on here?” the cop asked.

I slyly took down M’s piece and put it behind my back, just in case he wanted to hammer us for public indecency.

“We’re having a little gathering, a convention if you will.” M answered. She may have been batting her eyes and gently tugging down on her shirt to try and calm the situation.

“You have permission?”

“No, sir.” M answered again, this time obviously thrusting out her chest.

The guy looked at the stuff.

“OK, you guy’ll have to take down the sign and the things on the seats, but you can stay on as long as you don’t cause a scene.”

I had already begun taking down the art before he finished his sentence. We would be given the same speech

badges.

The day winded on and we ended up in Fremont, where we had two vans waiting for us, where we took everything with us. We’d had four panels (including a debate between the pro-SteamPunk and Anti-SteamPunk leagues) and an Opening ceremony. M had not been able to get a Masquerade together, but did parade around the car in her long cloak and the elfish bodice she had changed into at the Lake Merritt station. We went and got ripped at M’s hotel room afterwards, bringing two of the seven extra people we had picked up along the way. We had a total membership of 20 for the entire day: more than those first cons between fans in those olden days.

I’ve threatened to do another one, but I don’t think the current climate of security would enjoy us playing around so. Still, it was a blast and if we could get a good enough Guest of Honor to agree to ride around on the BART all day, I think it’d be a fun time.



The Red Fire Of His Pain

E.A.Poe As Space Invader in Verse and Prose

Steve Sneyd

We generally think of Edgar Allan Poe's poetry as darkly Gothic, obsessively exploring a death-in-life Tombworld or, at best, encountering its doomy messengers like the "Nevermore"-quothng raven..

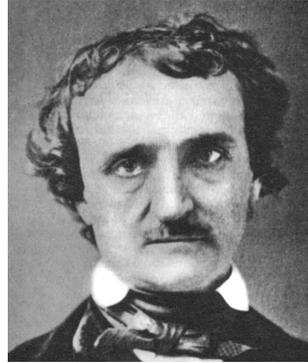
Yet Poe, who applied the phrase "Out of Space—Out of Time" to his own work (it occurs, for example, in his poem "Dreamland"), echoing Ralph Waldo Emerson (an 1838 Divinity School address), and earlier users of the concept, like Keats "There is no such thing as time and space" (Letters) or Milton's time and space-bereft Chaos in Paradise Lost also made powerful use of settings beyond our Earth

In his long early poem "Al Araaf" (1827), Poe gives us intelligent life Out There—albeit the taint of death does still creep in: this is after-life intelligence—entities, some of Earthly origin, living in truly extraordinary setting.

Writing to potential publishers to introduce the poem (probably originally written while he was in the army, as an ordinary soldier—enlisting after his adoptive father refused to pay the gambling debts, forcing him to leave the University of Virginia, he won promotion to Sergeant-Major, then became an officer cadet at West Point, the American Sandhurst, before being expelled in 1831). Poe explained the title "Al Araaf" as being the Koranic name of the Limbo between Heaven and Hell, and the poem's setting as the "new star"(nova stella in Latin—it proved to be an example of, and gave its name to, the concept of a nova, the explosive death of an immensely swollen star) discovered by Tycho Brahe in 1572, in the constellation of Cassiopeia, which became brighter than either Jupiter or Venus, remaining visible for 16 months).

Poe further explained: "Even after death, those who make the choice of the star as their residence" (the word "choice" is a curious one in the context!) "do not enjoy immortality...but, after a second life of high excitement, sink into forgetfulness and [a second] death" (As American SF poet and critic Jonathan Vos Post has noted of this passage, reincarnation inside an exploding star would indeed be exciting, if brief!).

The poem is long, full of dreamlike, unexplained transitions (although Poe footnoted the poem extensively, explaining sources of names etc., he left key matters of intent and meaning wide open to interpretation) and ends abruptly, almost anti-climatically. (This has led to frequent suggestions either that a final Book has been lost, or at any rate was intended, even if never completed: it may be that, having strong views as to the maximum



sensible length for a poem—in his essay "The Poetic Principle" he held that "a long poem does not exist...is simply a flat contradiction in terms,"—he then realised he was in danger of transgressing his own self-imposed rule. Equally, he may have wished to delay no longer in publishing the

work, found himself unable to achieve a satisfactory conclusion amid the distracting changes of his own life-circumstances, or simply have felt it appropriate to make the poem an example of the Romantic tradition of the "fragment" or uncompleted poem, so notable in the work of Keats with "Hyperion" and "Endymion"). His view, also, that "the highest poetry...is sense swooning into nonsense—he replied to a Mrs. McKenzie who asked why he did not write poems so everyone could understand them, "Madame, I write so that everybody can not understand them"—could help explain the baffling discontinuities of "Al Araaf."

It is clear from the poem that, unlike the actual nova that inspired him, Poe's Nova is a "Daedalion," i.e. an artificial construction—a precursor of the planet-sized spaceships of modern science fiction. It is maneuverable—prior to the poem's time scale, for example, it is described as having made a near-approach to Earth, causing our planet to tremble—undergo orbital disturbance, in modern terms.

Equally science fictional is the way that the flora of Al Araaf is used by its female overlord Nesace—her nature is never clearly described, but she is clearly some sort of "angelic superbeing—to transmit silent messages to other, distant spheres in space—precursoring, again, modern ideas of organic communications machines/computing devices.

The story, in essence, is that of a couple on Al Araaf, one of Earth origin—he reached the planet during its flypast—the other of non-Earth origin but clearly humanoid in appearance—who disobey the world's injunction against physical love, and at the end sink into helpless slumber, although it is unclear whether this is a punishment or the result of contravening the physical laws affecting these limbo intelligences (a lengthy, coherent, if rather too conclusive-seeming discussion of the poem's meaning, and expansion of data on sources etc. beyond Poe's own exegesis, is given by Thomas Olive Mabbott, editor of The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe" in Vol.1, Poems, Cambridge, Massachusetts, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1969).

In another 1827 poem, "Stanzas," Poe speaks of his subject as "what in other worlds shall be," and he returned to extraordinary elsewheres involving Outer Space on various occasions—in the poem "Fairy-Land,"

for example, a fresh moon is created, then destroyed, each night, the remains serving the population as a kind of temporary tent or protective dome.

Poe's other major venture into outer space is on an epic scale "Eureka," written in 1848, can be seen as an extraordinary attempt—reminiscent of the Roman poet Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*, but in an age where the inrush of new knowledge had made the task even more impossible—to create a coherent overall picture giving understanding of the universe as a whole. Poe himself insisted "Eureka" should be considered solely as a poem; although it must be said that, even allowing for the wide, ill-defined borderlands of that hybrid entity, the prose-poem, "Eureka" reads as prose; so perhaps Poe's insistence that it be judged as a poem owes more to his poetic and imagistic approach to data than its linguistic style. One brief instance will illustrate the prose nature of the text—an extract fascinating also for the way it seems to prefigure modern ideas of ostensibly willed behavior by particles in quantum physics—"—is it not because originally... they (the atoms) were One that now, in all circumstances—at all points—in all directions... in all relations and through all conditions—they struggle back to this absolutely, this irrelatively, this unconditionally One?"

Written in 1848, not long after the lingering death of his child-wife Virginia (she burst a blood vessel while practicing her singing in 1842, but lingered on painfully for another five years), its outward theme perhaps chosen as a means of escaping the all too-recent realization of his Gothic fears of the worm within, this 30,000 word "Essay on the Material and Spiritual Universe" embraces an eclectic variety of material. This ranges from sarcastic remarks about Western philosophy, to analyses of the problem of "indeterminacy of the language" (for instance, depending on definition, can "man leaping to the moon" be truly considered impossible?).

As Poe interprets the science of his time for his own purposes—the work began as a lecture on scientific development and understanding, "Cosmogony of the Universe," delivered on February 3, 1848, in the New York Society lecture hall before its expansion and reshaping into the work Putnam published five months later—he looks with a poet's eye, although, as said, the text is in prose form throughout. He makes leaps of expressive interpretation which can, from today's "horizon of expectation," seem to precursor, as well as the modern quantum physics mentioned, aspects of relativity and non-Euclidean geometry we tend to ascribe purely 20th century origins.

Indeed, as the protagonist/persona voice of "Eureka" takes flight to meditate upon ultimate causes, a passage on derivation of Creation from the splitting of atoms was what the late Sir Arthur Eddington, one of the great pioneers of astronomical physics, tributed as having first aroused his interest in the subject which became a life's work.

The 96 pages of "Eureka" end with a conclusion more mystical than scientific—that the total of all sensations

experienced by sentient beings, particularly happiness but also suffering "appertain by right to the Divine Being when concentrated within himself"—which, in science fictional terms, would imply that these emotions are collected or harvested as some sort of food or fuel for some Universal Mind, a Mind which, on a vaster scale by far than the poet attempting to describe the indescribably vast, thinks "unthoughtlike thoughts" and even higher-order "thoughts of thoughts."

This envisioning of a vast Intelligence in operation upon humans and their environment with which "Eureka" implicitly ends is a metatheme also of his haunting 1847 story "The Domain of Arnheim," later to inspire the work of the Surrealist artist René Magritte and the Scots poet Edwin Morgan—in this story, like Slartibartfast in *The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy*, but without that being's displayed humanity, vast distant beings reshape the landscapes of Earth for purposes beyond our understanding.

(A further return to science fiction-like themes occurs, incidentally, in a story written the year after "Eureka," "Mellonton Tauta," Poe's picture of the 29th Century.)

In a sense, thus, Outer Space for Poe is as darkened by cosmic fear as it was for Howard Phillips Lovecraft a century later, although Poe's metaphysical despair is less specific than HPL's conjuring of the cold vast Old Ones.

The world of "Al Araaf" may indeed have been paradisaical for Nesace, its "Captain"—and for those of its "limbonauts" who obeyed the rules—as it "lay lolling on the golden air/Near four bright suns" at a "temporary rest" in its voyagings—yet it is also "Dread star!" disrupter of "a night of mirth" "making a red, fearsome flypast of "timid Earth."

Indeed, although Poe thus also wrote of realms above and outwith our planet, spacious and star-scattered, as well as dark tomb places within the Earth, there are in "Al Araaf" lines which illuminate the psychic connections, the way in which Space, to him, was as much a source of fear, guilt—and horrid attraction—as the more conventionally located lands of death populated by those the writer had failed in life.

It is hard not to feel that, in the way he here personifies a lifeless astronomical phenomenon into an image of fallen angels, he is writing as much about his self-image as he is about the real wanderers of ice and rock Out There:

*...the barrier overgone
By the comets who were cast
From their pride, and from their throne,
To be drudges till the last -
To be carriers of fire
(the red fire of their heart)
With speed that may not tire
And with pain that shall not part.*

Look upward and outward to the stars as he might, it seems, then, that they offered Poe no real escape from the mind-tomb within himself.

Northern Ireland in Science Fiction and Fantasy

Nicholas Whyte

A short essay exploring the intersection of two of my interests—science fiction and Northern Irish politics.



I have compiled an extensive list of science fiction and fantasy set in Ireland (available at <http://explorers.whyte.com/sf/irsf.htm>) over the last few years. There are over two hundred novels on the list. Few of them are really very good. The vast majority are either simple retellings of the best known Irish legends, Cu Chulainn, Finn McCool, or else draw on a sentimentally conceived Irish background for thin material making up very fat books, and can be considered part of the genre effectively parodied as “PanCeltic” by Diana Wynne Jones in her *Tough Guide to Fantasy Land* (1996)—“The Tour will take place in the usual way, except that PORRIDGE will largely replace STEW and there will be rather more MAGIC. But the WEATHER will be a great deal worse.”

Ireland as a backdrop for SF goes right back to the origins of the genre—a chapter of *Frankenstein* (1818) is set on the west coast. The political crisis of the late 19th century inspired some ponderous early SF works—John Francis Maguire’s *The Next Generation* (1871), Tom Greer’s *A Modern Daedalus* (1885), Edward Lester’s *The Siege of Bodike* (1886), and F.M. Allen’s *The Voyage of the Ark* (1888) and sequel *The Round Tower of Babel* (1891). In the mid twentieth century, Ireland was sometimes used as an incidental, pastoral background to apocalypse, especially by writers closer to the mainstream—a tradition that perhaps started with William Hope Hodgson’s *The House on the Borderland* (1908) and includes also Fred Hoyle’s *Ossian’s Ride* (1959). Flann O’Brien famously depicted the Irish midlands as Hell in *The Third Policeman* (1967).

