



ARGENTUS

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2008

From the Mine

Welcome to the 2008 edition of *Argentus*, once again coming out in the waning days of the year. And what a year it's been. Apparently there was an election in the United States, so an entire year's worth of news was hijacked. The political pundit class on television really needs to be put down so the rest of us are put out of our misery. And that goes for bloviators on both sides of the aisle.

I was very pleasantly surprised to receive an e-mail in March from Mary Kay Kare, Denvention's Hugo Administrator informing me that *Argentus* had been nominated for a Hugo Award for Best Fanzine...the first time the magazine has had that honor. Although I'm the editor and publisher, much of the quality of the 'zine comes from the dozens of people who have provided me with articles, illos, letters of comment, and mock section pieces over the years. Without them, *Argentus* would be little more than a perzine. And one person who I specifically want to call out with thanks is Mike Glycer, who eventually won the award this year. Back at Chicon 2000, I mentioned to Mike that I was thinking about doing a paper fanzine and Mike mentioned it in his *Locus* con report, making me feel that I had to go ahead with it. Mike's fanzine, *File 770* narrowly edged *Argentus* in the first round of voting, and *Argentus* eventually finished fourth in a field of very good competition. Thank you again to those who nominated, voted for, or have contributed to *Argentus*.

This issue contains a variety of pairings: Chris Garcia's TAFF Report, chapter two and John Hertz's Japan trip report, chapter two are both published here. John published the first part in *File 770* and other portions of Chris's report have appeared in *Drink Tank* 165, *Banana Wings* 34, *Vegas Fandom Weekly* 107, and *SF/SF* 67. The entirety of Chris's report can be found at <http://TAFF.org.uk>.

I also have paired articles by Daniel Kimmel and Fred Lerner in which these two look at their fields, Daniel at films and Fred at books, and confess the classics (or not so classics) that they have somehow managed to miss.

Alma Alexander discusses the lessons she learned at LaunchPad, an astronomy for writers seminar hosted by Michael Brotherton and my nephew, Zachary Charney Cohen, makes his fannish debut writing about his experiences working on the set of a potential television pilot on Catalina Island during the summer.

A few months ago, I interviewed author Michael A. Burstein, whose first collection, *I Remember the Future* is now out. You can read the interview here and then order the book on-line or through your local bookstore.

For several years, Lynne Thomas has been working to build a science fiction archive at Northern Illinois University in DeKalb and I've asked her to write about it for *Argentus*. Lynne has also been trying to get me to donate my collection of fanzines, books, magazines, and convention-running

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papers, so when she says that I've been important to her cause, take that with a huge grain of Lot's wife. Sucking up to the editor isn't necessary, Lynne.

I was sitting behind Mike Glycer when he won his Hugo at Denvention for *File 770* and I have to admit that if only one Glycer won, I wish it had been the other, especially after I saw the first round voting statistics. So, I went behind Mike's back and approached the other Glycer, Diana, and asked her if she would be willing to write about the research she conducted to produce her excellent Hugo-nominated study *The Company They Keep: C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien as Writers in Community*. Diana agreed to share her research secrets and the results can be read below. Diana, by the way, beats Lynne for longest title by 7 words.

You may have heard a little about the politics of my state, Illinois. Apparently we run the gamut from Honest Abe to Rod Blagojevich. I look at a handful of our corrupt politicians and try to explain how many Illinoisans view this particular class of criminal. They may not be the best public servants money can buy, but they do provide entertainment value.

Vampires seem to be everywhere these days, not just in the pages of a Stephanie Meyer series, but roaming a variety of cities. For some people, like the woman who sits next to me at work, these are bonanza reading times, however Pat Sayre McCoy returns to the pages of *Argentus* to explain "Why Sexy, Studly Vampires Suck."

Kicking off this issue is a piece by Paul Kincaid in which he examines hard science fiction (and to a lesser extent space opera) in terms of the right-wing/left-wing political spectrum.

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Hard Right

Paul Kincaid

I

A shuttle is delivering vital medical supplies to a plagued world when the pilot discovers a stowaway. It's a little girl, innocent, weak, all too human, just anxious to visit her brother on the doomed planet. But the pilot knows how finely tuned his craft is, even this marginal increase in payload means it cannot safely land. The little girl would not, could not, harm a fly, but her very presence threatens the survival of an entire planet.

