

Rasterman Blues

An unbelievably “lazy web” publication compiled by Lenny Bailes of 504 Bartlett Street, San Francisco, CA 94110 (email: lennyb@speakeasy.net) as a last-ditch effort to demonstrate that he’s not completely dead as a fanzine fan. This is a Bailesania publication, number something or other. It was either do this, tonight, for Corflu or get a haircut.

The wind in the mailbox whistles again
that special tune known to all trufen.
Trap Door, Banana Wings, Es-Ef-Ef-Y,
the wind sez the oldpharts are too young to die!

I’d like to join the fan menage,
but my inkgun’s rusting in a cold garage.
Lord, my inkgun’s rusting in a cold garage!
(And the postal rate’s an unholy charge.)

Now there’s one scheme left that some folks choose;
Guess I’ll re-invent with the Rasterman Blues.

Skanking it!

“OK,” I said to Ted White, sitting in his legendary fan den at 1014 North Tuckahoe in my third annual visit/editorial discussion of his book review for the non-published latest issue of *Whistlestar*. (My excuse for not publishing in the first year was that he still hadn’t finished writing the review. In the second year, my excuse was that I had no dayjob and was doing a 60-hour per week contract writing gig — buying groceries and catfood on princely advances of \$500 per month. This third year, my excuse was that I’d Been Sick—and still am. I’m nursing acute gastrointestinal problems over a new dayjob, trying not to be branded to my co-workers as the Creature That Couldn’t Stop Clearing Its Throat.)

“I’m now shooting for this year’s Corflu as a publication deadline,” I told Ted. “I really have put some work into the issue. I’ve started working on part two of Andy Hooper’s *Fanotchka*, with Alan White illos. *Fanotchka* is my favorite of all Andy’s plays. I’m going to put out a separate PDF that combines the second part with the Stiles-illustrated first part from *Whistlestar 6*. I’ve recovered the lost “academic” essay on S. Morgenstern that rich brown originally sent me back in 1990. And, of course, there’s your review of *Kavalier and Clay*, detailing why you think the book sucks, despite winning the Pulitzer Prize.





“It does suck,” Ted replied. “As I explain in the review.”

“You know,” I said, “for three straight years I’ve come out here—I sit with you in your living room and talk to you about that review—and the issue still isn’t published. I worry that if this goes on too much longer, you’re going to shake your head, ask for the review back, and drum me out of the Ted White Group Mind.

“Lenny,” said Ted, “I think you worry too much.”

Moving swiftly through the jump gate to the present crisis point (Corflu minus two days)—I do hope this is the case. Also add a plea to Mr. Hooper for mercy, when his eyes happen to cross these ciphers. The next issue of *Whistlestar* *is* going to come out, and the combined-*Fanotchka* PDF will, too. But not this week.

In the meantime, tired and phlegmy, two evenings before *C-day*, I’ve decided that I hate the idea of showing up empty-handed at what promises to be the most fanzine-rich Corflu of the 21st Century. (“That’s OK, Lenny. You go run along and play with the conrunners. Volunteer for more panel items on “The State of Fandom,” why don’t you?)

I am still a fanwriter, at least in my own mind. Also, I may still be one in my Livejournal, which is read primarily by David Bratman ( [Calimac](#)) and Gary Farber (anonymous)—with occasional comments from Lucy Huntzinger ( [Athenais](#)), Tami Vining ( [Tamiam](#)), and Patrick Nielsen Hayden ( [pnh](#)).

Non-fans of LiveJournal, I beg you to keep your eyeballs focused on the page for awhile, yet! (That means you, Arnie, Joyce, Ted, Robert.) Don’t let those arcane symbols in the preceding paragraph trigger a cortico-thalamic disconnect, just yet.

Pretend the next twenty-five pages of this are in an experimental layout that Arnie Katz dreamed up for *VFW*, (minus the photos of lady wrestlers), and that Arnie then came to his senses and passed it on to me. You wouldn’t let a thing like that stop you from reading the excellent *VFW* lettercol, would you? Underneath the LiveJournal façade, what follows is just my sporadic diary of fan-related thoughts, spanning the last several years. I’ll cop to the fact that I’ve acquired some new semiotic writing habits—a fair amount of pointing at things, with URL citations as the equivalent of hand gestures. People do that a lot in the (wait for it) “Blogoverse.” It may be true that stuff written for the web falls flat without the extra point-and-click context to support it. *Rasterman Blues* is a spontaneous experiment. My entire Livejournal is where it always is, online at <http://spacecrab.livejournal.com>, if anyone in the paper-reading hardcore wants to try it in the other context (with the clickable hand waving integrated into the conversation).

Hope to see you all, soon, in Whistlestar cipherspace.

-- Lenny B, 2-6-07


03/03/2004 01:27:00



 spacecrab

Hello

I suppose that it's time for this username to materialize a journal somewhere within the Livejournal Riverworld. Nestled within my protected anonymous bubble, I've been reading livejournals from friends and acquaintances for several years. "Spacecrab" is a handle that I used for a long time on [The Well](#), and it struck me as an appropriate carry-over personality aspect to bring here.

A longtime involvement in science fiction fandom -- writing/publishing fanzines and hanging out -- is the main source of my acquaintance with people on LJ. I've been hesitant about starting a journal out of fear that the naturally crabby aspects of my daily thought processes now overshadow entertainingly cosmonautical ones. But after receiving my third annual parcel of good advice on this issue from  [holyoutlaw](#) at this year's Potlatch, I've decided to put my toe in the water.