He was unusual; Irish SF authors themselves rarely used their homeland as a backdrop for their work. C.S. Lewis, though born near Belfast, was educated and spent all his adult life in England, and although some wishful thinkers claim that the topography of Narnia is based on the Hollywood Hills, it has always felt pretty English to me. Likewise Bob Shaw, perhaps the best known purely SF author from Northern Ireland, tended to set his stories firmly elsewhere. Of Shaw’s generation of writers, only James White allowed his homeland to occasionally crop up in his novels (but not in his best known works, the Sector General series set in an intergalactic hospital). Let us not, however, forget the efforts of the most prolific Irish-language author of all time, Cathal Ó Sándair, with his four SF novels culminating in *An Captaen Spéirling*, *Spás-Phiólóta* (*Captain Spéirling*, *Space Pilot*, published 1962) featuring a spaceport at the Curragh in County Kildare.

The outbreak of the Troubles in the late 1960s gave Northern Ireland new prominence in films and thrillers. While few of these have SF elements, I find it impossible to watch *Monty Python’s Life of Brian* (1979)—which qualifies as science fiction because of the spaceship scene—without some sense that our local situation was being referred to. Rather than “Brits Out,” Brian paints “*Romanes eunt domus*” (corrected by a friendly centurion to “*Romani ite domum*”) on the walls of Jerusalem. Although the Pythons themselves have always asserted in public that the various Palestinian revolutionary groups are based on small British left-wing sects of the 1970s (or indeed of any period), the nomenclature of the People’s Front of Judea (Officials) and their rivals is more reminiscent of Northern Ireland (or indeed of 1970s Palestine) than of the contemporary Trotskyists. And the “What have the Romans ever done for us” scene surely has common roots with Harold Wilson’s infamous “spongers” speech from 1974. (“It’s safe to walk in the streets at night now.”—“Yeah, they certainly know how to keep order. Let’s face it, they’re the only ones who could in a place like this.”—Rebels chortle.)

The Romans in *Life of Brian* display the typical attitude of British observers perplexed by the quarrels of their Irish neighbours. Terry Pratchett, in *Thud!* (2005) also features an external observer in the shape of the eternal hero, Commander Vimes, but is much more engaged with and sympathetic to the conflicting parties. His dwarves and trolls look back to the Battle of Koom Valley (rather than the Boyne Valley), which is commemorated with parades and remembered in a big painting which sounds a bit like those found on gable ends all over Northern Ireland. (Of course, Pratchett has borrowed from other sources too—the theology of the “deep-down” dwarves is closer to Salafism and Wahhabism than to the Free Presbyterian Church, and his mockery of the execrable *Da Vinci Code* is topical as well as welcome.) Of course, in conflicts in our world, people rarely agree on as much of their history as Pratchett’s dwarves and trolls do—while 1690 is the big date for Ulster Loyalists; for Irish Nationalists it’s an irrelevance, a

struggle between two foreign kings. And if both sides actually do agree on the crucial date or dates (Bosnia 1992-95, Cyprus 1974, Israel/Palestine 1948) it doesn't really mean that solving the problem gets any easier...

The Troubles also appear, though largely as a backdrop for a deeper parable about humanity in crisis, in Frank Herbert's *The White Plague* (1982). The Irish reader will find much to sneer at in his grasp of the details—why, for instance, would the IRA want to bomb Grafton Street in Dublin, an incident which triggers the rest of the plot?—and it is perhaps better to pretend that it is about another, fictional country entirely. Mildred Downey Broxon, in *Too Long A Sacrifice* (1981) tried a bit harder, pulling her polyamorous PanCeltic central characters centuries forward in time to get caught up in paramilitarism. Again one can quibble with some details—one character's perambulations in Belfast take her “down Falls Road” from the Royal Victoria Hospital to Milltown Cemetery (rather than “up the Falls Road” as that route would normally be described), another complains about Monaghan having been partitioned from Ulster—but it is an honest effort. There are a few others that touch on the situation in passing: Ulster-born Paul Kearney's early novel *A Different Kingdom* (1993) is a lament for the death of the 1950s County Antrim countryside, and in Peter Dickinson's *The Green Gene* (1973), Celts living in Britain are easily recognizable by their skin colour.

The one SF writer who has tackled themes of Northern Irish politics repeatedly and successfully is Ian McDonald, in his “Irish trilogy,” *King of Morning*, *Queen of Day* (1991), *Hearts, Hands, and Voices/The Broken Land* (1992), *Sacrifice of Fools* (1996). One has to put “Irish trilogy” in quotation marks because they are not really a trilogy—no characters in common between the three books—and the middle volume is not even set in Ireland. All three, however, are excellent. *King of Morning*, *Queen of Day* edges around Northern Ireland. Its three sections are set generations apart, the first largely in County Sligo in 1912-1913, the second putting a foot across the relatively new Border in the late 1930s, and the last set entirely in Dublin in 1989.

Hearts, Hands, and Voices/The Broken Land depicts a dense, baroque synthesis of Ulster, the tropical climate where McDonald seems more at home with in his writing, and his ideas about biology. Some of the parallels are pretty obvious: the citizens of the Land are divided into Confessors and Proclaimers, and ruled by the Empire across the big River. But the parallels go beyond the blindingly obvious. McDonald has said of the central character's muteness: “Mathembe's not speaking was a simple symbol for the disenfranchisement of the young: speaking of the Northern Ireland situation, what you're offered is a series of off-the-peg attitudes, identities and solutions made up by people with a vested interest in you buying them. Mathembe has no voice; at another level, she knows that if she did speak, no one would listen to her.”

Only in *Sacrifice of Fools* does he bite the bullet, as it were, and combine a setting of gritty police work and murder in the streets of contemporary Belfast with the settlement of the earth by a small number of aliens,

exploring the roots of our local problem by bringing in *Alien Nation* (but doing it a lot better). The Shi'ans, to a certain extent, stand also for those of us who dislike being labeled. In one memorable passage, early on in the book, the central character, Andy Gillespie, muses: “You're either a Nationalist Chinese or a Unionist Chinese. Nationalist Shian or Unionist Shian. Can't just be Shian or Chinese, or Indian. Bastards have to divide everything between them. You're either one or the other. Can't be neither. Can't be just for yourselves. That's sitting on the fucking fence. You know why I haven't voted in ten years? Because these wankers aren't worth my vote. If you're not one, then you must be the other.” *Sacrifice of Fools* combines a setting far more realistic than the PanCelts mocked by Diana Wynne Jones with a visionary gift for writing. I've very much enjoyed McDonald's more recent novels set in warmer climes, but I hope he returns his attention to home shores soon.

Best Birthday Present Ever

Or

What I Did On My Winter Vacation

By Baron Dave Romm

So this penguin comes up to me, cocks his head quizzically and stares, silently pondering, “are you food?”

I visited Antarctic from Nov. 27-Dec. 7, 2005 as part of a Lindblad Expedition. Penguins weren't the only attraction. None of the animals behaved like they were in a zoo; none of them behaved like they were in the wild. They behaved like it was their home and *we* were trespassing.

Which we were.

Not many humans get to The White Continent. It's estimated that around 10,000 people visited Antarctica in 2004...which may be too many. The place isn't designed for humans, and there's nothing to see except everything.

I went on a Lindblad Expedition with my mother: It was her 50th birthday present to me. Best birthday present ever! Our expedition was a luxury cruise, but we were aboard a working National Geographic ship, and we had undersea camera people and scientists counting penguin rookeries and naturalists who had written books about the area and wildlife experts. At 50, I was below the average age of the expedition members, though there were several youngsters (including a few children).

We were part of a scientific expedition, but it was still a luxury cruise. The food was great: Despite all the exercise I gained weight. We were never more than two hours away from a bathroom, if necessary, and never out of sight of a crew member.

We flew from Miami to Santiago, Chile. Spent less than 24 hours in Santiago, then down to Ushuaia, Argentina. Ushuaia bills itself as the Southernmost City in the World, and has a burgeoning tourist trade and a growing population. From there, we steamed down the Drake Passage (passing smaller villages in Chile) and onto the open sea. We had a good crossing, according to old hands, and rarely needed to hang on to the ropes strung through the middle of the Dining Room or Lounge areas. I gambled and didn't take any of the anti-motion



sickness pills provided free, and didn't need them. But I knew better than to brag about it.

Once on board, mom and I settled in our cabin. One of the best parts about the trip was the people. The crew was very experienced, and lived up to the adage about Antarctica: First you go for the adventure, then you go for the money, then you go because you don't fit in anywhere else. I'd never been on a cruise before, and expected a bit of decadent ennui, but no. It's not like jaunting to Hawaii or the South of France to meet with the elite. If you go to Antarctica, you *want* to go to Antarctica. Out of 110 tourists, almost everyone went on almost all the landfalls and kayaking.

Antarctica is very specifically *not* a country. By the Antarctic Treaty of 1959 (and amended several times since), no country lays claim to the continent. Not successfully, anyway: Some countries have gone so far as to import pregnant women so their child would be born on Antarctica and the country could lay claim to it. Such attempts by Argentina and Chile have not persuaded the international community.

There are two ways to tell you're in Antarctica. The first is physical: When you cross the Antarctic Convergence, or Arctic Polar Front, the temperature of the water drops 2-3 degrees C, the chemical composition of the water changes and the sealife changes. For a strip about 40km wide, all the way around the continent, the Antarctic Circumpolar Current meets the warmer waters to the North. This is usually about 55 degrees South Latitude but moves around somewhat, and global warming is affecting the currents. Much sea life doesn't cross the Convergence. This is why whales and larger animals have to migrate south: For the krill blooms. This is also why the passing is so treacherous: The temperature differences create fog and hazardous weather.

Crossing the Antarctic Convergence, we saw various birds, of which I'm not an expert. I'm told they were albatross and kestrels, among others. The Expedition crew lectured us on the biology of the area. The Captain offered a magnum of Champaign to the first person to spot a whale. I stayed up the first night to see the Southern Cross, but gave up on the whale about 2am. One was spotted about 3:15am, and subsequent sightings were cause for all of us to rush to the bow. The whales were usually in small pods of two or three, the few times we encountered them. They were curious about with us, at a distance, then left when we weren't food. The sonar on the ship's bridge could spot krill “blooms,” when massive amounts of the krill, a small shrimp-like creature which is the whale's major food source, would come close to the surface. That's how we knew to look for whales: look for krill.

Individual krill are small, but they are one of the most important links in the world-wide food chain. It's estimated that the biomass of the krill population outweighs the biomass of human beings. A small change in krill density or breeding grounds due to climate change will have far reaching consequences for all life on the planet.

The second way to tell you're in Antarctica is actual land. I was in the area of the continent that looks like a tail known as Graham Land. The immediate islands in the area are part of the continent; outlying islands such as the Falklands and South Orkney Island are still in dispute by Britain, Argentina and Chile. Tourists are sometimes caught in the middle of political disputes; Lindblad charters a plane from Santiago Chile to Ushuaia Argentina because this is not a reliable commercial route.

Antarctica is described by many superlatives: It's the highest, driest, coldest, loneliest, emptiest, and windiest continent. About twice the size of the US, not counting some of the surrounding islands, and much larger in the Southern hemisphere's winter. Antarctica contains 70 percent of the world's fresh water and 90% of the world's ice. (The Greenland Icecap contains 8% of the world's ice. That doesn't leave much for the rest of the world, no matter how much we have during a Minnesota winter.) While I was on the fringes and never ventured more than a hundred yards or so away from the sea, most of Antarctica is on the inner plateau, to average around 7,500 feet above sea level. Add the ice and the average height of Antarctica is 14,000 ft. This is three times



higher than any other continent.

And after all this, it's a desert. Antarctica—the inner plateau which makes up most of the continent—averages less than 2" of precipitation a year. Less than that of the Sahara. The plateau gets an inch or two of snow *from the ice freezing out of the moisture in the atmosphere*. And that's most of where those extra 8,000 feet of altitude come from. Much Antarctic ice has been undisturbed for 20 million years. And now, large parts of it are melting.

Despite—or because of—the pristine purity of Antarctica, it's easy to get mad at all those lying bastards who rudely condemned global warming to us hippy treehuggers. If there's one issue you can state for sure that the conservatives were wrong and the liberals were right, it's global warming. Climate change is here. Close up, the effects are hard to notice; you have to be aware of more icebergs and changing migration patterns.

We saw some icebergs calving. Nothing major, and we were never in danger, but every now and then some ice would slide off some other ice. My eyes were always

elsewhere at the critical moment of calving, but I could see the effects, as large chunks of ice and "bergy bits" were expanding in a circular pattern.