The situation is, of course, entirely artificial. There is no way that the shuttle, especially on such an important mission, would not have failsafe supplies of fuel on board. There are, as endless discussions of "The Cold Equations" since it was first published in 1954 have amply demonstrated (see *The New York Review of Science Fiction*, *passim*), plenty of other things that the pilot might have chosen to jettison before the girl. Indeed, we know that the author, Tom Godwin, revised the story many times to try and avoid its dire conclusion, but each time John W. Campbell struck his changes down and insisted on the dire inevitability of the girl's death. It is this that has made it the archetypal hard SF story.

What is significant about the story is not the misogyny. The fact that the victim is a little girl ratchets up the emotional impact, but the stowaway could as easily have been a little boy, the pilot's wife, the first alien ever encountered. Who she is, is irrelevant. Nor, perhaps surprisingly, is the technology important. There is remarkably little technological know-how in the story, the pilot knows as much about his craft as the average driver knows about his car. Nothing in the story hinges on the technology other than the initial set-up, and the fact that there is no failsafe suggests that this is neither a likely nor a deeply thought-out technology.

No, what makes "The Cold Equations" hard SF is the fact that there are rules that must be obeyed, rules in the face of which common human feeling is irrelevant.

The hard SF universe, therefore, is a constrained universe. Much has been achieved, much can be achieved, but there are limits in the shape of the laws of nature, the state of knowledge about science. If all fiction deals in conflict, then, at its core, a hard SF story sets up as its antagonist not a figure of evil, of moral corruption, but the cold, unfeeling cosmos. Every hard SF story involves coming up against the limits of what can be done in accord with the current state of knowledge, though the story may then go on to record submission to the rules (as "The Cold Equations" does), or it may present an exceptional hero figure, the competent man, finding a way to circumvent or avoid the law. I'll come back shortly to the figure of the competent man, but for now I will note that for the common mass of humanity there is no alternative to submission to the law, and their individual feelings, wishes and desires have no part to play in an entirely intellectual engagement with the laws of nature. Which may

go some way towards explaining why characterization has never been a strong point of hard SF stories.

II

For the sake of comparison, let me turn to the type of science fiction story that was superseded by hard SF, and which seems to have regained a measure of dominance in the genre: space opera.

As an exemplar, let us consider the Lensman series by E.E. "Doc" Smith. The six novels that make up the series contain all the characteristics we associate with space opera: a vast scale in both space and time, immense powers, ever greater weapons. At every stage in the story the enemy becomes bigger and the powers deployed against them thus become commensurably greater. In the end they are flinging entire suns at each other. The crudity and silliness of this notwithstanding, there is one obvious underlying fact: this is not a universe of constraint, but rather one of plenty.

If we turn to a modern equivalent of Smith's series, the Culture novels of Iain M. Banks, we can see that this universe of plenty is overtly cast as a utopia. There are no limits in the universe of the Culture, at least none that constrain the characters. The laws of nature, if and where they are acknowledged (and Smith certainly seems to have paid little heed to contemporary scientific understanding), are not restrictions on action but tools that can be exploited. Humans are free to be and do whatever they might wish, which is as implicit in Smith's creation of ever greater weapons as it is in Banks having a character in *Matter* remake himself as a bush.

In other words, the principle underlying space opera, the universe within which the space opera operates, is based ultimately on freedom, on openness, on plenty. In contrast, the principle underlying hard SF, the universe within which hard SF operates, is based ultimately on restriction, on the rule of law, on scarcity. I would characterize the one as liberal, the other as right wing.

We must be careful how these terms are understood in this context. I do not mean that anyone who writes space opera is a liberal or that any space opera propagandizes liberal views. Some may, but that is beside the point. Similarly, I do not mean that anyone who writes hard SF is politically on the right (that is manifestly not the case if you consider many of the leading hard SF writers of the 1940s and 50s), nor do I mean that anything they write will necessarily espouse right wing views. In political terms right and left are such flexible concepts that each can represent a wide spectrum of often contradictory views. Furthermore writers frequently, for dramatic reasons, produce work that runs directly counter to their own personal political opinions. But a hard SF story, unless deliberately subverted, will tend towards an underlying right wing position; a space opera, unless deliberately subverted, will tend towards a more liberal take on things.