Favorite current band: [Donna The Buffalo](#) (good musical offerings from whom can be found here (www.donnabase.com)


If you're new to them, I recommend the [Live from the American Ballroom](#) CD, or higher bandwidth MP3 versions of song selections "Movin' On," ("Rock of Ages," "Mr. King," "Tides of Time," "Family Picture." (Only the Realaudio files on the Funkyside link, above, stream properly. The MP3s download to temp files before playing, but it's worth the wait.)

Favorite current comic book: Kurt Busiek's [Superman: Secret Identity](#) -- a remarkable variation on an old theme. Kurt breathes in the WB Smallville remap of Clark Kent and exhales an Astro City-charged inversion of it.

Favorite current novel: Jonathan Lethem's [Motherless Brooklyn](#). [The Fortress of Solitude](#) is interesting, too -- a bit of Henry Roth's [Call it Sleep](#) mixed in with elements of Williams Vollman, Kotzwinkle, and Goldman. Lethem has had his share of criticism over the new book, which fills me with the urge to masquerade as Lionel Essrog (the tourettic protagonist of [Brooklyn](#)) and write a counter-review "Eat me, London Observer!" (This recent good-natured ribbing from one of Lethem's long-time stfnal comrades is also worth reading.)

05/04/2004 00:44:00



 spacecrab

Heroes and Villains

Many people I know have spent the last several days dealing with feelings of mortification and shame over the Abu Ghuraib prison atrocities. Gary Farber called this situation (and the awful pictures) to my attention in [Amygdala](#) last week, a day or two ahead of the release of Seymour Hersh's [New Yorker exposé](#), and the publicity of the story through the rest of the Blogoverse. Since then, he's continued to post a number of well-considered updates and analyses that I recommend to anyone who seeks a review of the chronological unfolding of events related to this shameful tragedy. See also, [Juan Cole](#) for ongoing wisdom and expertise, and [Kathryn Cramer](#) for additional attempts to identify the faces of corruption. (If you're looking for a place to express personal horror and disappointment over these events among friends, I recommend recent threads on Patrick and Teresa Nielsen Hayden's weblogs, [Electrolite](#) and [Making Light](#).)

That said, I went somewhere else, for May Day, out of a desire to escape for

awhile.

I started on my way with a link on Neil Gaiman's website to Peter Sanderson's [astute literary dissection](#) of Neil's recent *1602* series of Marvel comic books. The 1602 discussion wasn't actually what captured my attention on the site. Instead, I found myself deeply engrossed in the [same author's analysis](#) of Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Strikes Again*.

I was and am feeling dispirited over the progress of law, justice, and mercy in this place with the red, white, and blue flag. It is a given (to me) that I should do what I can to further the lawful replacement of George Bush and his cabinet with a Democratic administration -- even if I'm not personally inspired by John Kerry. Criminals and fools are succeeding in dismantling the best parts of 200 years of the American experiment. We need to get the guns, tax laws, and government services out of their hands as soon as possible. John Kerry has only partially supported some of the actions I believe the government of the United States should undertake. But that's not the point. The point is that John Kerry is a rational adult, capable of channeling his conscience to put a stop to the worst abuses of Bush and Cheney.

But, after reading things like this [Washington Post poll](#), I find myself lapsing into the emotional thought patterns of a younger self. "It's Brainiac and Luthor calling the shots in Washington, now, and the American public is in a trance. What if we wind up with another four years of these guys?" When does it become Batman time?

I've been a fan of certain types of comic books for all of my life. I put Superman and the Justice League away in my teens and twenties, in favor of other real-life comic book epics: the adventures of Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young in Chicago; Ken Kesey's adventures in Mexico; The adventures of mild mannered KSAN Reporter, Dave McQueen, and the tragedy of Allende; Jackson Browne and the Sun Soldiers; Rock Against Apartheid, and so on. In the past ten years, Alan Moore, Frank Miller, Bruce Timm, and Paul Dini have succeeded in renewing my affection for one traditional comic book crime fighter.

I'm not going to pretend that the *The Dark Knight Strikes Again* isn't over the top. But I will argue that it's a significant work of art for our time.* Or, instead of me arguing, let me point you to [this essay by Bruce Baugh](#), as a supplement to Peter Sanders' "Knight Terrors" critique linked to above.

I guess, childishly, after being confronted, with the inescapable cowardice and cruelty of real world bullies, my mind longed to go somewhere else, this weekend. So I bought a \$15 day-pass to the Wondercon Comic Book Convention being held in downtown San Francisco. I found 20 issues of the Giffen-DeMatteis Justice League for 50 cents apiece. And I watched Mark Evanier moderate a "Quick Draw" artist's improv panel, at which Sergio Aragones, Kyle Baker, Scott Shaw, and Steve Leialoha took turns doing spontaneous drawings (sometimes blindfolded) to comply with Evanier-suggested themes.

The day was capped off by Bruce Timm and Paul Dini presenting the, as yet, untelevised first part of the finale for this season's animated Justice League, [Star-Crossed](#), on a huge screen. Kevin Conroy's Batman is actually the most attractive element, for me, in the Justice League cartoons; but Timm and Dini are definitely still at the height of their creative powers. They readily admit that their mandate from the Cartoon Network is to design for an age demographic between 9 and 14 -- and that they got into trouble at Warner Brothers over "The Return of the Joker," written for an older audience.