The most common question I get is: "Was it cold?" The answer is no. We never went up the plateau or were close to the pole. It was summer, and we never got as far south as the Antarctic Circle. We were in the peninsula and islands closest to South America. Not in center; it was never much colder than freezing, and often much warmer. Heck, it was warmer in Antarctica than it was back home in Minneapolis.

The other major question I get is about last year's movie *The March of the Penguins*. The answer is yes. We saw the penguin cycle in action. It was early in the breeding season, so there were no chicks, but I tried very hard to take pictures of eggs. We did see the penguins going to and fro, and diving in the ocean.



The movie is about Emperor Penguins, who have to March 70 miles to get to their rookeries near the pole. We were much farther north, and saw Chinstrap, Gentoo and Adelle penguins. I brought along my iPod and iTalk, and interviewed the birds...well, I captured some of their chirps. The different types of penguins are distinguishable by their sound, and individual voices are so unique that baby penguins can find their parents by sound. I'm not that good on either level. But I do have the soundfiles. I've included one or two in Shockwave Radio Broadcasts, and will add more Antarctica soundfiles to my Audio site and podcasts.

Penguins look awkward on land because their natural habitat is the water. In the water, they're beautiful, graceful and *fast*. It was quite a sight to see penguins porpoising: a whole colony of penguins would briefly surface, arcing in the cold blue and white. They were having fun.

And so was I. www.romm.org has links to the 2,389 pictures from the trip, with a Best of album so you don't have to wade through them all.

10 Big Budget Disappointments, Or,

I Liked the Original (Book, Film, TV Show, Comic Book) So Much More

Dr. Bob Blackwood

Steven Spielberg's *War of the Worlds* (2005), or, "How My Week-end with the Kids Was Destroyed by Some Maniacal Martians."

Everybody likes Stephen Spielberg's science fiction films, don't they? From *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* with its short, little creatures backlit like heck, to *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* with its cute young alien being pursued by Drew Barrymore (so aggressively too, a role reprised in *Charlie's Angels* and *Charlie's Angels 2*), and many others.

And then Spielberg decided to re-make *War of the Worlds* at a cost of \$132 million, which grossed \$591 million. The stockholders and many fans were happy, but some of us weren't.

We had seen Byron Haskins' 1953 "The War of the Worlds" with George Pal overseeing the state-of-the-1950s-art in special effects. Haskins kept the plot going. Gene Barry showed credible emotion at the end while searching for Ann Robinson through California churches; it was moving.

Haskins' film took characters close to Wells' novel and dramatized the events. On the other hand, Spielberg took characters very much unlike the characters in Wells' book and gave us a soap opera. Cruise's ex-wife insisted on twitting the husband about what wasn't in his refrigerator. The teenage son steals dad's car. And the 10-year-old daughter responded to the serious challenges of the alien invasion like a seven-year-old deprived of her iPod. Was it Dakota Fanning's fault? No, I'm sure the script called for her to scream and to cry and to continue to panic, unlike real children of her age who would have learned to cope, eventually.

Frankly, I was more interested in the alien invasion than in the domestic life of a New Jersey dockworker (or the household of a Winnetka heart surgeon). The film's special effects were duly honored by the fans and the industry, but I wanted to see more of how the humans faced the nasty Martians (their vampiric touch was right on, just like the novel). I didn't want to see an obvious nutcase of an unarmed and untrained teenager who wanted to take on a superior alien armed force with nothing but his big mouth to inflict damage on the enemy. Most normal teens his age would be running from the front line.

And at the end, everyone materialized at grandma's home (even though grandma didn't like dad). It reminded me of *Little House on the Prairie* instead of H. G. Wells' early science fiction commentary on British imperialism,

scientific progress and the survival of the fittest. On this planet, we are the fittest. If we completely pollute the environment, however, it's the cockroaches' turn.

2. Paul W.S. Anderson's *AVP: Alien Vs. Predator* (2004), or, "Don't Mistake the Previous Movies for This Video Game."

Ridley Scott's 1979 *Alien* with Sigourney Weaver brought us three things we can't forget: the reptilian alien, a horror story that gets you in the gut (literally) and Sigourney Weaver. In Anderson's film, you just get the alien, though you will see plenty of them. (If that's all you want, go for it.)

In John McTiernan's 1987 *Predator* we had three things that worked: a combat team with fairly well-developed characters, led by Arnold Schwarzenegger with his fellow governor-to-be Jesse Ventura as the really Heavy Metal dude (a mini-Gatling gun); a reversal of expectations with the combat team as the stalkees, and an alien with superior technology as the stalker. Instead of one predator, you get three predators from the start in *AVP*, though only one makes it to the end, sort of.

In *Alien*, we had the crew on the spaceship that we got to know and even to like—such as, Harry Dean Stanton and Yaphet Kotto. In this film, we had one very attractive woman—Sanaa Lathan—with a leadership position but very little depth of characterization, Lance Henriksen as a dying tycoon, and a few other paper-thin characters.

With floors and walls disappearing every 10 minutes and aliens appearing in unexpected places, it sure was fast-paced. It is just that I missed putting in the quarters and shooting the plastic pistol at the Aliens. I could have been Dr. Bob with a score of 100,000 points. You shouldn't take that away from a guy, or Annie Oakley, or my wife who was raised in Texas, either.

3. Simon Wells' *The Time Machine* (2002), or, "I May Be a Morlock, But I Have Feelings Too."

Simon Wells, the great-grandson of H.G., created a very attractive film with beautiful sets. He had a budget of \$80 million, and it looks like it. Late 19th Century New York sparkled, a fair substitute for London. The world of 82,000+ years looked even better with its deep chasm in the earth, homes perched on the walls of the chasm and boats on the river beneath it. It was more attractive than George Pal's 1960 *The Time Machine* with Rod Taylor as the scientist.

In the 1960 film, the world was divided between the day people, the Eloi, who were hippy types, just grooving on the food that somehow appeared overnight (no meat, as I recall), doing the wild thing with their long-haired others, and living a life of fun (mixed with horror when the Morlocks appeared on some evenings to have a munch on whatever Eloi was handy).

Pal's Eloi were passive, anemic pale prey. The Morlocks appeared in the evening, moving fast, highly muscled, ready to take what they wanted without any problem. In Simon Wells' film, the Eloi are pretty good-sized mixed-blooded folks who make some living on the river, on the land, and are able to construct their homes despite a great deal of danger (worse than building homes

in L.A. that are half-perched over the edge of a cliff). You can't wrestle with the river and build a house on an almost vertical plane without developing some muscle and some risk-taking skills.

Yet, when the Morlocks come, the Eloi just run, leaving the older folks and the slower to be captured, just like the anemic Eloi of Pal's film. True, the Morlocks can jump 20 feet at a pop, but the Eloi could learn to fight.

The plot wasn't credible, and neither was Jeremy Irons as the Oxbridge-speaking Morlock leader talking his version of survival of the fittest. Next.

4. Tim Burton's *Planet of the Apes* (2001) or, "Nobody Remembers the Conclusion of This Movie Anyway."

I remember the gasp in the audience at the end of Franklin Schaffner's *Planet of the Apes* (1968) when the ruined State of Liberty appears on the horizon. Charlton Heston echoed all of our fears about the possible destruction of the human race. Yes, even with its comic moments, the original *Planet of the Apes* had an impact almost as significant as Robert Wise's *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951) had in its day.

In his career, Charlton Heston occasionally overacted. But, at least Heston could modulate his acting. Wahlberg lacks a certain variety in his instrument. He basically has two looks, something like Ben Stiller's male model Zoolander in the film of the same name.

But even ignoring Wahlberg's performance, Burton's conclusion is totally absurd. Wahlberg's character finds himself at the Lincoln Memorial with his old pal General Thade in the Lincoln seat. Well, why not? Frankly, I would just as soon have seen him landing in Tim Burton's version of the Chocolate Factory and dying while screaming at the makeup that Burton had Johnny Depp wear. That makeup was truly frightening.

5. Stephen Hopkins' *Lost in Space* (1998), or, "Will Robinson, Bail Out!"

I was never a big fan of the original TV series. I thought the series had one of the best concepts but some of the worst writers on the tube. I figured the film would have the advantage of some talented actors—William Hurt, Mimi Rogers, Heather Graham, Gary Oldman and Matt LeBlanc—plus any number of good writers always ready to take on a major Hollywood film (the budget of \$80 million resulted in a gross of \$135 million—a financial disappointment, 2 ½ times the budget is a good return).

Alas, instead of keeping the plot moving, for no particular reason we get into a paradox in time travel with an older Smith, a younger Smith, an older Will, a younger Will. Frankly, I lost the will to follow the plot in the middle of the film when Heather Graham (playing a scientist) is stuck in a spaceship with Matt LeBlanc (the pilot hunk) and plays hard to get in a trip that may have no end. Both actors act like it is 1965. Come on you two! He's the only human male in light years who isn't Dr. Smith or a family member. Yes, they do get together eventually, but only after he promises to buy her a corsage for the prom.

6. Paul Verhoeven's *Starship Troopers* (1997), or, "Why Robert Heinlein Almost Rose from the Dead in 1997."

You know, Heinlein was a master novelist. His *Starship Troopers* was a balanced argument on how a democratic American society could benefit in a future in which, after the legal system fell apart, the right to vote was reserved to veterans who fought for the society. Heinlein draws the characters with some real dimension.

Verhoeven's *Starship Troopers* is a depiction of a fascist society. The people are all Nazi stereotypes—beautiful young people, ready to kill the insect enemy without a thought, without an attempt to find common ground. Oh, I know it is a clever film displaying hate-inducing propaganda pieces. And I know Verhoeven is not a fascist; his early film with Rutger Hauer, *A Soldier of Orange* (1977), is anti-fascist.

But the film trashes the premise of the original novel. The combat sequences are silly, showing troopers with lightweight automatic weapons taking on creatures the size of a hippo with naturally armored exteriors. Heinlein's troopers used power suits, heavier weapons and even tactical nukes. I wish someone had dropped one on this script.

7. John Frankenheimer's *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1996), or, "Marlon, Let's Trash This Sucker."

There were two good versions of H. G. Wells' *The Island of Dr. Moreau*: Erle Kenton's *Island of Lost Souls* (1933) with Charles Laughton as Moreau and Bela Lugosi, and Don Taylor's *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1977) with Burt Lancaster as Moreau and Michael York.

Frankenheimer was a good director. His *The Manchurian Candidate*, *Grand Prix* and his 1998 thriller *Ronin* were memorable films. But he was having a little problem on the set. Val Kilmer admitted on *Inside the Actors Studio*, he asked Brando if he cared about the film. The response was "no." From that moment on, the picture was doomed.

Brando, the premier American actor, and Kilmer, an excellent actor, apparently just did what they wanted to do whether it advanced the story or not. It was sad to see on screen, and even worse to have someone admit to doing it. We all think we are something special, but we should try to do good work. The actors playing the man/animals, like Ron Perlman, managed to do rather well, Val.

8. Willard Huyck's *Howard the Duck* (1986), or, "Duck Suit, Duck Suit, Who's in the Duck Suit?"

Although I did not read a lot of comic books past the early underground comics of the 1960's and 1970's (*Crumb*, *Spain*, *Zap Comix*, etc.), I did read several copies of the *Howard the Duck* comic book. Howard was a sarcastic-talking duck who "was trapped in a world he never made," sort of an avian Danny De Vito from *Taxi* without the malice or a toned-down Groucho with only half the sex drive.

The film cost \$30 million, a respectable budget in 1986, and grossed just over \$16 million. The film, produced by Lucasfilm, was a synonym for "flop" for about five years.

Why did this film fail? I think the midget in the duck suit idea was bad. They should have kicked up the budget and done him as a cartoon character—like Roger in *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* which was a hit two years later.

Also, the subplot of Dr. Jennings as the Dark Overlord was too pompous. The humor of the comic was in Howard's reactions to the people around him in their everyday interactions. He just happened to be a duck; more important, he was an observant and witty duck. Kermit the Frog sang: "It's Not Easy Being Green." Howard the Duck didn't sing, but he quacked wise a lot. And we loved him for it.

9. Jack Smight's *Damnation Alley* (1977), or, "A Yawn Too Far."

Roger Zelazny's novel, *Damnation Alley*, was a character study of an outlaw biker named Hell Tanner, who had the job of running the alley of a post-nuclear holocaust America all the way from California to bring a much needed drug to Albany, NY. It was a short novel with lots of punch, the kind of book—like *This Immortal*—that Zelazny did very well.