III

There is no readily accepted definition of left and right in political terms, so this model of hard SF is bound to be contentious. The terms themselves originated in the physical positions occupied by delegates to the National Assembly at the time of the French Revolution: the Third Estate who tended to support the aims of the revolution sat to the left of the president, the Second Estate who tended to support the old order sat to the right. Since then, any notion of what represents left and right has become increasingly muddled. Fascism, generally considered as representing the extreme right wing, espoused many policies normally associated with the left; while communism, likewise regarded as on the extreme left wing, practiced an authoritarianism more normally seen on the right.

To extend this argument about the generic right wing character of hard SF, therefore, let me pick out certain features that I consider characteristic of the right and see if they can be identified as part of the structure of the hard SF universe. Generally the right favours an hierarchical approach to most social structures, from economics (the notion of “trickle-down” is a classic right wing argument for concentrating funding into already high-earning financial bodies rather than spreading benefits more thinly among the masses) to town planning (post-war Britain was blighted by unpopular housing schemes because the planners refused to consider the views of the people who were supposed to live in them). Such hierarchical structures, rule by the elite, have two noteworthy concomitants: first a tendency towards the militaristic (clearly defined ranks); secondly, an underlying assumption that the “great man” theory of history holds true. The right wing, furthermore, tends to be politically conservative (many right wing parties around the world are called “Conservative”), that is, older political orders (monarchies, empires) are defended wherever possible, while, within democracies, political change is resisted. Confusingly (and the more you go into left-right politics, the more confusing everything becomes) a conservative political body can be revolutionary, if the revolution is against a new order that has usurped the old. This, of course, is a natural consequence of the structured, hierarchical, rule-driven view of the world.

IV

“Overhead, one by one, the stars were coming on.” This short sentence (deliberately turning on its head the famous last line of Arthur C. Clarke’s “The Nine Billion Names of God”) effectively summarises another classic of hard SF, “Nightfall” by Isaac Asimov. It is a story that hinges upon the majesty of space, the vast star-bedecked infinity of the universe. What, then, could be more open than that?

And yet the story set within this open universe is as constrained as that in “The Cold Equations,” if not more so. Society struggles up from the quagmire of anarchy, builds a civilization, and then the remorseless and inhuman force of nature sweeps away that civilization and casts society back down into madness and anarchy. There is no escape, the law is

absolute and implacable. Where, in space opera, we might expect humans to bend nature to their will, here in hard SF nature bends humanity to its will.

But it is not just the constriction of the universe that makes this story hard SF. We are told that civilization rises and falls on a regular pattern; though there may be differences in detail between each iteration, in broader terms they are similar. This historical determinism is an idea that Asimov uses elsewhere. It is what lies at the heart of the notion of psychohistory in the *Foundation* trilogy, for example, the assumption that historical developments are scientifically predictable. Superficially this resembles fundamental principles of Marxism: the application of science to historical development, the suggestion that societies follow a predictable historical path. But where Marxism (in principle, if never in practice) predicts a diffusion of controls over the individual with the advance of progressively less hierarchical and more communal systems of government, in Asimov the historical predictions point towards an increase in controls in the hands of a progressively more hierarchical system. The *Foundation* trilogy, for instance, which is predicated on the politically conservative notion of the preservation of the old order, takes as its avowed political model the decline and fall of the Roman Empire. Interestingly, the threat to the imperial system that the *Foundation* is meant to counter is a less hierarchical system (which is represented as anarchy, chaos), though what turns out to be politically the most successful counterpoint to empire is dictatorship (the “Mule”), another form of rule by elite.

The historical recapitulations of *Foundation*, and by implication the historical recapitulations of “Nightfall,” therefore, suggest a political structure at least as authoritarian as the laws of nature.

V

One novel above all others exemplifies the hard SF assumption that the universe is all the antagonist a story needs: *Mission of Gravity* by Hal Clement. It is a novel singularly devoid of human interaction as we negotiate, directly through Barlennan and indirectly through his human advisors, the various perils of the high-gravity world Mesklin. As in both “Nightfall” and “The Cold Equations,” the law of nature is all powerful. Not only is ignorance of the law no excuse, but ignorance of the law is the most serious crime, and the verdict is usually death.