Timm, Dini, Stan Berkowitz, and Alan Burnett held court for an hour after the screening, answering a number of questions about their current animation projects. It turns out that Warner Brothers has commissioned yet another animated Batman series, this one not produced by Dini-Timm, but with Alan Burnett as a consulting director. Mark Hamill and Kevin Conroy won't be voicing in it, but Frank Gorshin will. I took 30 seconds to ask them the closing question of the panel; remarking that, in my opinion, there was no such thing as too much Kevin Conroy Batman. "Could we, maybe, have some more?" Bruce Timm announced his intention of continuing to employ Conroy as Batman as much as is humanly and economically possible.

I came home humming the Lola Ritman JLA theme song under my breath, having succeeded in forgetting about the destruction of the character of America for nearly eight hours.

*And, to my taste, a work of apocalyptic moral fiction with more logical consistency and emotional integrity than most Buffy and Angel episodes. But let's not go there in this post.

05/07/2004 15:08:00



 spacecrab

(AKICIC) Stopping the Terrible Toyman

Does [this villain](#) look familiar? His M.O is to launch explosive robot replicas of the Man of Steel, creating a diversion that permits him to commit bank robberies.

Here's hoping that he's finally run out of luck.

Haircut and new suit



notwithstanding.

05/12/2004 15:31:00

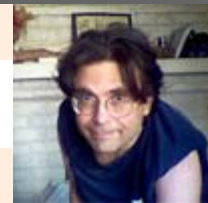


 spacecrab

A little peace and happiness

My friendly neighborhood coffeehouse has a young counterperson who plays "The Kink Kronikles" and Van Morrison's "Astral Weeks" (among other infrequently-accessed, but not forgotten musico-cortical experiences).

profile



User:  spacecrab
Name: Spacecrab

Violin strains of the Jack Nitzsche/Neil Young "Emperor of Wyoming" move me to set aside my work-for-hire dissertation on the ATA classifications of IDE hard drives, and come here.

The music gives sweet respite from the lottery ticket process of invoking Dell technical support -- which is how I've started the last several days. Laptop part breaks. Onsite service call brings replacement. Replacement part breaks again. Dell L2 supervisor refuses another onsite service call: "Too many broken parts for you, Mister! You'll have to mail the box to us." (L2 supervisor enters note in customer profile: "Do not provide onsite service or ship any more plastic parts to this user. Unit must be returned to the Depot.")

Time passes. Repeat calls for help and pleas for mercy to other support reps:

"All I did was open the lid. It made a creaking sound and a crack appeared in the lid. I know how you feel about these things. I tried to pretend it wasn't there. But the crack got larger every time I opened the computer. Maybe the fastening screws to the LCD cover were in too tight."

((Stress points, plastic. Maybe your current parts distributor for this three-year-old unit has lower quality standards than the last one. Here I am: unworthy destroyer of computers, public enemy of profitable business, pleading for mercy and honoring of the service contract.))

"Oh, you will. Thank you, thank you. I promise I'll be good to it." ((And never call

again, until the next time the LCD panel goes out with a series of vertical stripes, or the PCMCIA controller on the motherboard fails and no longer recognizes my network card.))

My counterperson-dj has the recessive, but existent, "I like Dylan's voice" gene (which may be similar to the "I like/hate/can't taste cilantro" gene). So I've been slipping some live Rolling Thunder stuff into her playlist.

05/21/2004 21:22:00



spacecrab

Heroes and Villains (continued)

Some thoughts on the last episode of Angel as moral fiction.

Angel, in his final episode, is not a heroic figure. He makes the wrong strategic decisions and becomes a tragic villain. That is, he does, if we judge him by the wisdom of our best moral philosophers, and consider his actions within the infrastructure of our own world. Angel breaks with the moral code he's established for himself as an ensouled being. He commits a series of despicable acts -- as a prelude to an ill-considered stand against overwhelming evil.

I know that Joss Whedon tells you the rules of the Buffy/Angel world are different. In that world there really are supernatural, evil forces, which act upon the characters. Lovecraftian eldritch dooms are attempting to rule (Buffy) or already rule (recent Angel) the world; and they really should be Stopped.

But even within the context of Whedon's usual Buffyverse, the sensibility of Angel's final campaign seems debatable. Angel might go on for years and years, quietly improving quality of life for the supernaturally-afflicted. He could take a leaf from the book of Gunn's social worker friend: "load the truck" and set up business in a new location. But that's not what this Angel episode is about. Apocalypse is coming. Has to come. The eldritch dooms rule the world, and may foreclose on it Real Soon Now.

Once the Mutant Enemy script writers get you to accept the passion of this premise (or the less-fatalistic Buffy version: "One Eldritch Doom Can Spoil Your Whole Day"), they go to work on your sense of situational ethics. Our suppressed visceral responses to evils in _this world_ become fair game for externalization in the Buffy/Angel world. This does, I'll concede, constitute art.

What it does not constitute, in many individual episodes, in my opinion, is well-constructed moral fiction. This is my ongoing beef with Buffy and Angel.

What we're led to experience in the series finale of Angel is not the evocation of pathos for a tragic villain. What we're given, instead, is a flash of existential courage over the plight of a Dark Knight. "Let us be moved by this tale to go out and renew our own heroic battles with evil. There's only one way to go out -- singing! " (Or slashing at goblins with sharp metal instruments, if we've grown up in a slightly different context of economics, politics, and pop art.)