The production team had \$17 million (an "A" budget in 1977). Jan-Michael Vincent played Tanner, and we see him on a bike a few times. But he is far too nice and well scrubbed, and he is ex-U.S. Air Force, instead of ex-con. And Vincent is supervised by George Peppard as his old boss, Major Denton. Peppard is career soldier to the core.

I resented the fact that Paul Winfield, a talented African American actor, was the first member of the team to be bumped off, instead of the uptight major. He wasn't even wearing a red shirt, Star Trek fans.

A counterculture novel did not survive the Hollywood star treatment. Has this ever happened before? Quite a few times.

10. John Guillermin's *King Kong* (1976), or, "It Was Bimbo Killed the Beast."

The talented Jessica Lange, the Blond Beauty of this tale, had the worst dialog in Hollywood in this version of the classic tale. She gets on the ship to Skull Island when her boyfriend's yacht explodes while everyone else is watching *Deep Throat*. Her Hong Kong horoscope said she would take a trip over water and meet the "biggest person in her life." It gets worse.



When Kong attempts to play with her, she calls him a chauvinist pig ape. Moreover, she insists she is a Libra and he is an Aries. Well we know that spells doom. Later, she confides in Kong: "Forget about me. This thing's never going to work." At the end, while he is batting helicopters from the top of the Empire State Building, she says: "Hold onto me; don't let me go." And she screams: "Don't kill him." Tears filled her eyes; heck, tears filled my eyes too after seeing this turkey.

My thanks to Steven Silver and Dr. John Flynn for their inspiration.

10 Big Budget Disappointments, Or,

I Liked the Original (Book, Film, TV Show, Comic Book) So Much More

John Flynn

For almost seventy years, since the first World Science Fiction convention in New York in 1939 (and perhaps a bit longer than that), fans have been debating the importance of one science fiction film over another. Is Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* superior to Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*? *Star Wars* or *The Matrix*? *Metropolis* or *The Day the Earth Stood Still*? Ask any fan about his favorite film or selection of top ten favorites, and more than likely, he or she will engage you in a conversation that has the potential to last for hours. The fact of the matter is that we know what we like, and though our responses cannot be expressed in a simple declarative statement or two in much the same way we express our fondness for a Philly cheesesteak or a glass of Merlot or a baseball game at Wrigley Field, we have very strong feelings about our favorite films. The response also tends to be a very subjective one, and since it is subjective, our enjoyment of a particular film does not necessarily endorse or negate another person's reaction to the same film.

However, ask that same fan about his or her biggest cinematic disappointments, and you're likely to discover ten to twenty films that we all share in common. Tim Burton's *Planet of the Apes*, *Howard the Duck*, *Mars Attacks!*, the 1976 remake of *King Kong*, and a handful of others are likely to appear on our common lists "with the tedious inevitability of an unloved season."

One of the true joys in writing *Future Prime: The Top Ten Science Fiction Films* (Galactic Books, 2006) with Dr. Bob Blackwood was learning how he approached films differently from me. I think our different approaches are what make us truly a good team, and worthy of the moniker, the Film Doctors. In recognizing and accepting that, I also recognize and accept that he may like certain movies more than I do (*The Fifth Element* immediately comes to mind) and that I may like

others (like *The Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai*) more than he does. His opinions are bound to be different from mine because he has a completely different background from me. I try to listen and learn from those opinions whether I agree or disagree with them because that is what makes film criticism interesting. In looking back over the last twenty-five or thirty years of reviews that I've written, I'd formed certain opinions of my own. Those opinions may differ from his as well. What I find truly amazing is that Bob Blackwood's opinions on big budget disappointments are really not all that different from mine, or from what most fans would say in a similar forum. I see no real reason to rubberstamp everything he has to say, and instead will offer rebuttal, if I feel he has missed the mark somehow. And also offer a few big budget disappointments of my own.

1. Tim Burton's *Mars Attacks!* (1996), or, "How My Sex Fantasies About Sarah Jessica Parker Were Ruined by Some Maniacal Martians."

Bob Blackwood lists Steven Spielberg's *War of the Worlds* (2005) as his biggest big budget disappointment, and while I respect Bob's choice and don't necessarily agree with it, I think he completely missed the other big budget Martian invasion that should have been at the top of the list. Let me start by saying I do not like Tim Burton as a film director and I have not cared for most of his work. He tends to think he is very clever at what he does, and more often than not, fails to deliver the goods. With *Mars Attacks!* he seems to be wagging a finger at cinema audiences, promoting his own cleverness at our expense. I don't think *Mars Attacks!* was very clever; in fact, I feel he ruined for me those wonderful memories I had of collecting the gory *Mars Attacks!* cards when I was a kid. He was trying to spoof the kinds of movies that we liked to watch in the 1950's, but unfortunately, his satire falls flat in almost every area. Burton demonstrates his contempt for both humans and Martians, particularly when he relies on the recordings of Slim Whitman to blow up the Martians' heads. That's such a ludicrous ending! I would have preferred that Burton stuck more closely to the cards, and had Earth launching a counterattack against Mars.

Mars Attacks! came out the same year that *Independence Day* came out. Like it or not, *Independence Day* is a far better movie with a great deal more heart. Argue as much as you like about how stupid it was for Goldblum and Smith to download a computer virus from Windows 98 into the alien mothership...I just don't care. It was cool, and reminded me of H.G. Wells' virus in the original *The War of the Worlds*. I think part of the reason why Spielberg's film was not as successful as it could have been is that people remember how truly wonderful *Independence Day* was...and nothing is likely to change that recollection.

Some critics have likened *Mars Attacks!* to *Dr. Strangelove* and *Independence Day* to "Fail Safe." Both end-of-the-world movies came out the same year, with *Fail Safe* relying on its blockbuster appeal and *Strangelove* relying on its comic satire. *Mars Attacks!* is

no *Dr. Strangelove*, and Jack Nicholson's multiple roles are nowhere near the work of Peter Sellers. Burton employs some truly amazing talent, from Nicholson to Rod Steiger, Pam Grier, Pierce Brosnan, Glenn Close, Michael J. Fox, and Lisa Marie, but then makes all of them the brunt of the Martians' silly practical jokes. Worst of all, he makes sexy Sarah Jessica Parker into a dog! I've said it once, and I'll say it again...please take the movie camera away from Tim Burton before he truly hurts someone with it.

2. David Fincher's *Alien Three* (1992), or, "Let's Totally Screw this Franchise Up by Killing off Our Star"

Once again, Bob Blackwood misses the mark by choosing the wrong "Alien" movie for his biggest big budget disappointments. *AVP: Alien Vs. Predator* (2004) had its problems, not the least of which was violating almost everything we already know about the monsters from *Alien* and *Predator*, but that mistake pales in comparison to Fincher's decision to kill off Sigourney Weaver in *Alien Three*. Several years ago, I wrote a book titled *Dissecting Aliens*; the book was an insider's guide to the *Alien* movies, and I made the one critical mistake in my chapter on *Alien Three* to criticize Fox and Fincher for their mistake with the franchise. Twentieth Century-Fox withdrew support of the book, and now, if you're lucky, you'll find the book remaindered some place (if you find it at all).

Fox had several exceptional scripts that had been written for *Alien Three*, Some of those scripts picked up right after the events of *Aliens*, with many of the characters that we loved (Hicks, Newt, Bishop) in featured roles. Some of the others found Ripley in other extraordinary circumstances, including one that had her crash-landing on a wooden spacecraft that was launched by Twelfth Century-monks seeking religious freedom. But instead of pursuing something truly unique, the studio settled for a Ripley and convicts theme. Minus Newt, Hicks. Minus automatic weapons, and minus the Alien Queen. Instead we get one alien that looks like a dog, people running around in the dark, lice and Ripley's shaved head. There was nothing the least bit appealing about the movie's premise, and then, when you add in the fact that Ripley was going to die, all that was left was a downer movie with a downer ending.

At least, with *AVP: Alien Vs. Predator* (2004), you have familiar elements from *Alien* and *Aliens* that made those two movies fun. Was I disappointed by *AVP: Alien Vs. Predator* (2004)? Yes, but not as disappointed as I sat through Fincher's dark wet-dream that kills Ripley off. (Okay, okay, I know they bring Ripley back as a clone in *Alien: Resurrection!*)

3. *The Time Machine* (2002), or, "Let's Go Back in Time and Remake George Pal"

I could not agree with Bob Blackwood more. The George Pal version of *The Time Machine* (1960) is a classic film that did not need to be remade. In fact, let's ban all remakes unless the original was really terrible. With such great books as *Stranger in a Strange Land*, *Childhood's End*, *Rendezvous With Rama*, *Downbelow*

Station, etc., why do filmmakers insist on remaking classic science fiction films? I am really worried about what they would do with *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951) or "Forbidden Planet" (1956). Did we really need a remake of "The Stepford Wives" or "Rollerball" or "The Manchurian Candidate"? Let's agree not to remake a classic science fiction film until all of the really wonderful science fiction novels have already been made. Remaking a classic film is like time traveling...going back to a certain point in time and tampering with something that did not need tampering. So, again, let's ban all remakes! And if we can't force Hollywood to do things our way, we can always withdraw financial support until they listen to us. Instead of remaking "The Time Machine," Simon Wells should have made Stephen Baxter's *The Time Ships*. 'nuff said.

4. *Planet of the Apes* (2001), or, "Take Your Stinkin' Paws off Me, You Damned Dirty Tim Burton"

When Charlton Heston (as Taylor) happens upon the ruined Statue of Liberty at the end of the original 1968 film, everyone in the theater was stunned. Director Franklin Schaffner, who would later direct *Patton* (1970), and screenwriters Rod Serling and Michael Wilson had pulled a fast one on us...and given us a twist ending that was the biggest surprise in motion picture history. Of course, the rest of the film was equally memorable! I loved it, and I liked *Beneath the Planet of the Apes*, its first sequel, with those wonderful mutants who worshipped the atomic bomb. I also enjoyed the rest of the films in the series, no matter how stupid they had become, because they were fun and exciting and good sci-fi. I really didn't want anyone to remake the original, but rather pick the story up and carry it forward. Of course, when I heard Tim Burton was remaking the first movie, I shuddered in horror. Tim Burton had already ruined my memories of Sarah Jessica Parker and the gory *Mars Attacks!* bubble-gum cards, and now, I was afraid that he was going to ruin my fondness for *The Planet of the Apes*. The only thing that Burton did was make the original film so much more enjoyable with his awful, uninspired mess that debuted in 2001. For all of the advances in make-up and special effects, Burton's remake could not even touch the original. Will someone please steer Burton clear of any other remakes? Please keep his "stinkin' paws off" remakes of *Forbidden Planet* and *The Day the Earth Stood Still*. In fact, let's just buy him a bus ticket home, and keep him away from movies in general.

5. *Lost in Space* (1998), or, "Danger, Will Robinson"

Lost in Space was a terrible television series, and when I learned they were going to make a big budget remake, I wondered why. But then I had forgotten that Hollywood is a vast wasteland with few, if any, new ideas. In all honesty, the first four or five episodes of the original series weren't that bad. There was a lot of suspense and mystery...we didn't really know if Dr. Smith was going to succeed in his plot to derail the Jupiter 2 and its crew. I actually liked the original pilot, which I saw recently on DVD, and preferred it to the television series. In the original pilot, Smith and the

Robot are absent, and the show focuses solely on the Robinson family's survival on a hostile world. Good stuff, particularly with Bernard Herrmann's score from *The Day the Earth Stood Still*. But of course, Irwin Allen tampered with the show, by making Smith a buffoon and the Robot his comic relief. I could only hope the new film version would return to the original pilot. It didn't, although Gary Oldman really tries to make a memorable villain. Mostly, I remember Joey (Matt LeBlanc) in a silver suit trying to pilot the flying saucer that has gone out of control; I kept waiting for him to pull over and have a cup of coffee with his buddies from *Friends*; at least, that might have been interesting! I hated the loveable Will Robinson (Jack Johnson) character showing us how much he was like Wesley Crusher from *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. I really hate movies and television shows that portray kids as smarter than adults; I want to fire up the grill, and take Jonathan Swift's advice. The film gets points for Mini Rogers and Heather Graham, but regrettably, it's "DOA. Dead on Arrival." Another word to Hollywood. Please don't remake any more television shows into big budget movies! We didn't want big screen versions of *My Favorite Martian*, *Bewitched*, and *The Dukes of Hazard*. Though not sci-fi, I am really dreading what they are going to do for my beloved *Magnum P.I.*

6. *Starship Troopers* (1997), or, "What Happened to the Powered Armor Exoskeletons?"