Furthermore, there is a distinct hierarchical structure in that Barlennan is guided to his destination by the absent humans. Although his local knowledge occasionally proves more successful, in the main he is required to make practical the abstract knowledge of his human mentors. At times their suggestions seem counter-intuitive, but they know better because they are applying the very laws of nature with which Barlennan must contend. Knowledge of the law is power. This is something we see not just here but also, for instance, throughout the work of Robert A. Heinlein.

The archetypal Heinlein hero, the competent man (and it is practically always a man, hierarchies seem to find it hard to accommodate women), is competent precisely because he has knowledge, and this knowledge, in the end, will give him

power. If, for Clement, the end of such power is simply survival in the face of an implacable nature, Heinlein will generally include a human enemy. But the rule is still the same, there is a natural hierarchy and the peak is occupied by those with the most knowledge of the laws of nature and how they can be used.

The Moon is a Harsh Mistress, for instance, gives power to those who understand how the freight delivery system from the Moon to Earth can be converted into a weapon. The weapon is, of course, used to further the aims of a revolution, but it is worth noting that it is a conservative revolution. The colonists on the Moon, in a clear reflection of the essentially conservative American Revolution, are not seeking to overthrow the old order, but are rising up against a new relationship between colony and colonizer that is being imposed from without. As such things do, it ends up creating a new order, though there is much in the new that deliberately replicates the old. And the competent man, who led the revolution, retires from the scene because his knowledge is of the laws of nature not of man.

VI

The “great man” theory of history has it that events are shaped by powerful individuals. It is a theory that is, nowadays, really espoused only by those with a romantic attachment to the past. Most theories of history tend to revolve, to some degree or other, around the notion of social movements, intellectual movements, religious movements or what have you. Certain individuals might shape the specifics, but the general shape of things would hold even if they never existed.

The competent man, therefore, which is an off-shoot of the great man theory, is rather less common in fiction today. We need a protagonist, very often we need a hero, but very rarely does this character take the form he does in classic hard SF: the man who, through technical ability and, more importantly, through knowledge of the way the world works, is able to save the universe, create a successful revolution, steer the spaceship safe to its destination. Hard science fiction is full of competent men (and, sometimes now, competent women, though they do often feel little more than a gesture towards equality politics); indeed, for Heinlein the competent man was an essential figure for science fiction.

The competent man presupposes an hierarchical structure. Not the old hierarchies of wealth, social standing or military might (though competent man science fictions often seem to have a militaristic aspect), but a new hierarchy of scientific knowledge and technical ability. Its supporters might well claim this as a meritocracy, though it is really rule by those who “know best,” in both its positive and its pejorative senses. Once again, therefore, hard science fiction, so much of which is built upon the notion of the competent man, falls into a pattern more generally associated with a right wing perspective.

VII

Having said that hard science fiction has, of late, lost its place within the literature to the resurgence of its literary forebear, space opera, I should make it plain that the form has not disappeared entirely. Hard SF is still being written, though more often now combined with other forms. For example the latest novel by Greg Egan, *Incandescence*, is effectively space opera in those portions of the story that deal with Rakesh and Parantham and their journey into the galactic core. This is a world of plenty, there are no limits to how long people might live, how far they might travel, what form they might occupy, and what resources they might employ. If you want a specialist tool, lo it is conjured in front of you; if you wish to be on the other side of the galaxy then that is where you materialise.

In contrast those sections of the story that deal with the Splinter are hard SF, and betray all of the characteristics I have ascribed to the form. It is, for a start, a constrained world, literally so since it occupies the inside of a piece of interstellar rock, but also metaphorically constrained since the inhabitants lead a narrowly prescribed life. No political structure is apparent in the social organisation of the Splinter, but everything is geared towards the preservation of an existing social order. So much so that when major changes are initiated to allow the survival of life in the Splinter, we are told on more than one occasion that the overwhelming desire even of those leading the intellectual revolution is to return to the old ways. Since there is no political organisation, life within the Splinter would seem to be arranged along communistic if not anarchistic lines: everyone works without bosses towards the common good. Yet even before the threat to the continued existence of the Splinter becomes apparent the great man theory begins to emerge. First Zac and then his successor Roi embody the role of competent man (or, in the case of Roi, a rare instance of a competent woman), leading the effort, recruiting others to their cause, directing the intellectual and physical direction of their entire world. Indeed, even when they have recruited so many that virtually the whole world is involved in the effort, the structure suddenly becomes hierarchical with team leaders emerging.