The most successful thing that Joss Whedon does to make this trick work is to employ good actors and script writers (with excellent ears for dialog and well-developed senses of irony). The less successful thing (from my point of view) is to proffer superficially-logical justifications for the metaphysics of his universe, using directorial manipulation combined with spectacle to make those metaphysics feel credible to us.

As far as I'm concerned, the last few episodes of Angel destroy any resonance with Angel-as-Dark Knight that were successfully established in earlier episodes. Compare/contrast with Frank Miller's Dark Knight. Miller's world jabs at our sensibilities. His Batman shocks us. But despite the presence of super-powered evil in Miller's world, his Dark Knight refrains from crossing certain lines. Batman's shocking pragmatism does not negate the moral force of his courage.

In the last few episodes of Angel, Whedon stacks the deck (as I think he often did in Buffy). He manipulates his metaphysics so that the ultimate actions of the

characters are less likely to be categorized, a priori, as immoral or two-dimensional. (As usual, the script writers feint on a scene-by-scene basis. "Uh-oh. This one is out of character doing good|evil. But no! It's the opposite of what you thought. So there!")

For me, Angel was entertaining TV in the early episodes, which showed him as a Chandleresque detective in the City of Night. The show was entertaining, sometimes, in episodes that showed a supernatural being trying to survive -- and cope with other (comically-ironic or horrifying) supernatural beings. (I will continue to remember Wesley's desperate plea to the loa that manifested, in one episode, by incarnating as a Bob's Big Boy hamburger sign.) I think Angel was less successful as a Dark Shadows romantic soap opera, and dull as a Lovecraftian (or Stephen Kingian) horror surrogate. I wish I had the text for the paper Umberto Eco is supposed to have written about apocalyptic horror themes in American TV shows, in which he calls them signifiers of the corrupting influence of corporate capitalism. I have a feeling he might have been on to something about memes that show up in Buffy and Angel.

Comments

From:  calimac

Date: 05/22/2004 11:00:54

I'll disagree with you about Miller's Dark Knight. I thought Miller wrote very well, but loaded the deck in an offensive and preachy way. The villains (led by the Jabba-with-shades guy with the teeth) were simply evil-evil-evil for the sake of evil, and the liberals who tried to negotiate with them were depicted as cowardly fools. This is right-wing cant, nothing more.

This is much worse than most of what appeared on *Angel*. Though the evilness of Wolfram & Hart is an essential premise, they are suave interesting villains who can, and sometimes should, be negotiated with. (This despite the fact that I found Angel going to work for them to be a stupid plot premise.)

were supposed to constitute a supernatural detective agency.

I will also agree with you that the fundamental premise of the Buffyverse does not constitute moral fiction. What may be hard to grasp is that, at its best, *BTVS* was not about its premise. (I can't say that *Angel* ever really achieved this.) My touchstone for this is the final climax of *BTVS* season 2. Angel is evil, Buffy "kills" him. ("Kill" was the verb used at the time; actually he just went to hell for a while and came back none the worse for the experience, though he kept saying it was for the worse.) The specific set-up for the moment was completely absurd.

But that's not what it was about. It was a supernatural version of the "you've got to hurt the one you love" story. In watching that scene, don't look at the stupid CGI vortex. That's the plot gimmick, but it's not the story. Look at the actors' faces: that's where the story is being told.

From:  jerrykaufman

Date: 05/23/2004 10:05:37

I'm still trying to decide how much thought I want to give to Angel and the final episode. Do I really believe that Loren would shoot Lindsay? Just when Lindsay was sounding like a valuable addition to

From:  belisem

Date: 06/08/2004 07:31:17

Oh, good ghod yes.

Er, I think so, anyhow. Lorne had broken, a little while before that. Working for W&H, or to be more exact, working for Angel at W&H had broken him. The act of shooting Lindsay was the external manifestation of that, and Lorne knew it.

Besides, he'd heard Lindsay sing.

One can make a case that most of the characters on Angel broke at the end. Within the context

From:  jerrykaufman

Date: 06/08/2004 21:43:21

Still haven't thought much about that episode; thank goodness you did some of the thinking for me.

Good thinking, too - don't get me wrong. Guess I was disappointed that my heros all had feet of clay and soluble souls. They all melted and broke under the pressure of trying to do good from an evil starting point.

We were watching an episode of *Stargate* last night from a season or two ago, in which Teal'c is revisiting his past. In a flashback, his friend and superior Britac (excuse me if I get these names wrong) is explaining that though he appears to serve the Guaould (the evil parasites that pass themselves off as gods), he's actually doing his best to undercut them and save lives. But often he has to do evil things to retain the Guaoulds' trust.

The difference between the situations is that W&H's "senior partners" *know* that Angel et al are trying to undercut them, and they use that knowledge against our heros. I think it was a no-win situation from the start, and never could really understand why Angel took over.

From:  spacecrab

Date: 06/08/2004 22:32:26

Because the main writers felt like doing sardonic "law firm" humor with demons in it?