I liked *Starship Troopers* when I saw it in the theatre in 1997, but honestly, when I saw it, I wished Paul Verhoeven had simply called it *Aliens*, *Take Two* rather than after the title of the novel by Robert Heinlein. The movie is a cool, shoot-em-up with lots of silly youngsters, like Denise Richards and Neil Patrick Harris, running around in neo-Nazi uniforms killing bugs. I cheered, I laughed, I kissed six bucks goodbye. So, I did enjoy this movie, and again, certainly more than Bob Blackwood. But what I didn't like, and what has always bugged me about the movie is that it had very little to do with that great science fiction novel I knew as a kid. I know that Heinlein wrote it, along with dozens of other novels, as a juvenile for us sci-fi kids. Years later, when I encountered *Starship Troopers*, I found this clever little satire that I had never seen before, and I enjoyed the book on a completely different level. Heinlein, who had been in the Navy, felt that social responsibility required individual sacrifice, and his Terran Federation was a meritocracy, where suffrage belongs only to those willing to serve their country. This was really radical stuff, and has led to some interesting debates in fannish circles.

In all fairness, Verhoeven does try to capture that sense of an alternative government in the early segments of the film, but after the first attack, he simply recreates Jim Cameron's battle marines from "Aliens" in the scenes that follow. I guess that's fair because Cameron borrowed plenty from Heinlein.

My biggest disappointment was the lack of the Powered Armor Exoskeletons, that Heinlein details in the novel. His Mobile Infantry soldiers control significant weaponry, powered leg jumps, almost everything from

the suits. In the movie, his troopers drop down on the enemy in ships, carry weapons not much more sophisticated than those used in today's army, and has them rely on battle tactics that are decades old. Alas, *Starship Troopers* is a World War 2 movie, with the Bugs standing in for the bad guys. I could not agree with Bob Blackwood any more.

7. *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1996), or, "Brando's nutty Colonel Kurtz Gets Resurrected by John Frankenheimer."

I wrote the new Afterward to Signet's new edition of *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, and in it, I explain my fondness for the Wells' story as well as my disappointment for the big budget remake in 1996. Like Bob Blackwood, I like John Frankenheimer. He has made some wonderful and provocative movies over the years. But this was not one of them. I felt Frankenheimer had decided to remake Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*, but failing to obtain the proper rights and permissions, decided to borrow Brando and make his own version by way of H.G. Wells (instead of Joseph Conrad). Consider: An outsider arrives, after a long journey upriver (both metaphorically and physically), and discovers the man he has sought out has gone insane. Ultimately, he has to make a decision whether to leave him alone to wreak havoc on the locals, or kill him. Throw in music by the Doors, or better yet, Val Kilmer channeling Jim Morrison, add some cool psychedelic special effects, and John Frankenheimer's got his remake! Well, not quite. *Apocalypse Now* was a great movie. Even the earlier film versions of the Wells' novel were good, particularly the 1977 version with Burt Lancaster. But this one was simply bad, and deserves to be in the 2 for \$11 bin at Wal-Mart.

8. Kenneth Branagh's *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* (1994), or, "Kids, Don't Try This At Home."

Bob Blackwood lists *Howard the Duck* at number 8, and while I agree with him totally about that movie, I'd place the big budget remake of *Frankenstein* here instead. Following the critical and box office success of Francis Ford Coppola's big budget remake of *Dracula* (1992), Tri-Star Pictures announced it would spend \$35-40 million to remake Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. At the time, Coppola was interested in making a series of films based on great gothic literature. But he was so exhausted after making *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, the Italian-American auteur turned the director's reigns to the Shakespearean actor/director Kenneth Branagh. That was his first mistake. Don't get me wrong, Branagh is an incredibly gifted thespian! But he also needs a good director or producer to show him restraint. Branagh directs and stars in *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* like it was *Hamlet*, not the juicy little chiller that the great Victorian writer imagined it to be. Not surprising, Branagh was performing *Hamlet* on stage in London when he got the nod from Coppola. He was so thrilled by the prospect of both acting and directing in such a marvelous work of gothic literature that he quickly threw himself into the production and forgot to take off

Hamlet's make-up. I wish I could scream (like Colin Clive) that "It's Alive! It's Alive!" But frankly, all that I can say is that the picture is so pretentious that it's really dead. What a waste of Robert DeNiro as the Monster!

9. Willard Huyck's *Howard the Duck* (1986), or, "Duck Soup in Your Eye"

Well, as much as our editors would have liked to have made this article into a battle between the Film Doctors, I'm afraid that I have to disappoint them. Prior to writing his half, Bob Blackwood and I talked on the phone about big budget disappointments, and we agreed in principle to most of the movies that make up this list. He went off and wrote his piece, and I got busy with another book. Then, Steven Silver contacted me, and asked if I would write a rebuttal to Bob's work. I really tried to do that, but alas, we

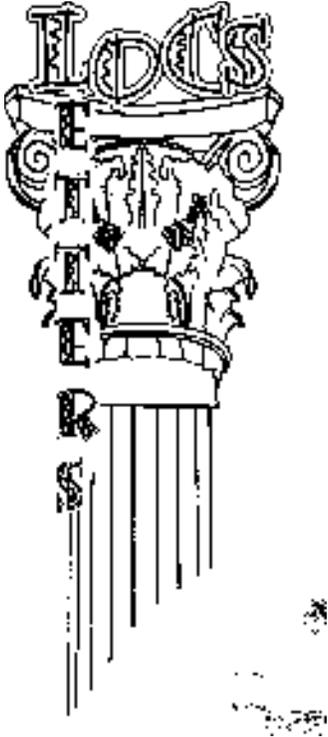


agreed on most of the worst films. Here again, with *Howard the Duck*, all I can do is rubber-stamp what Bob's already said. I liked the comic book series, and imagined Danny De Vito in the role of the wise-cracking duck. But then I heard George Lucas—Yes, that George Lucas!—was going to make the movie with a rubber suit, and I knew we were all damned. Lucas should have consulted with Robert Zemeckis, and made *Howard the Duck* in the same way that Zemeckis made *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*? Lucas didn't, and the result is one of the worst big budget movies ever made!

10. John Guillermin's *King Kong* (1976) and Peter Jackson's *King Kong* (2005), or, "It Was the Bimbos That Killed the Beast."

This probably falls under my comments about remakes, and I apologize for repeating myself yet again, but honestly, I found no reason why the great 1933 version of *King Kong* needed to be remade, not once but twice! Jessica Lange and Naomi Watts are two wonderful actresses, and they both deserved so much better than to star opposite a special effect. Neither the Guillermin nor the Jackson version tells us anything new about Skull Island, Manhattan, or the strange love affair between Beauty and the Beast. Both remakes are about showcasing the latest advances in special effects! Special effects alone should not be enough to greenlight a big budget Hollywood movie. And yes, I realize that Peter Jackson's version was a vanity project. After his incredible success with the *Lord of the Rings* movies, any studio in the world would have given him money to shoot day-old shit just to boast they were making a Peter Jackson movie. And come to think of it, the 2005 remake was little more than day-old shit. Now that Jackson has gotten *Kong* out of his system, he needs to get to work making *The Hobbit* and *The Silmarillion* before his New Zealand crew and WETA find real jobs. The final word is...stop re-making classic films!

Letters of Comment



Happy New Year,
Tardiness *is* a fannish trait,
right? ‘Nuf said.

Kudos for getting fillos from
Steve Stiles—nice.

I have two of the total spectrum
lights and they do have a different
feel to them, but I’ve never noted a
problem with SAD—this is just in
case.

As I’m sure you know—the
special Hugo category will be
interactive game (I presume you
meant Hugo—when you said a
special award—right?) a field in
which I know absolutely *nothing*.
Uh—guess I’m wrong—asked Rich
Lynch—nope—you are 100%
correct (I was wrong in my
presumption)—is is a committee
award and not a Hugo.

*[Correct. And as you know by
now, you aren’t the only one who
knows nothing (or, perhaps, cares
nothing) about a Hugo for
interactive game. It didn’t get
enough nominations to make it
feasible. The difference between a
Committee Award and an extra*

*Hugo category is that the latter is
voted on by the membership, the
former only by the concom.]*

Quote often such an
achievement award is given for a
body of “work”—usually when the
person in question has somewhat
retired. That is usually not the case
with writers—they just keep
on...writing.

Oh—that *Fanzine File* list looks
impressive. I’m not familiar with
about a third of them and that *good*
fanpubbing info.

The touch of color adds a zest
to thish—nice. I must admit that I
cannot identify um...er...any of the
photos from my own knowledge—
by-line identification does not
count. Uh—one exceptions Soupy
Sales!

Time again to start thinking
about Hugo nominations—hope all
your eligible readers will do so.

Sigh—I upgraded my OS and
all the artwork I’d done is hidden in
its recesses. Proponents say this
Mac System is intuitive—*but* only
if you don’t have to unlearn
previous systems...gonna be a long
haul!

Thanks for thish!

Sheryl Birkhead

9/24/05

Hi Steven—

Thanks for the ‘zine. I’m doing
this on webmail, something is
wrong with the Atlanta server for
Earthlink—when I try to send, it
just whizzes but never gets the e-
mail out. At least they admit it’s
their problem.

I’m not much use on the cover
photos...I recognize Soupy Sales
and Silver Surfer. I suppose the
athlete might be Sammy Sosa. Is
the demented conductor Somtow
Sucharitkul? The blonde could be
Sharon Stone. The rest I haven’t
the foggiest—if the bust is

Socrates, I didn’t know he had
another name so as to get two Ss.

Something like a cast stainless
steel dates back to before 1900—I
have a “White’s Staple Inserter” in
the original box with a patent date
of 1882 that is a plier-type device
that will insert one staple and then
you have to reload it. It is cast of
something that looks like white
aluminum (quite unstained by any
corrosion)—and yet it is quite
ferrous, as a magnet will stick to it.
Seems unlikely it was made of
Brearly’s 1913 stainless steel, as by
1913 there were much more
advanced staplers on the market.

I am glad to know that *Eszett* is
the name of the German double-s
that looks like a Greek Beta. It was
in the German book I had at
Georgia Tech in the late 50s—even
though this course was supposed to
be for engineers who might have to
make out technical German, the
text was something about a hermit
in the Black Forest screaming
about the Whore of Babylon. There
was a hunter in there too, and when
reading aloud as we had to do, I
like as not said *schiessen* for
schiessen or vice-versa. There’s
two esses for you—I still don’t
know without looking it up which
means “shoot” and which means
“s**t.”

*[Schiessen is the one you
probably wanted for a hunter].*

The typewriters group at
Yahogroups periodically falls into
a string on the German typewriters
that were fitted with the double-
lightning-bolt symbol of the
Schutzstaffel or SS. One brand
name was the Groma. It has been
claimed that all such machines are
postwar retrofits to sell to
collectors, but I have images of
apparently authentic typed
documents of the time that use it.

I read LotR from the Atlanta
public library in the late 50s, didn’t
know until around 1963 that there
was a Tolkien Fandom. Later I
reprinted John Closson’s “Frodo
Lives” and “Go Go Gandalf”
buttons, and received a lot of the

fanzines—I just scanned two Mythlore covers for a friend. My Tolkien collection now runs to a couple of yards... There is really nothing like Tolkien's vision.

Best,
Ned Brooks

9/28/05
SS:

Thanks, btw, for my copy of *The Alliterative Argentus*. You'll doubtless enjoy the irony that I didn't remember writing the review, thought it was a real one, and managed to thoroughly offend myself before remembering. LOL

Julie E. Czerneda

9/28/05
Salutations Steven~

Seriously, as a solo spectator to the spectacle of *Argentus* Five, I am smitten.

While skeptical at first sight, what seemed a shameless gimmick structured around only a sibilant sound was, with closer scrutiny, something with a strong soul.

Your group of scribes have scrawled several sophisticated scripts, stuffed with style. I saw scarcely a single slip-up in these samples from such solid scribblers.

Strictly speaking, the sometimes sensational subjects of our strange subculture of speculative science stories can still surprise, as shown here.

As September follows summer, as sunset follows sunrise, sentence after sentence was savored with satisfaction. I submit that each section had a substantial spark of the spirit of smart

sentimentality from our small society~ or is this simply silly semantics?