Hard science fiction is not right wing propaganda, it is not written by right wing ideologues, but the world view that underpins hard SF conforms structurally to the world view that underpins right wing ideologies. It is a narrowly prescribed world where obedience to the laws is essential for survival, far outweighing in importance the individual needs and desires of any of the inhabitants of that world. It tends to be conservative: if the law of nature is a universal limitation on any action, revolution or even gradual change must be resisted. And it is a set-up in which great men are fated to emerge as leaders because they know best, and the masses should bend to their will for the good of all.

TAFF Report

Chris Garcia

Chapter 2:- Saturday- Keep Feeling Fascination

We arrived and were told that there were no gates for the plane to stop at, so we'd have to wait to find out when one was coming available. It turned out to be only a couple of minutes. Still, we had to drive all over the place to get there. We must have logged half-a-rally getting into the slip. I was happy when we managed to stop and get up, the hurting had returned to my ass, and I started the long wait until the moment I could get off the plane. Luckily, I did get off pretty quick after they let our class go through. One of the nice things was they helped me with my bag, which was neither heavy nor bulky, but the thought was nice.

I got off the plane and made my way through customs. Easy as pie. There was no hold up except I didn't know what the address of the place I was staying was. I just put Heathrow Radisson and they bought it. I was down to get my bag. The funny thing about that was I had no idea what the color of my bag was. I knew it had the Mervyn's price tag still on it and that was going to be how I got a hold on it. It came with the second batch from my plane. That was good enough. I would never survive without my bag since I had my CPAP, a most important thing, in there.

I found Mark Plummer, Claire Brialey and Mr. James Bacon waiting for me with a sign declaring me a Cultural Ambassador. That may be the scariest concept in the history of Man. I mean think about it: my way of Americanism representing the way of Americanism for everyone. TERROR. It was good to see them, as they were three of the few Brits I actually knew by face. I half-imagined that I wouldn't recognize anyone and just keep going on. Handshakes and hugs were exchanged. That's what people do when TAFF delegates arrive. They shake hands and they hug. Or drink. One of those things. We

headed into James' waiting car and headed off. Well, first we got to the wrong floor on the elevator, but who hasn't had that happen once in a while. Then we went to get gas, petrol as they call it in those parts, and the station that James was thinking of had closed. That was a bad thing. We made another circuit of the airport with James explaining the history of the place. For some reason, there was a sign stretched across the two lanes of the highway. The first part was The Future, spelt correctly in forwards fashion. The second part was The Past, only written backwards. That was kinda cool because we always went into The Future, which was proven because they had it painted on both sides of the sign. Sic Semper transitus.

Driving back, it struck me that the highway could have been one of the roads between Boston and New York or Atlanta and Greenville, even. Highways look alike. Mark kept pointing out these things that were small areas that he identified as Wales, a hill with sheep, and Scotland, an old garage. The funny thing was after about 20 minutes in the car, we came across a strange sight. On one of the overhead pedestrian walkways a horse, giant in my estimation, the kind of thing you'd see outlined in chalk on the top of ancient hills, made his way across. I was telling a story and then I broke it off and simply let things go on. This



whole thing was weird.

I wanted honest-to-Ghod English Pub food and Mark and Claire knew a little place. We headed there and parked. I realized I didn't know the proper UK crossing technique. It's easy to miss these things and end up flattened dead. We got in and the place didn't do food on Saturdays. These things happen. I liked the look of the place and in the minute between the time we arrived and the time we discovered that they didn't do food on Saturdays, James had managed to disappear

himself. It was quite a trick. I wonder if that's the kind of thing you learn on your TAFF trip; how to disappear within the blink of an eye. I really could use that skill in my arsenal. I had to remember to ask him. The guy at that Pub sent us down the road to another pub, where I got my fish and chips. The fish was sole, I believe, light and very tasty. The chips were exactly what I suspected, some crispy and some softer. You really can't go wrong either way. I mixed up Mayonnaise and ketchup for dipping. Those who just drizzle ketchup on fries, you're barbarians. Get with it! Dipping is the one true way...like Militant Islam.