One of the interesting things about Buffy/Angel is the way people adopt the (well-drawn/well-acted) characters and develop their own rationales for why things in the stories happen. My own feeling about the plotting is that a lot of it wasn't constructed to make sense over the long haul. The point was to have the characters interact in a bunch of scenes each week, setting up viewer expectations and then breaking out of them -- inducing the audience to experience a range of emotional reactions.



 spacecrab

Livin' in another world

I went to see "Festival Express" last night, and liked it. LJ may be the wrong demographic home to talk about this (in the hope of getting other "I saw it and really liked ..." responses). I could go over to [The Well](#), where there are probably long frame-by-frame analyses and people-identification threads on this from other Old People of my musical ilk. In posting here, I'm probably looking to say that something unique and extraordinary was happening back there -- saying that to people who haven't had the eye-witness experience.

The movie is a grainy, but well-photographed, time-machine look at some events and people at the neuron core of the year 1970. If you enjoyed "Monterey Pop," but are less enthusiastic about public documents such as "Don't Look Back," and "Big Sur Festival," then "Festival Express" may disappoint you. Musically, I think most of the performances in it are better than the ones captured in the Woodstock movie -- but they're not at the Monterey Pop level.

Background for casual passersby:

Finally released at the Toronto Film Fest in 2003, this 90-minute film by Canadian director Bob Smeaton documents the legendary 1970 tour with The Band, The Grateful Dead, Delaney and Bonnie and Friends, Ian and Sylvia, New Riders of the Purple Sage, Tom Rush, Buddy Guy, Eric Andersen, Mountain, Ten Years After, Traffic, Seatrain, Charlebois, James and the Good Brothers, Cat Mashmakan and The Modern Rock Quartet.

The Band perform "Slippin' and Slidin'," "The Weight" and "I Shall Be Released." Rick Danko appears in jam sessions with Janis Joplin, Buddy Guy and others.

I wouldn't rate Bob Smeaton, the Festival Express director, at the genius level of D.A. Pennebaker. But "Festival Express" captures a few brilliant musical performances in its 90 minutes that are worth the price of admission. It presents a montage that hints at the passion, creativity, and artistic precision

that bubbled around some of the stoned, hedonistic icons of this period. A number of them suffered, dissipated themselves, or died unpleasantly -- as a direct consequence of poor impulse control. But the idealization of their art that dominated the media for so long (to the annoyance of two succeeding generations) was not all silly hyperbole.

In particular, I'm thinking about The Band -- who, for me, capture and play the heart and soul of America as well as Walt Whitman did. It's been so long since I've seen them perform, that I'd almost forgotten the good-time lifestyle intelligence and poetry in their musical core. The sideburned, bearded, gold granny-spectacled Robbie Robertson singing and picking, backed up by the mad organ genius of Garth Hudson, the steady, driving drum beat of Levon Helm, and the soulful voices of Rick Danko and Richard Manuel, allowed a generation of intelligent, middle class twenty-somethings to hear America singing.

Years later, Robbie Robertson managed to encapsulate another place that some of us lived in:

[Jupiter Hollow](#)

So far, so near
Like a time machine take you out to a different year
Phoebus Apollo played on his lyre
While we danced to the music of the sphere
And as the moon went down and the sun came up
With the mercury risin' too
'Twas then the prophet said the secret of the dead
I'll whisper it to you

Livin' in another world
Livin' in another time
Like a comet I was hurled
Oh, livin' in [another world](#)

Janis Joplin's performances in "Festival Express" are also good snapshots of her musical power. Jerry Garcia is captured in typical acts of being the young Jerry Garcia.



spacecrab

A very cellular song



I'm not announcing the results of a Livejournal "Which Tarot Card am I" quiz.

On Saturday night, I saw the partially-reunited Incredible String Band in concert at the Noe Valley Ministry. I was reminded of what I knew at 20 and now too often forget:

*the natural cards revolve ever changing
seeded elsewhere planted in the garden fair grow trees, grow trees*

*tongues of the sheer wind
setting you foot where the sand is untrodden,
the ocean that only begins*

I was the right age to discover the Incredible String Band at their peak -- when songs on the FM radio allowed us to become thousand-year old trees, metamorphosing caterpillars, Byzantine magicians, witches' hats, dancing amoebas, and so on.

I don't find that kind of stuff, much, in stereo now. Those adventures are kind of back to where they were before the Beatles: in children's rooms at libraries, occasional comic books, and YA fantasy novels. We've got improved animation and stereo -- but it tends to be more full of giant robots fighting monsters than cosmic sea voyages, these days.

I love the fact that there's a 120-year old [Noe Valley church](#) just a couple of blocks from where I live, where, over the past ten years, I've attended a number of musical performances by Oregon, Roger McGuinn, Gene Clarke, Peter Rowan, Cindy Lee Berryhill, and Robin Williamson.

This [touring version](#) of the Incredible String Band lacks Robin Williamson; but it includes the other two original band members: Mike Heron and Clive Palmer. Newcomer Lawson Dando does passable substitution on the background vocal, keyboard, string, and kazoo parts that were arranged for/by Robin.

When this ISB launched into their first song, one of the guitars was slightly out of tune and Heron was a bit off key. But I decided to be patient. Not so much changed about that from twenty years ago, when they surrounded themselves on stage with a humungous assortment of nylon and steel guitars, banjos, violins, mandolins, cellos, mandocellos, sitars, glockenspiel, kettle drums, bass drums, flutes, pipes, recorders, and so on -- most of which had to be tuned and retuned between each song.

Heron picked up quickly, and within two or three songs, his vocals had as much power and charm as I ever remembered. Clive Palmer proved to be an adept banjo player with a good bluesy voice; and Lawson Dando tastefully filled in high harmony and string counterpoint. This was sufficient to allow me (and an enthusiastic audience of about 150) to re-experience the sense of wonder bound into the [Williamson-Heron poetry](#).