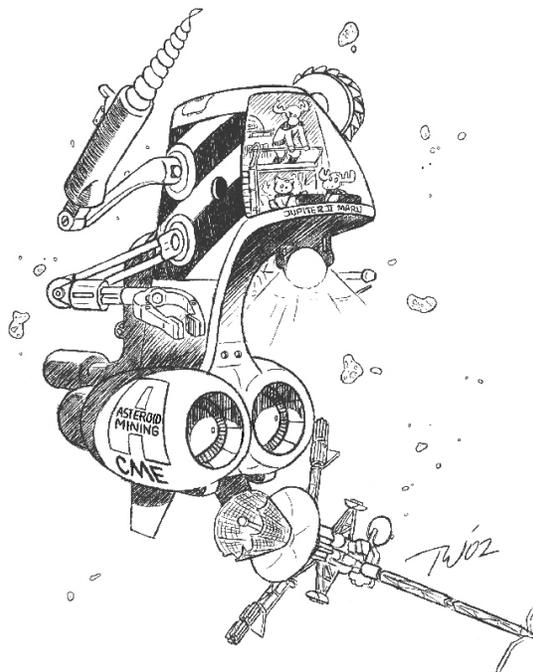
So, you've scored a solid hit, and I solemnly salute it, sealed with a double-s of two staples to stick it all together.
Sincerely

SBrad (the "s" is silent) Foster

9/22/05
Dear Mr. Silver,

In the Category of Curious Coincidences, just the other week I wrote a LOC to Pete Young, editor of the British fanzine *Zoo Nation*. It said, something like, British fanzines tend to have themes, and their editors tend not to publish until they're satisfied. American fanzines, or at least a significant number, tend to publish on a schedule and with whatever material is available. I would not go so far as to call *Argentus* a "British" fanzine; yet it has to me the feel of a British style fanzine. Except for Einstein, who has yet to be proved wrong, there are exceptions to most rules.

Of the initialed people, I got five of the nine on the cover, and a smattering of others; but not



enough to be worth attempting your contest. (I suppose that to be Seattle Slew on p. 19.) As for Sammy Sosa, many of us in this area who are not even baseball fans felt that an injury-prone 36-year-old outfielder with declining skills was a bad risk to help the Orioles, and would not prevent them from puking away another season; as was the case.

Sharon Stone is hot though I don't normally go for blondes.

Stanley Schmidt says, "Your past... is yours and it is secure... and nothing can now change that." Some of us wish our past was less secure, or could be discarded altogether. Maybe the grievous overuse of amnesia as a plot device masks the fact that people would choose to forget, if they could. Nice to hear, though, that someone other than myself enjoyed Palmer's "Emergence." Now let's get it back in print.

"Award Well Deserved": Personally, I think there are already too many "awards." As for lifetime achievement, is that not what the Nebula Grand Master is for? [No, while it is a lifetime achievement award, that is limited to authors and is a peer award, given by the authors in the SFWA. I'm suggesting the fans should recognize Betty Ballantine's work] But I will not dispute that Betty Ballantine is underappreciated. I note you list *Banana Wings* in your fanzine listings; the general topic of forgotten and unappreciated fans has been discussed there lately.

"Naturalization and the Alien": I will doubtless be criticized for observing that Mr. Stirling's motive for becoming an American citizen seems to have been because it was administratively easier, rather than from any more positive motive.

"Fifty Year Anniversary": I had rather a different experience with *Lord of the Rings*. By 14 or 15, the age Ms. Smith was when she encountered the books, I was a somewhat experienced reader of SF, and was well aware that adults did that sort of thing. I was older,

19 or so, on being exposed to *LOTR*, and frankly found the glacial pace rather tedious. Only on the insistence of a friend did I continue reading the books. Eventually I got hooked, but much later in the process. [*I only finished the trilogy because of a bet with a friend as to who could finish it first.*]

“Creation of Recreation”: Um, I think there should have been a hyphen there... In the author’s introduction of a later edition of *Dhalgren*, Samuel R. Delany, who was well known for re-writing his stories, said that he had been making corrections to the book for ten years and “It’s time to stop tinkering,” or words to that effect. Then there’s the *Bible*, which has been re-translated many times (and that’s just in English). Then there’s the danger of re-editing the virtue out of works in the name of political correctness. I don’t know that *Lord of the Rings* would be any the worse for deleting all the references to smoking; but it would not be what Tolkien wrote. Worth noting that Jackson kept it in the film version. Similarly, books like Wylie & Balmer’s *When Worlds Collide* or Heinlein’s *The Day After Tomorrow* appear distressingly racist by today’s standards; but perhaps it is more important for the reader to see the text in the context of when it was written. Save for a few fools, we see *Huckleberry Finn* as a great novel mainly because it triumphed over the stupidity of its time. Yes, gone off on a tangent here, not really discussing Mr. Sawicki’s point, with which I am in general agreement.

“Dumpster World”: It appears the adverb Ms. Keebler-Egge is struggling to produce should be either “lubriciously” or “ludicrously.” One or the other, please. [*“Ms. Keebler-Egge” has many issues with language, as you may have noticed.*]

Sincerely, E.B. Frohvet

P.S. Footnote to p.16, re: the Fallen Astronauts memorial-you

say it lists “just the Americans.” Ilan Ramon is not American (Colonel, Israeli Air Force). I suppose what you meant was that it lists only the astronauts killed in American space program accidents, and it happens that Col. Ramon has been the only non-American citizen meeting that criterion.

[*Of course.*]

As soon as I saw Soupy Sales, The Silver Surfer and Sammy Sosa, I knew the gimmickery that was going on.

What Dead Men Tell was a great little story. There are a lot of great films with Movie Projectionists as the focus, including the great Sherlock Jr. by Buster Keaton and The Last Action Hero. It sounds like Stan Schmidt has had a wonderful life full of those moments that just about pop when think about them. I’ve had a few (a magical moment with a young starlet being one of the top three or four) but nothing can come close to the things that he outlined in his tale.

For your list of SSs, Ida May Fuller received the first Social Security check ever. We the machine that issued the check in our collection at the Computer Museum back in the day. I think the check itself is somewhere like the Smithsonian. The first Black computer operator was dubbed the Systems Specialist in 1950. The Service Sector comprises about 75-85% of our economy. Sugar Shock is what I go into any time my Mom puts on one of her old 1970s records.

I’ve just had a friend spend several months trying to get into the US to make films. She had a terrible time at it and seeing S.M. Stirling’s look at becoming a citizen just shows how hard things can be. Then again, for my Mexican family, it always seems so much easier, as I can remember one of my uncles going from Mexico City to a citizenship party in less than a year. This is actually only the second Stirling I’ve ever read!

Excellent point on Betty Ballantine, though she’s received many awards, including something major from the ALA. I’d fully back a Lifetime Something from the Hugo committee.

I’m a huge mark for Groucho. I grew up watching Dialing for Dollars and Saturday afternoon movies which almost always featured the Marx Bros. and their shenanigans. I used to watch reruns of You Bet Your Life. I even had the fortune to discover one of Groucho’s props when I was working at the Smithsonian in the early 1990s. I had always heard that the death of Groucho was overshadowed by the death of Elvis (whose funeral was the morning of Groucho’s death, I believe) and it’s a shame. I remember talking to a newspaperman whose job it was to pre-write obits and he had one on Groucho ready for more than 8 years, he said. The record was only broken when Leni Reifenstahl passed and he’d had one for her for almost 15 years.

The Real version of Dune is the longest, Alan Smithee version. It’s also the only one that is coherent.

As a writer/producer, I like multiple versions, not only as revenue streams, which they certainly are, but because they allow for people to chose their favourite. We’ve even done alternate versions of shorts that we’ve made. Some work for some people, others don’t, but it’s always fun making them.

I was laughing so hard at Julie Czerneda’s mock review that I nearly woke the Museum’s Curator who was napping at his desk. I was howling. The CyberPern piece seemed like it was setting up for a grand pun-filled punchline, but thankfully, we were spared. Dumpster World will be my next project, as it sounds almost as good as Mant, the great film in a film from Matinee. I will totally film it and make Gene Wolf watch it. Mike Resnick, as always, had me laughing too.

Great issue

Chris Garcia

Thanks for *Argentus 5*.

To me it seems mundane to pester at what "purpose" fantasy serves. Art showing the familiar can be good. Art showing the strange can be good. Nabokov said, "To call a story a true story is an insult to story and truth."

Here you have Stan Schmidt on making memories and Sherwood Smith on the numinous new. Curiously, SF may be the newest art form, and Tolkien, whom Smith writes of, was much in touch with the old. In both cases we can be so struck by the subject that we fail to notice the worth of the workmanship. Shakespeare, or Murasaki, are so good we want to know more about their world for their sakes.

John Hertz

9/11/05
Hi,

Enjoyed *Argentus* but it poses a problem. I vowed to limit my fanac to eZines and short locs but a short loc seems a bit of a shortchange here. Nevertheless...

Loved Stanley Schmidt's essay. Beautifully written and very true...for the most part. I do have a quibble. Our past, our memories, may be *more* secure than our present but memories are not immutable or inviolable because what those memories mean can change as our present circumstances and outlook change. For instance, my initial meeting with my first wife, many years after the divorce, is not the pleasant memory it was shortly after our marriage! Conversely, the day I was laid off from my long-time job I was not thinking it was an event I'd recall fondly. But seeing as how I've survived, and lived a far happier lifestyle freelancing since then, I find the memory of that day to be rather amusing. (When I suddenly run out of freelance work I'll look at it differently again!)

This kind of ties in with my agreeing with Steve Sawicki that works should be left alone. Correct any perceived mistakes in the next work. I reckon if someone wrote the same novel (or tried to) every ten years it'd turn out totally different each time. Of course an artist looks at a work differently when his or her perspective changes. So there's no end to the adjustments that could be made. What's perfect today won't seem so next year.

Sherwood Smith's recollection of reading *LOTR* reminded me of when I first read the books. It was the summer after sixth grade. A strange summer. My friends all vanished into organized activities. Camps and tennis lessons. Or parties where boys and girls got together and played cards. At that time, seventh grade was junior *high*. So there was no more popping over and asking could Jim come out to play? My friends were busy growing up and suddenly I was a loner. But I had *LOTR*! A great argument that imaginary worlds are better than this crummy one so I never did bother to grow up.

Eric Mayer

10/14/05

Dear Steven:

Many thanks for The Alliterative *Argentus*, *Argentus 5*, or *Argentu5*, as the front cover has it. I am hoping that the inside will be supremely silly, or satisfying serious, or even fabulously fannish, or if I am lucky, an amalgam of all of the above. I'll peer into the printed pages, to see what tale they tell me.

Stanley Schmidt's essay, in effect, outlines our future. I expect that as prices for just about everything rise, and income drops, I won't be able to take part in many of the things I enjoy today. With that in mind, it would be a good idea to record the best of your memories in some fashion so that as your own memory fades, and you age, you may have those pleasant and proud memories to fall back upon. Of course, I'd rather keep doing the things I like to do, but as much as doing is the best, remembering fondly is what I expect I will do.

I would certainly agree with you on Betty Ballantine's contributions to SF. Unfortunately, those who would remember her are rarely voting for the Hugos these days. I expect this is one reason



why you're appealing to the Los Angeles or Japanese Worldcons. Torcon, I suspect, never thought of anything like this, and certainly never thought of honouring any Canadians who may have contributed to SF as a whole. I suspect that you may have to lean on the Worldcon I expect will be voted to Chicago for 2008; you are in a unique position to campaign for this overdue award.

I found Middle-Earth in my teens as well, having found (with the assistance of my mother) anthologies first, and much earlier than novels. Somehow, *The Hobbit* placed me in a world I could immerse myself in. Most stories I read, I felt I was looking in a window to that world, and never climbing through. I was in Middle-Earth, running with hobbits to Bree, marching to Mordor. There was such a history created for this world, it was three-dimensional for so many readers, a world you could live in for its beauty and breadth, and its simplicity in lifestyle, and adventure just outside your front door. I agree that the Harry Potter books may have also ignited that wonder and excitement in its readers; I certainly hope so, and I hope that wonder will urge them to read more by other authors. The Narnia books will soon be transformed into movies, and I hope another Inkling will enjoy the popularity Professor Tolkien did.

Steve Sawicki's article on re-re-crediting reminds me that I saw Episode VI—Return of the Jedi on television a couple of weeks ago. The final scene that we all remember in this movie saw a ghostly Yoda, Obi-Wan and Anakin beaming proudly at Luke Skywalker as the Ewoks party in the distance. The original take on this had Anakin as once the middle-aged version in the Vader suit, played by Sebastian Shaw. (Thank you, IMDB...) The version I saw on television had Shaw replaced by Hayden Christiansen, the pre-Vader Anakin. (Still the Alec Guinness Obi-Wan, though...looked a little out of place to me.) Lucas has

ruined this series of movies for many of us because he continually tinkers with them. Makes me wonder what he plans to do with this upcoming Star Wars television show he's now working on.