We headed back to Mark and Claire's after that. James had wanted to watch a Rugby game, and I was interested too. I've watched Rugby, but I'm more of an Aussie Rules fan. This was a good game between England and Ireland. You might not know this, but Mr. Bacon is Irish. I almost wrote French. Can you believe that? I almost said James Bacon was from France. I'm glad I pulled back because I'm afraid he'd kill me. When we tuned in, Mark brought coffee and tea and the Irish were up 10 to 3. That didn't last. The English powered up and ended up ahead by half-time with a 17 to 10 lead. That's all they needed, but they added twenty more to make it a thrashing. The first half was very good rugby, fun to watch and easily understood. After that, it got to be a blowout. James went from understandably full of bravado to a bit sunken, as if he was being swallowed up by the couch. It was fun to watch a full sporting event on a different country's TV though. I HAVE TO ADMIT I didn't expect to be watching Rugby, but I WAS QUITE ENTERTAINED.

At the same time as that, we had random fannish small talk. Now, there's a lot of variety in what counts as random fannish small talk, ranging from simply talking about cons and what everyone did over the last few years to straight-up gossip. While there was some gossiping in our talking, mostly it was a stream of consciousness flow of ideas between an ebbing and flowing quadrangle of talkers. It was nice, because my body was in a form of rebellion. It refused to get tired and at the same time it refused to pump whatever I could use as energy. The odd thing was that no matter what I did, I was in the state where I wasn't going to get any worse nor any better, so being on couch chatting was the perfect activity. Mark and James and Claire were darn nice hosts. After James' terrible loss, he headed off and Mark and Claire and I chatted more. I love their house. I love any house that qualifies as much nicer than mine. They got all sorts of Nova awards, small and terribly cute little rockets, and they haven't put them into a scene where the awards are fighting one another. I'm hoping that my telling them to do so will result in some sort of mini-rocket space battle coming over Croydon, but who knows?

What's funny is that it felt no different than if I'd popped over to have an afternoon at Frank Wu's place. The universal activity of fandom is conversation and we're really good at it. It was strange how similar all the conversations were to the ones I'd have back home, though why I was surprised is a mystery. I mean, I guess it's that I'd expected it to be so much different than home, so much more...well, that's that's thing. I had no idea what to expect. I couldn't tell you how I thought things would be different, but I thought they would be. Isn't that how things go? I realize that this is more of a sign of the

way I think than the way things are, but in the end, can't you say that about everything. Marshall McLuhan would say so...but then again, look where it got him.

Mark, Claire and I enjoyed a lovely home cooked pasta dinner. Mark's a helluva cook and there were just enough peppers of the red and yellow variety to make me smile. And big ole meatballs to make the angry puma that lives in my stomach purr like a cervel. It was pleasant. We had some fine conversation where I introduced one of my great concepts: the stolen story. I pointed out that one of the great ideas I had years ago that I never managed was to start a website called And The Story Goes. The site would be full of stories that a person could claim as their own at a party and a board saying who was going to what party to tell which stories from the site so that you wouldn't get crosstalk on them. I have lots of fun ideas like that. I then, perhaps unwisely, uncorked a couple of stories of things that obviously had happened to me in the US recently, like the time Dave Kyle said I couldn't sit there or how I was the one that tried to build a tower of beer cans to the sky. Acting comically like a thought thief will usually get you a laugh. I simply wonder what would happen if we allowed people to do that for their own comical gains. Interesting.

I was tired. It was hitting me that I'd been awake with the exception of maybe 15 minutes over the last 26 hours. I was a very animated corpse of a husk of a shell of a man at the moment, but the couch was slowly swallowing me and it was getting to the point where I no longer needed to tell it to stop. Believe me, that sentence will make sense if you ask Mark or Claire about it. Go ahead, send them an e-mail now.

And of course, I wrote a couple of thousand words of this report while I was waiting for my body to accept it's inevitable slumber. The light of the iBook was all the light I needed to function by. How in the hell had I ever lived before I got it?

Off to bed I went, to sleep, perchance to dream. Would visions of Fanzines unborn dance around me in England as they did in America as I set myself down on my favorite possession: my highly uncomfortable couch? Only the night would tell me that.

Conquest of Another Country of Science Fiction

In October, 2008, my first short story, "*Les Lettres de Paston*," was published in Helix SF. Unfortunately, it was a magazine killer and at the time of publication, Helix's publishers announced that the October issue would be the final issue of the magazine. The story can currently be found on my own website at http://www.sfsite.com/~silverag/les_lettres_de_paston.htm.