I don't know if any other LJ readers witnessed (and/or loved) the Incredible String Band in their original touring incarnation. Old-young fogey Deadheads know that the GD version of "And We Bid You Good Night" was inspired by the ISB version on "The Hangman's Beautiful Daughter." The new ISB performed a well-arranged (two organ counterpoint) version of Heron's 17-minute "A Very Cellular Song," which includes "And I Bid You Good Night."

I'm glad I had this song in recent cellular memory, last night, after seeing the photo of Chris Reeve-in-supersuit on the Atrios website. I knew what that

photo meant as soon as I saw it. I thought about posting my reaction to the news of Reeve's death on LJ, last night. But I knew that, within an hour, the Internet would be full of Reeve supersuit photos -- with eulogies that would say most of [what I would have said](#).

*earth water fire and air
met together in a garden fair
put in a basket bound with skin
if you answer this riddle
you'll never begin.*


Good night, Chris.

For those who care to do so, Christopher Reeve's family has requested that donations be made in his honor to the [Christopher Reeve Paralysis Foundation](#).

Current Mood: awake

12/12/2005 21:14:00



 spacecrab

Putting frustration in context

I've always been opposed to the death penalty; just so you know where I'm coming from. I have the unattractive (to conservatives and fiscal pragmatists) opinion that even the worst convicted murderers should be guarded by the State and forced to labor -- that this is a better payment to society and to the families of victims than taking another life.

In present-day America, the economic cost of a "no death penalty" policy combines with a cynical, pragmatic social climate -- to trump the mid-20th Century belief system that I grew up with: *an enlightened justice system offers the possibilities of restitution and redemption, even to convicted murderers.*

If you asked cranky old me (which you didn't), I'd be tempted to launch into this subjective (and possibly irrelevant) lament: Our collective notions about

justice in the United States have changed significantly in the last thirty years. We no longer enshrine the blindfolded Lady Justice holding the scales. We no longer make movies featuring that wise, white-haired angel with the ledger book. We're down to Jimmy Cliff. "The harder they come, the harder they fall." We're back to "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth." (And yes, I know that "an eye for an eye" was invented in biblical times as a policy of moderation and judicial restraint. But in more recent times, we've been innovative enough to try experimenting with "a seeing eye dog for an eye.")

In current America, the economic force behind death penalty advocacy ("we can't afford justice the other way") is combined with attitudinal stances:

"Murderers should get what they've earned: death."

"I'm good. I didn't kill anyone and I'm hurting. Why should I pay taxes for bad guys to live?"

"If a criminal inflicts damage on Society, Society should inflict equal damage on the criminal."

"Right back at ya."

Punish the ones who screw up to "the fullest extent of the law," to set scary examples and "assuage the grief of the victims." We're a society that's becoming poorer spiritually as well as financially.

"To assuage the grief of the victims..." That's the biggest change in the blindfolded justice paradigm over 50 years. (Geek ob cit: Terry Bisson's "macs.")

But I don't so much want to rant about the socioeconomic forces that have brought the death penalty back into vogue in the United States. (Jon Carroll [does that](#) in today's San Francisco Chronicle.)

I want to do two things:

a) Express my sadness that we're throwing away the now-useful life of Tookie Williams; a life that's actually saving other lives. A life that's acting as a much greater deterrent to crime than his dead body ever will.

b) Question the system that our governor is enforcing: "if you don't confess to the crime that you've been convicted of, the law must kill you -- no matter what you've done (or the State has compelled you to do) to repay the victims, no matter that you no longer pose a threat to society."

I don't know whether Williams was guilty or innocent of the crimes for which he was convicted. (I do wonder, at this point, why he would fail to confess if he were guilty. It's hard to believe that a guilty man with the intelligence Williams displays in his writings would gamble his life on a bluff, when all he had to do to save his life would be to admit his guilt.)

That's a weight on the other side of the scale from "so expensive to incarcerate them" -- the possibility/probability of judicial error.

From Julianne Malveaux [on the BET network](#) that Aaron Macgruder so often ridicules:

"Stanley Tookie Williams is just one of the 3,415 people on death row in the United States, just one of nearly 650 on death row in California. More than 40 percent of those awaiting execution are African American, even though we are less than 13 percent of the nation's population.

The death penalty isn't fair – too many death row inmates have been unrepresented or inadequately represented. Too many have been convicted on faulty circumstantial or eyewitness evidence. Too many mistakes have been uncovered after conviction, so many that the state of Illinois has suspended executions indefinitely.

We should simply eliminate the death penalty, especially as there is no evidence to suggest that it deters commission of crime, and since it is so unevenly applied. Those who are convicted of killing White people are far more likely to get the death penalty than those convicted of killing people of color."

Comments

From:  calimac

Date: 12/12/2005 22:43:29

Nobody forced Richard Nixon to confess his crimes before he got clemency. Why not?

If the person actually didn't commit the crime - and it's well within possibility that Williams did not - pushing him to confess is not only strange, it's perverse. This perversity has been noted before. See the end of Miller's *The Crucible*, where it becomes the stuff of tragedy.