Greg Benford, did you work on the solar sail The Planetary Society tried to launch? Tried is the main word here...it was launched on a faulty Russian rocket, and wound up in the drink. Lou Friedman is trying to drum up more money for a second sail, but he's risking donor fatigue in his own organization.

My favorite authors in my teenage years were Asimov, Clarke, Heinlein and Bradbury, to name a few that come to mind. I encountered Vance, Simak, Cherryh, Ellison, Tolkien, et al, once I found other books with interesting premises.

My loc...it might be an idea to attach a date to these locs so we know how far back they're going. My job at Stronco lasted exactly five weeks, and the boss let me go because I wasn't the same workaholic she was. (Found out just a couple of weeks ago that I was not replaced. I was the fourth person they'd hired, and the fourth let go in such a manner. The boss was told that if she couldn't treat her assistants properly, they weren't going to give her more. So now, she has something to be a workaholic about...she's not getting any more help.) These days, unable to find a full-time job, I work at the Globe and Mail in the evenings, installing appointment notices on their website, and in the daytime, I take odd assignments, doing data entry and such, and trade show and conference assignments with a company called BBW. I work the registration desks at these shows...after all these years of working the reg desk at cons, I am now getting paid to do it for professional shows. I'm looking forward to the next *MidFanZine*.

Many thanks for *Argentu5*, and looking forward to *Argentu6*.

Yours, Lloyd Penney

November 21, 2005

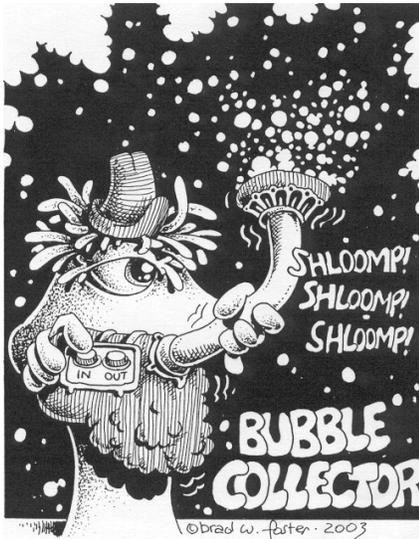
Dear Steven,

On the cover of *Argentus #5*, I managed to recognize Susan Sarandon and Soupy Sales. I really don't know why I recognized those two. It may be that it is sort of hard to forget anyone who uses the name Soupy Sales even if you want to. I may remember Susan Sarandon because she was in Rocky Horror Picture Show and later became a respectable actress in spite of it. Elsewhere in the issue, I did recognize Stanley Schmidt, although you did sort of give a clue on that one.

As you say later in the issue, there is no Hugo for lifetime achievement. However, that's what the Worldcon guest of honorships are for. The Ballantines were pro guests of honor at Noreascon 3 in 1989. Andre Norton was also pro guest of honor that year, but everyone knew she would never attend a convention. So her guest of honorship was for the record only, and the Ballantines were the only pro guests of honor at the actual convention. The Ballantines were influential publishers of science fiction over a number of decades. They really didn't publish the first paperbacks in the United States or even the first paperback science fiction in the United States.

It appears that most people remember the circumstances under which they read *Lord of the Rings* for the first time. I read it while I was at Fort Benjamin Harrison in Indiana in 1966. Fort Benjamin Harrison was an Army Base. I was a naval officer at the time. Nobody knew what I was, but everybody saluted. A few years earlier (1960 or 61), I had read *The Hobbit* while I was working in the children's room of the North Hollywood public library. To be perfectly honest, there wasn't much better to do or see while working in the children's room of the North Hollywood public library.

Several people in the letter column indicate that they don't



usually remember where they were when they read particular books. In many cases, I do remember where I was when I read particular books or even short stories. What is really strange is that I sometimes remember where I was when I read a particular book, but I don't remember the contents of the book. I tend to remember particularly good science fiction or particularly bad science fiction. Much of the middle stuff has long ago floated off into the ether.

"Life with Groucho" seems very familiar, even though I'm sure I've never read the book it came from.

Yours truly,
Milt Stevens
6325 Keystone St.
Simi Valley, CA 93063
miltstevens@earthlink.net

Steve Sawicki discusses something I had hit on some years ago, and not thought through very far before being (as usual) distracted by some flashing lights or pretty new toy. What is authenticity in the digital age? Anything that can be rendered into 1's and 0's can be easily altered by changing the order of those 1's and 0's. I myself have taken art off-line, felt unhappy about this or that detail, and altered it to suit my tastes. (As long as this was for my

entirely private pleasure, I felt no great qualms about it either.) In the case of images, an expert can analyze the altered copy and determine that the pixel size is different, or its biased in some different way from the original. But with text, it isn't so easy. Still, what does it matter? Really?

Skip ahead a thousand years or so. Assuming anyone should seriously value the works of George Lucas so far into the future, which of two hundred cuts of Star Wars is the authentic one? Which of 27 known texts of *Moby Dick* is closest to the original? Is it possible that *Catcher in the Rye* had an obvious Christian moral, or is that an adulterated copy that forcibly replaced a lost version in the great religious revival of the late 21st. century? Could *Lord of the Rings* really have a homosexual sub-text, or has it been contaminated by later political correctness?

Given long enough, there may be no way to tell. We have trouble enough with really old literary works whose only copies are partial and hand-copied a few hundred years after they were first written. It would be ironic if the result of the digital storage medium was another sort of "dark ages."

Other than that, all I've got to say is you need to be more careful with my address. You sent the last issue to apartment #211, and the correct # is 2111. I only found it because the occupant of 211 stuck the opened envelope in a box for mis-placed mail in the mail room, instead of simply throwing it away. Makes me wonder if any previous issues were lost that way.

Taral Wayne

Steven:

Thanks for the latest *Argentus* that I received back in October and have been terribly remiss in not LOCcing until now.

You clearly have too much time on your hands if you are going to track down pictures of S.S. people. I largely gave up when I didn't finish the front cover.

I'm glad you made it up to Ditto and I hope you received your One Shot.

Until next issue...

Henry L. Welch
Editor, *The Knarley Knews*
welch@msoe.edu
<http://people.msoe.edu/~welch/tkk.html>

9/12/05

Hey Steven

OK, here's as far as I got (and will probably get without spending another day working on this):

On the cover: Silver Surfer, Soupy Sales, Sachiko Shibano, Sammy Sosa, Septimius Severus, Somtow Sucharitkul, Susan Sarandon, I have no idea, and Sharon Stone. That's 8/9—not bad, huh?

Page 5: ? and Steven Stills
Page 7: A whole bunch of guys who look like they might have been prime minister of Canada or Australia except that Canada and Australia did not have any prime ministers with the initials SS, and Sean Stewart

Page 8: Some guy in a hat, Stu Sutcliffe, Sirhan Sirhan, Sissy Spacek, some old fart

Page 10: Lots of people I don't know and Sylvester Stallone, someone, Susan Sontag, maybe Shel Silverstein (bald guy with a beard?) and Steve Saffel.

Last page with pictures: Sly Stone, Sharon Shinn, Seattle Slew?, ?, Sharon Sbarsky, ?, lots of question marks, Saint Steven? ? Susan Shwartz.

Is one of those pictures you?

I'd love to know who all the other people are—and I promise, really promise, really really promise not to tell anyone.

Frank Wu

Mock Section

The Morning's Wedding

By Jasper Fforde and China Miéville
Review by Christopher Garcia

*M*elanie offered her hand to James a split second before the bug came crashing through the altar.

If you're going to open up a book, that's the way to do it. In that one sentence you get the idea that you're about to read a book that will throw you around a little before finally letting things get back to a sense of normalcy. So much of the collaboration between Jasper Fforde (author of the Thursday Next series) and China Miéville (author of the Bas-Lag novels) is a testing of the edges between conflicting ideas: Miéville's dark density and Fforde's light comedy, The tourist sections of Wales and the dark Hells that lay beneath, the life of a simple tour guide Melanie and the Racer-X mystery doings of James. Along those edges, *The Morning's Wedding* walks.

The story will sound familiar, and in every way it is. James Hollander, who is actually originally from Belgium, falls in love with Melanie Myfanwy, the leader tour guide of the city of Portmeirion, the lovely Italianesque town where *The Prisoner* was shot. The two are a perfect pair with the minor exception that James runs a small Hell called Gradlec where the others Hells all sent their worst offenders for James and his friends to destroy. James gave up on running his Hell, so he came top-side and failed to mention that there were hundreds of angry demons and other nasties that were starting to look for him again. It's Buffy The Vampire Slayer meets Bewitched, only with a difference: neither of them had China Miéville.

James stood silent as he looked over his latest victim, his first victim since he left the small Hell he controlled; the most feared Hell, the final resting place for demons, the only Hell where Man ruled Demon via fear...fear of Him.

While Fforde handles much of the hometown fun that takes place in Wales, Miéville gives us the happenings in the various Hells. The version of Hell that Miéville presents is similarly familiar, Hells run by various creatures or people who somehow cheat demons out of their share of Damnation. Parts of Hell sound like New Crobuson, while others almost seem like a literal London. The depiction of the various Hells has the fingerprints of *Perdido Street Station* and *Iron Council* all over them, especially in the characters that rule over them. The two that are given the most time, Feaals of the Dark Hell and Darius McEntyr of the Older Hell, both ring with the strong force of will that Miéville instilled in all of his Bas-Lag villains. In fact, Feaals feels much like Motley

from *Perdido*, right down to the mélange of different animals that make up his unholy person.

Fforde's section is full of the linguistic playfulness of his Thursday Next series of novels, while Miéville fills full the sections about Hells with his dense prose, broken only occasionally by lines from characters like James or Melanie which Jasper obviously took a pass through. It's interesting to see the interactions, and when Hell starts to appear on Earth, we even see Miéville writing a bit or two in the 'real' world, including a demon chasing Melanie through Portmeirion while James tries to capture it and send it Hell. While the dialog in the scene is very Fforde, Miéville does a great job with the fight and chase. At times it feels like a replay of some of the Slake Moth scenes in *Perdido*.

The sound of screeching tire echoed off walls that could not be seen in the blanket of damp and hollow darkness that Esteroath brought to Portmeirion. The flight path the creature maintained brought it into loops and feints that seemed designed to confuse a follower of which there was none.

While the familiarity may turn some readers off, I found the combination of styles to be very refreshing. Whenever one section would remind me too much of something one or the other of them had written before, they'd change scenario and I'd get a chance to frolic/wallow in that world for a bit. While the overall effect is very similar to books like Tim Powers' *Expiration Date*, the writing is as conflicted as the characters and that adds to the sense of unease that should fill you from a book about beasts from Hell invading the Waking Life.

The heart of whatever beast tonight had summoned was barely beating, but still it battered the small garage where James had made himself captive. These walls would not hold, he knew that, but he also knew that in the chaos of the collapse he could, would find escape into the night, through the dust, through the hammering limbs of monsters he had once so carelessly eliminated.

"Well, this will be an interesting exercise." he said, figuring to entertain the Someone who must be watching.

Perhaps the biggest thing about *The Morning's Wedding* is that it's nearly 600 pages long. While Miéville's solo works are often in that range, here it's more tolerable since they alternated back and forth between the two of them, so the oppressive nature of Miéville's writing is tempered with the light-hearted pun-filled fun of Fforde. I found myself hoping it would go on and on as it came closer and closer to the conclusion.

Thomas the Positronic Engine

Written by Dan Simmons, Illustrated by Frank Miller
Inspired by an outline by Isaac Asimov

Based on the series created by the Reverend W.V. Awdry
Review by Matthew Appleton

It's hard to imagine that there exists a parent of a child born in the past 10 years that doesn't know about *Thomas the Tank Engine & Friends*. The show is a huge hit with the toddler crowd in both the United Kingdom and the United States and probably qualifies as one of the greatest television adaptations of a series of children's books. If not the greatest television adaptation, then certainly one of the greatest marketing efforts to children ever—look no further than my own son's bedroom to see just how many items Thomas and his engine friends now appear on.

Unbeknownst until very recently, before Reverend W.V. Awdry authorized the television series created by Britt Allcroft, he approached Isaac Asimov during the late 1970s to write a new children's book based on his original work. It seems Asimov took an interest, but the brief outline of his proposed story was rejected as too futuristic in its scope. However, the turn of the century brought a change of heart to the Awdry estate—now maintained by Awdry's son, Christopher—and it decided that like so many of the superheroes in the DC and Marvel universes, *Thomas* needed to be re-imagined for the 21st century. They hired Dan Simmons to work from Asimov's original outline, which the Awdry estate still possessed and owned the rights to, and the result is *Thomas the Positronic Engine*.