To prove that sale wasn't a fluke, I've also sold another story, "Bats in Thebayou" to Kerrie Hughes and Martin Greenberg for the 2009 DAW Books anthology *Zombie Raccoons and Killer Bunnies*. The book has not yet appeared on the DAW Schedule, so keep checking your bookstore's shelves.

The Residence of the Wind

John Hertz

*hana chirasu
kaze no yadori wa
tare ka shiru
ware ni oshie yo
yukite uramin*

Does anyone know
The residence of the wind
That scatters the blossoms?
Anyone who knows, tell me!
I will go there and complain.
Sosei, tr. Donald Keene

This is the second half of my Japan report. I was sent to Nippon 2007, the 65th World Science Fiction Convention, first in Japan, first in Asia, by the one-time travel fund HANA, Hertz Across to Nippon Alliance (*hana* in Japanese is “flower” or “blossom”, a word much used in poetry), organized by Murray Moore at the 64th Worldcon, L.A.con IV. The first half, “The Worldcon I Saw”, appeared in *File 770* 152.

I give surnames last although that is Occidental custom not Japanese; I generally mention people by surname even if entitled to more honor; I try to mark the Japanese long vowel e.g. *Bashô* (although that is a literary name for this great poet, not his surname Matsuo).

I gratefully thank HANA donors, without whom.

日本地図



The Japanese Worldcon bid began in 2000—or 1996, when Takumi Shibano was Fan Guest of Honor at L.A.con III—or 1987, when he and Tetsu Yano received the Big Heart, our highest service award—or 1968, when TOFF the one-time Trans-Oceanic Fan Fund brought Shibano to the 26th Worldcon—or 1957, when he started *Uchûjin*, the first Japanese fanzine (its name means “cosmic dust”, and by a pun also “space man”)—or 1927, when he was born. I was one of the con’s Advisors, the only non-Japanese; plenty of time to learn the language, and work out how I could travel to Japan. Ha ha ha, ho ho ho. In fact the Cosmic Joker not only distracted me from those tasks, but deposited me in Japan anyway. Don’t you think the Joker laughs at you?

Nippon 2007 was the most ambitious Worldcon we’d ever held, except for the first one. We knew it would be strange, and it was, strange for Japanese, strange for visitors; we looked forward to that: are we not fen? The con was a great success, in which I include the many things that didn’t work, which was sometimes because they were strange, and the many things that did, which was sometimes because they were strange.

HANA raised enough that I had a week after the con in Japan if I was frugal. Until the end of the con I had no notion

how this would be spent. I could have turned tourist, but I hoped instead to put myself into the hands of Japanese fans. I had been told this would be impossible. But it wasn’t.

After Closing Ceremonies, in the crowd around Shibano, who was Fan Guest of Honor—very few have been made a Worldcon Guest of Honor twice—Mikiko Nakamura said she worked at the Bashô Museum. I exclaimed, “The Bashô Museum!” She said, “Yes, does that interest you?” Thus began the second half of my adventure.

Among the Japanese I’d been in touch with was Seiichi Shirato. Like me he was a fan of the graphic artist Eiji Yokoyama; when I’d urged that Yokoyama exhibit in Worldcon Art Shows, Shirato helped; when I wrote “A Look at Eiji Yokoyama” for *Science Fiction Chronicle* 248 (sorry the color pictures were printed in monochrome), Shirato helped. Like me he was a fan of the fermented-soybean dish *nattô*, which is so strange some Japanese won’t eat it. He lived in Tokyo and had said he’d show me around. We both feared this would be impossible. But it wasn’t.

On Tuesday Shirato arrived, with a friend Jôson Yamamoto, a Buddhist priest. What kind of Buddhist, I asked. Shingon, he said. I offered praise of Kûkai, the Great Teacher, who founded this school of Buddhism twelve centuries ago; many tales are told of him; he is credited with inventing *hiragana*, one of the three writing systems used in Japanese. Yamamoto had brought an automobile. As we drove along, he apologized for its noise. I said it was chanting Buddhist texts. He apologized for its shock-absorbers. I said comfort was an illusion. We passed a snake restaurant. Stopping there for supper was too strange even for these two Japanese. I said Yamamoto was exonerated because on the traditional calendar he had been born in the Year of the Snake.