07/07/2006 12:12:00



 spacecrab

rich brown

I first met rich when I was 17 years old. It was at a Fanoclast meeting in New York City. I was young and impressionable, and he took a mischievous delight in plonking me: by pretending that he was a real representative of Ayn Rand's "John Galt Society." This probably sounds absurd by reality-quotient standards for today's 17-year-olds. You had to be there. If there were still a good Internet link to it, I would point you to rich's scholarly article in the 1990s, which explained how the true and actual S. Morgenstern used "William Goldman" as a pen name -- publishing "The Princess Bride" as a PR stunt to promote his masterwork, "The Silent Gondoliers."

rich was a good friend to me for all of my life. He was also really a butthead, sometimes, in fanzines and online communication. His closest friends will readily acknowledge this. Face-to-face, rich had a large and generous soul. Sometimes, this fact managed to shine through in his fanwriting -- along with a wry sense of humor. I'm happy that people are remembering that side of him, now. He was always ready to buy the next round in the bar or treat you to dinner, while explaining the intricacies of style in John Myers Myers' *Silverlock* -- or the cumulative paradoxes and plot flaws in *Quantum Leap*, *Star Trek* or *Firefly*.

To those who knew rich only from periodic bombastic tirades, all I can say is this: I don't think he ever understood that opinions and denunciations in fannish print had the power to upset people in their actual lives. rich looked at s-f fandom the way that fan-fiction shippers look at their stories: as a large parallel universe to escape into with his friends -- where they (we) could

make the rules.

In person, rich was introspective and considerate, often willing to acknowledge that he'd allowed himself to be carried away in the "paper world." He would typically express surprise that people took the things he said in fanzines or online seriously, since he didn't take them seriously himself *outside of the world of fandom.*

I believe this fan world/real world dichotomy in rich's thinking is what managed to alienate him, so much, from some people in the modern s-f community. S-F Fandom Challenge No. 2814: find the operant domain where the Knight of La Mancha is a good spirit guide, not a pain in the ass.

Comments

From:  fringefaan

Date: 07/07/2006 13:21:12

Thanks for this, Lenny, it's really good stuff. I just saw a discussion on Usenet this week between a guy who didn't understand why people took anything said on Usenet seriously and a woman who chided him for his blindness to how he was being a jerk in the way he used words. Some people seem to take "sticks and stones may break your bones, but words will never hurt you" deeply to heart. rich's broadsides frequently irritated me (and I was even the butt of a couple of minor ones on Trufen), but in the end it was his fannish generosity and his singular passion for fandom and for fanhistory that left the deepest impression on me, along with his shaggy dog sense of fanoclastic

08/21/2006 20:14:00



 spacecrab

Fandom in the 60s

Actually, I'm still only 59. There are a few months left before the digit in the tens place rolls over on me, again.

Just between us, I become like a depressed, ticking clock (with blocked minute and second hands) every July when I read the preliminary Worldcon program draft. I attended my first one at age 17, in 1963. To condense an epic stream o' consciousness rumble, I want the new conventions to kindle the intellectual and emotional excitement that the old ones delivered to me.

I'm appreciative of the fact that Craig Miller, this year's Worldcon programming head, was willing to read my various emails, consider and adopt some of the ideas I tossed in his direction. Craig is one of the best Worldcon facilitators in the business. He's committed to serving the needs of all the various factions and demographics in the modern science fiction community. The L.A.Con IV programming committee has really done right, this year, by the core of readers and writers who comprise the legacy brigade of carpers, diarists and punditizers in fandom. L.A.Con IV has fanzine (and blogger) programming up the wazoo.

I'm, therefore, able to get past my disappointment in not getting any of the following into the show:

After the Garden

Is the United States on a one-way ride to becoming a post-democratic state populated by corporate citizens? What can we do to stop the gradual replacement of individual rights and freedoms in this country with corporate rights and freedoms? (Alternate title: *Egypt Land: are we all working for the Pharaoh?*)

Media Matters

How do bloggers challenge lies and political distortion fields that mainstream media overlooks? [This article](#) inspired me to suggest that this might be a good discussion for LACon.

Sexism in Superhero Books

See Teresa Nielsen Hayden's [ML essay](#) on [Styrofoam Tits](#).

The Battle of the Sexes in SF

A discussion of the changing roles women have played in shaping science fiction, centered around Justine Larbalestier's research project: sex objects to 3-D characters in stories. Or it might focus on the changing roles women have had as authors, editors, and reviewers in the science fiction field -- introducing new con attendees to the history of feminism in s-f, the creation of WisCon, the Tiptree award, and the expanding literary counterculture (encompassing literary diversity) that centers around WisCon.

If you don't like the news, go out and make some of your own. -- Scoop Nisker

08/21/2006 20:19:00



 spacecrab

Seekers Into Mystery

I'm on two panels a day at L.A.Con IV. Mostly fanlounge stuff about fan history and fanzines -- plus one on Saturday morning that I invented about comparing/contrasting Superman archetypes and story realizations ... and one titled "Obscure Dick."

Sat 8/26 10:00 AM, 60-90 minutes.

Title: FROM SMALLVILLE TO SECRET IDENTITY

Participants: Lenny Bailes

Tom Galloway(M)

Lee Whiteside

Marv Wolfman

Doselle Young

Precis: Kurt Busiek, Jeph Loeb/Alfred Miller, Grant Morrison, and others have found radically different ways to retell and re-invent Superman's story.

Panelists discuss approaches that add to and detract from the collective myth.

I formulated this panel concept to Craig Miller--mostly because I was really blown away by the Kurt Busiek mini-series of several years ago. It hit me as a memorable, thoughtful treatment that revived all the sense of wonder anyone might need around the flying man who can bend steel in his bare hands.