The book operates from an interesting premise: concerned with the incredibly high number of crashes and accidents that befall Thomas and all the other engines on Sodor, Sir Topham Hatt, Jr. orders the construction of a new type of train that uses a positronic brain. He also orders that the consciousness of all the old engines, both steamies and diesels, be transferred into these new trains—which have imprinted in their positionic brains the Three Laws of Railroadng:

1. An engine must obey orders given it by its conductor.
2. An engine must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First Law.
3. An engine, through action or inaction, may not injure another engine, as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second laws.

The overall effect is breathtaking. Simmons has done an amazing job of replicating Asimov's clear, concise writing style, and he paces the story just like one of the good doctor's robot short stories. However, not content with just making it an exercise in working out the Three Laws of Railroadng, Simmons separates Thomas, Percy and Gordon from their conductors and sends them on a journey that takes them away from Sodor (sorry, I'm not giving the details of the plot point away) and into the European countryside. The plot parallels that of Voltaire's *Candide*, complete with a few lessons found in the classic of French literature, and in fact makes the reader want to go back and read the original story.

However, a true review of *Thomas the Positronic Engine* is incomplete with mentioning the illustrations. As part of updating Thomas for the new millennia, Awdry hired Frank Miller to handle the artwork accompanying the story. His re-imagined nourish world of Sodor is dark and full of shadows, and as at times drained of its color. For example, Thomas's bright blue coat of paint is replaced by a glossless midnight blue. Given the uncertainties in the world today, it's appropriate for Thomas and his friends.

Amazingly, although none of these disparate elements sound like they belong in a children's book, they somehow blend into a fascinating tale that enthralls both child and parent. For the ultimate test of the book, I read it aloud to my two-year-old and showed him each illustration along the way. Amazingly, he reacted to the story the way he does his favorite television show—by pumping his arms and yelling at the top of his lungs, "Choo-choo!"

I certainly hope we soon see a television adaptation of this new classic of children's literature.

The Weight of the World

Terry Pratchett and Neil Stephenson
Reviewed by Steven Silver

Sir Richard Devon spends much of *The Weight of the World*, an enormous paranoiac-satiric steampunk novel, trying to establish a link between the ancient Celtic tribes which ruled Northwestern Europe and the dark forces he believes are behind the rise in jingoism which has thrown the world into so many Little Wars. Devon's investigations, however, are complicated by the extremely odd cast of characters who tend to have their own very strong views of the way the world should work.

At heart, Devon is a loner, but early in his quixotic researches, he realizes that he can't work in a vacuum. His first attempt at collaboration is with a cadre of professors at Cambridge University. Their attempts to help Devon appear designed to hinder him, as each of the four professors focuses on a specific aspect of Devon's theory, to the detriment of all. It quickly becomes clear to Devon that any help they might be able to provide is probably best left alone.

Turning his back on dis-organized education, Devon's journey takes him to London, where he falls in with the gentlemen scholars of the day in the organization of the Academy of Academics. From their opulent club near Piccadilly Circus, these lordlings are pleased to expound on any topic Devon can raise. When asked for any sort of evidence, however, they prove to be as arid a source of information as the scholars of Cambridge.

These early sequences set the pace for the entire book, which is written with an ear to Victorian cadences. As Devon travels further afield, eventually leaving England (and the comforts of civilization) behind him, the satire picks up, but so do the forces of evil which don't want Devon to draw a link between the current world situation

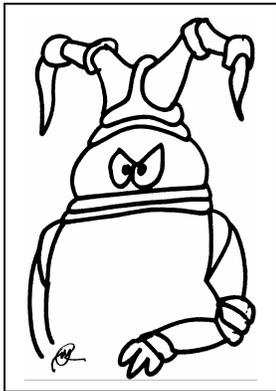
and the primordial powers which carved Europe from its original barbarity.

For much of the book, those forces are clearly meant metaphorically and Devon's enemies appear either in the guise of incompetent assistants or self-centered nationalists. About five hundred pages in, however, the metaphor is thrown out the window and the Keltoi appear as a ravaging band in the Low Countries, working to induce a war between the Germans and the French. Their depiction, which appears to be mainly the work of Pratchett, is much like the Nac Mac Feegle of the Discworld novels, grown to full size and less comically ferocious.

Pratchett and Stephenson form an interesting team. Their individual novels show a strong sense of history and the absurd, but their different senses of humor would not necessarily appear to compliment each other as well as happens in *The Weight of the World*. The satire of the novel is built of the situations in which Devon finds himself and never seems forced. And while it is set in the Victorian era and reads as if it had fallen through a time warp from the period, *The Weight of the World* is clearly a satire on our own world, covering not only the ivory tower of academia, but also the growing militarism of so many countries and movements.

One of the things that quickly becomes clear when reading *The Weight of the World* is that the two authors have more in common than would initially be apparent. Both authors use their novels to address series issues, although in their own way. Both also incorporate humor in their novels, although the humor in Stephenson's books can be said to be more understated than in Pratchett's. These similarities allow the authors to fuse their writing style in a manner which, while not entirely seamless, works much better than might otherwise be expected.

Despite its ponderous title and its massive bulk, *The Weight of the World* is a novel which leaves the reader wishing for more when the final page is completed. The ideas are presented in a manner which instantly grabs the reader and the humor is incorporated in a way that doesn't detract from what the book has to say about our modern world, but rather buttresses the authors' message.



Resolution

Commentary by Joseph T Major on
Glinda of Oz (1920)
by L. Frank Baum [and James Branch Cabell]

Most of us are aware of the movie, *The Wizard of Oz* (1939). Many, after seeing it, track down and read the children's classic novel it is based on, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900), by L. Frank Baum. Only a few are aware that in the early part of the twentieth century, there was a "Oz" business as it were.

Almost annually, or so children hoped, Christmas would bring a new Oz book from Baum's prolific pen. This became harder for him in his final years; he was bedridden for some time before his death in 1919. But the Oz series was as anticipated and popular as, a generation later, Fans would wait for a new Lensman story from Doc Smith, or another generation later, a new epic of Retief or the Berserkers, or a generation after that, the next "Star Wars" movie . . .

But this nascent Oz fandom abruptly died. The last book, *Glinda of Oz*, was so different that the series became unsellable. Even now, when original-printing Tom Swift books—mass-produced hack-authored volumes from the machine of the Stratemeyer Syndicate—go for three figures, and brightly colored, tattered volumes of, say, the *Adventures of Uncle Wiggly* (written by Howard R. Garis, the man usually behind "Victor Appleton" of the Tom Swift books) are found on the Net for as much, the old Oz books go for a few dollars.

As most readers will admit, *Glinda of Oz* had a decidedly different style. The book begins with the usual discovery of a new and bothersome land in the diverse and wild country of Oz, and with Queen Ozma, the ruler, dispatching Someone to find out.

The Someone, as it happens, are Dorothy and the Wizard, the original antagonists of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, and the reconciled friends of *Dorothy and the Wizard in Oz* (1908). The events of their Investigation are darker.

The bulk of the story, as Dorothy and the Wizard journey to the Land of the Flatheads, is the Wizard's tale of his adventures before he came to Oz, as a traveling juggler and conjurer. (Some scholars have pointed to a strange coincidence, claiming to find a resemblance between the Wizard's career as given here, and the life of comedian and juggler W. C. Fields; Fields, of course, was originally cast to play the Wizard in the movie, but left due to delays in the shooting.)

The Wizard's adventures at first seem reminiscent of the two con men in Huckleberry Finn; he pretends to be noble on an escalating scale, using his status to trick and fool people. The phrase "such a monstrous clever fellow as I" becomes almost his slogan. Each stunt ends with a fall, so to speak, and his escape to learn better.

The members of my family who have investigated its ancestry have inevitably encountered a book with the

hope-inducing title *The Majors and Their Marriages* (1915). The author, Virginia journalist James Branch Cabell, composed this investigation into his wife's ancestry in order to please her. Now Mrs. Cabell's ancestors are not mine, for all that mine are mentioned in the book.

Thus I was aware of Cabell. He had also written a few novels, including one with the remarkably Mary Shellyish title of *The Rivet in Grandfather's Neck* (1915).

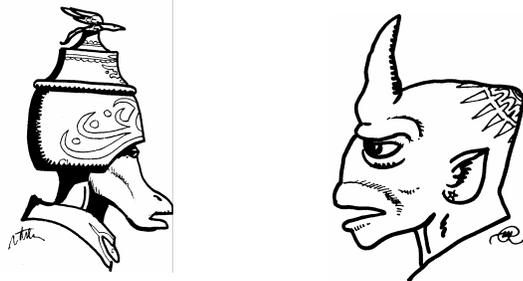
What I hadn't known, and I would like to thank my fellow investigators who are descended from the Major family of Cabell's book for the information, was that Cabell was hired to complete *Glinda of Oz!*

According to his letters, he had had a downturn in his fortunes at the time. He had apparently conceived the idea of a series of novels that would cover an imagined past history—imagine what Heinlein would have done had he decided to follow the example of Leslie Barringer in his Neustrian Cycle [*Gerfalcon* (1927), *Joris of the Rock* (1928), and *Shy Leopardess* (1948)], set in an imaginary part of France, and written an imaginative history with fantastic elements. This was Cabell's intent.

Then he took the job of finishing Baum's novel. Somehow, that killed any desire in him to write further fiction.

The story of the composition of *Glinda of Oz* shows the perversity of editors. Once Cabell turned in the manuscript, they had to run it, the book was promised and desired. That broke the chain, as it were, and there would be no more such works.

One wonders how such a dark and yet diverse world would "sell." Surely there would be some people who would read such works.



Shakespearean Lovecraft

Steven Savile and Alethea Kontis

With the ever-increasing popularity of paranormal romance in the genre these days, the pairing of these two authors was inevitable. After all, who better to define "paranormal romance" than the authors of *Romeo & Cthulhu*? Admittedly we were skeptical that the iambic nightmare of *Romeo & Cthuliet* could be anything but farcical but the passion generated by these venerable old masters fairly hums off the page when our hapless hero stands beneath the Capulet balcony professing his abiding love for the Elder God with the immortal cliché: Shall I compare thee to Yog-Sothoth. Indeed, thou art more fair

and less tentacled. There are moments of sheer downbeat power interlaced with beauty and horror as love lies dying.

In Shakespearean Lovecraft we find two star-crossed lovers, one a boy from a wealthy wine-country family, the other the mortal offspring of Great Cthulhu himself. 'My mistresses' eyes are nothing like the sun' has never been so poignant. There are, of course, humorous interludes aplenty, mistaken identity, a smattering of ghosts and lurkers from beyond the threshold, and of course, the obligatory dog. Though in this case our luckless mutt has a secret—he is in fact a tentacled beastie from beyond the stars sent to prepare the way for the Great Old Ones. One cannot help but feel a little sorry for the poor pooch as he cocks his leg left and right marking out the territory Nyarlathotep has instructed him to claim.

The main undercurrent of this warped collaboration is one of subversion, returning the fantastic to its roots. What you thought you knew, you find you didn't. You weren't even close to the truth. The core of the genuinely romantic offsets the indescribable horror that lurks just beyond the threshold on the Thirteenth Night where the winter dreams of our melancholic hero, Romeo, are broken by the slow tap tap tapping on the window frame of room in the familial mansion. The salt he has laid out upon this windowsill has been broken. All is most assuredly not as our lovebird would hope. In a moment of pure Lovecraftian genius young Romeo braves the Winter Night, venturing out into the unknown, hoping that it will prove much ado about absolutely nothing. Ah, but as brave souls, Constant Reader, we know to expect so much more, don't we? We know that whenever something comes a tap tap tapping the doles cannot be far behind, working their ways in through to corners and sharp places of our world to feast on humanity. And with them comes madness.

I must admit to my sheer delight I turned to page 214, and without wishing to give away too many of the wonderful intricacies of the mystery, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are in fact not dead at all—they are undead—shuffling creatures manipulated through their unlife by vile cultists led by three witches in the thrall of the Old One himself. It is a moment of sheer genius so two of Shakespeare's favourite sons reanimated as only HPL can! This is a moment to treasure. Mourn no more, Prince of the Danemark!

It is worth noting that this is a hefty tome, and it is written almost exclusively in pentameter, the beauty of the language often making it all the more haunting for its pretty turn of phrase.

The plot, however, is often slightly derivative, giving the reader the distinct impression that he has actually read it all before, but not quite like this—making Shakespearean Lovecraft a highly entertaining mélange of cliché, truism, ghoulie and ghostie united.

This marriage of two minds is perfect for the couple who find themselves in two minds about everything—like us! Recommended.