Busiek's story reminds me of Steve Gould's "Jumper," which is a great YA novel about a teleport. If you haven't read *Secret Identity*, see [here](#) for a good

abstract.

I'm pretty much left cold by the Smallville TV series -- another attempt to reformulate a classic storyline for a new audience. I thought it might be interesting to discuss the way different creative teams have attempted to "refresh" the story of Superman. Which ones are really memorable? For me, Grant Morrison's *DC One Million* is another really innovative effort. I don't have much to say about the Byrne *Death of Superman*.

Another topic that might have tangential relevance to this panel is the influence of Alan Moore's discarded *Twilight* script on Morrison's *DC One Million*, in addition to the obvious evolution of *Twilight* into *Kingdom Come/The Kingdom*.

As far as Smallville, I don't want just to diss it--but rather to talk about elements that seem to succeed and fail in the context of it (apparently) having to succeed as a WB teen-relationship soap opera. Certainly, Michael Rosenbaum and John Glover have done some good character acting in it, and there are attempts by script writers to integrate moral value issues in the middle of the "monster-of-the-week"/"seduction of the week" infrastructure. But, for me, the thing has a hard time escaping from a tragic reliance on the Salkind concept of Superman -- a woo-woo infrastructure that makes less sense than Mort Weisinger's. (I definitely hope most of the panel doesn't get sidetracked into discussion of this and comparisons with the new movie.)

- -

Sun 8/27 2:30 PM, 60-90 minutes.

Title: OBSCURE DICK

Participants: Lenny Bailes(M)

John R. Douglas

David Hartwell

Eric M. Van

Mark von Schlegell

Precis: Discussion and appreciation of the lesser-known works of Philip K. Dick. What did you think of "Now Wait for Last Year"?

I'm hoping we can use the title as a springboard to talk about the best of PKD's mainstream novels, as well as his obscure science fiction. Dave Hartwell

has already promised to bring his advance copy of "[Voices From the Street](#)" (Tor, January 2007) to the panel.

David published an excellent article in *NYRoSF* in 2001 by Josh Lukin: "*This sense of worthlessness*": *Ideals of Success in PKD's Humpty Dumpty in Oakland*.

Here are some choice soundbytes from that article--observations that apply to PKD's science fiction as well as the mainstream novels:

"In the world of Dick's novels, the "independent" people constitute far less than a quarter of the population. Even the science-fictional heroes who suspect that reality is very different from what's presented to them only begin to act independently when they find some form of outside validation for their suspicions. Consensus reality -- what Dick called the *koinos kosmos* - has an immense impact on nearly all of his characters."

"'50s sociology has the habit of "falsely universalizing a white, male middle-class experience of economic and social change."

Scholars in the mid-1970s began pointing out the disparity between '50s discourse and '50s realities.

"A powerful synthesis of [these] critiques of '50s literature appears in a 1957 lecture given by novelist Robert Bloch. Bloch begins by waxing nostalgically over the great protest fiction of the '30s by the likes of John Steinbeck, Sinclair Lewis, and James T. Farrell. He then denounces the popular literature of the '50s, with its message that "we must adapt, we must conform to the rules instead of wasting our time and energy asking a lot of foolish questions or putting up a bunch of stupid arguments."

[quoting Gregg Rickman]: "Dick might have been able to get away with a qualified pessimism in his genre work .. but such pessimism as Dick expressed had no place in mainstream American publishing."

"In the world of Dick's novels, the "independent" people constitute far less than a quarter of the population. Even the science-fictional heroes who suspect that reality is very different from what's presented to them only begin to act independently when they find some form of outside validation for their suspicions. Consensus reality -- what Dick called the *koinos kosmos* - has an immense impact on nearly all of his characters."

Dick is involved with hands-on labor, but does not always idealize the lone craftsman:

"In the science fiction realms that Dick frequented, hands-on labor is indeed often idealized in the form of the lone tinkerer who builds a teleporter out of his grandma's sewing machine and a few radio tubes. But to say that Dick consistently idealizes the isolated craftsman is to oversimplify his values. A Dick hero involved in collaborative labor (*Ubik*), administrative work (*The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*), or even sales (*The Transmigration of Timothy Archer*), may find that work fulfilling. Other factors are involved in distinguishing a good job from a lousy one. (such as the pride Jim Fergusson takes in treating his customers better than a large-scale operation might.)"

From: *(Anonymous)*

Date: 09/01/2006 22:58:01


[....] So how were your panels? How was your con?

--non-anonymous Gary Farber (I just *love* that LJ still doesn't allow for people to identify

From:  spacecrab

Date: 09/03/2006 07:28:05

[....]

I'm afraid that the audience for the Fannish Blogs & Websites panel (which was held in a Hilton sideroom at 10AM on Thursday) consisted only of  don_fitch and one other individual. Amygdala was listed on the official panel handout.

The two panels that took place in the Convention Center were a bit livelier. Paul Williams was a pleasant last-minute addition to "Obscure Dick." After the "Smallville to Secret Identity" panel, an intense, be-spectacled young girl came up to the platform and told me she'd never read any comics, but she really liked the Busiek/Immonen panel printouts that I circulated through the audience. "Could I sign her program book and recommend some other titles?"

I may post more about the convention, later. Right now, I should really fulfill my oath to the Green Lectern Corps and review some student papers.