Shirato arranged a week’s stay for me at an economy hotel, whose name retorted upon me amply. Like other fanziners I’m never sure who reads my fanzine, but quite a few people receive it, and in 2006 when I was nominated for Best Fanwriter someone in the Hugo ceremony projected pages of poor *Vanamonde*, so my association with APA writing, in particular APA-L, the Amateur Publishing Association of Los Angeles where *Van* appears each week before being later mailed to multitudes, must be known. In Japan my second-half home was the Tokyo-Itabashi neighborhood branch of a chain known by the initials of its English name Always Pleasant Amenities. I still have my laundry bag labeled *APA Hotel* and emblazoned, under a coronet, within a scroll and leaves, APA.

We fulfilled the hope Shirato and I had formed, and in retrospect decided had been a mutual promise, at a restaurant I thereafter called Science Fiction *Sushi*. It had a railroad. *Sushi* and other edibles passed in cars; you took what you wanted, and kept score. This was fun. You could signal the kitchen too. Not much *nattô*. Shirato and I each took some, to the unease of other customers. After years we ate *nattô*

together in Japan. Yamamoto wondered at the strange if simple joys of these two men he had innocently gone to dine with.

By railroad the Japanese would take me all over, indeed this tale could be called *Trains Over Tokyo*; the trains were plenty stfnal, to use our old adjective (“*stef-nal*”, a relic of Hugo Gernsback’s word *scientifiction*), automated, clean metal and plastic, prompt to the minute, high tech in the stations and the cars, full of readers including sober businessmen with comic books.

Wednesday; to the Edo-Tokyo Museum. Edo was renamed Tokyo (“Eastern capital”) when Emperor Meiji moved there from Kyoto. As a fanziner I was impressed by the accuracy of ten-color printing in an exhibit of woodblocks. We saw many pictures of Danjûrô VIII, eighth-generation actor to take that *kabuki* name, a great celebrity in his day. During the Worldcon a newspaper asked Danjûrô XII “Why do *kabuki* now?” He gave the proverb *On-ko chi-shin*, study the old to appreciate the new; the heart of my visit. Yamamoto and Shirato and I took turns hefting a fireman’s standard. An Edo fireman in the smoke and flame had to know where his company were. A pole held a large identifier on a crosspiece. It all had to be fireproof. It was heavy. You had to be fit to be a fireman. We snacked in the Museum sweet shop, cubelets of agar, beans, tea.

The Kiyosumi Garden had been Baron Iwasaki’s villa. He dug a pond and used his Mitsubishi ships to bring famous stones from every region of Japan. Stone appreciation is an art. After the 1923 earthquake and fire he restored what he could and in 1932 gave the land to Tokyo; the stones had survived. Here were Nakamura, Shigeru Hayashida one of two Worldcon vice-chairs, half a dozen others. We had umbrellas. A flat blue stone three people wide was like waves. A tall red one swirled like a waterfall. The wind made wavelets in the pond. Their patterns had names. Turtles and a dozen waterbirds lived there. Stepping-stones took us across. It is said that setting foot in Japan will leave you lonely for it forever.

*Tall red stone, flat blue,
Turtles breathing in Japan.
Sudden rain like pearls.*

I asked if we could look at the irises. People said “Why? It isn’t their season.” Irises are a May flower. As I explained I wanted to see where the irises had been, people realized I was talking about the 14th Century poet Kenkô, who said chrysanthemums are most beautiful when their edges start to brown. I could not remember the famous 8th Century iris poem, or its author Narihira, from the *Kokinshû* (*Book of Old and New Poems*), but Etsuko Kodama, who had been At-Con Registration, found both on her pocket computer. A stone with Bashô’s frog *haiku* carved in as a monument, originally on the bank of the Sumida River, had been moved here. Once water from the river fed the pond, whose water level changed with the ebb and flow of tides in Tokyo Bay. Today the pond is maintained by rainwater.

Upstairs at the Bashô Museum were replicas of his clothes, his traveling-hat, his writing-brush. Paper dolls a foot high

showed us. Nakamura asked me which of his *haiku* was my favorite. I said “Whichever one I re-read most recently.” They were all on a wall chart. Another chart showed the schools of *haiku* poets. We were in the Fukagawa district where his cottage was. A *bashô* tree (a kind of banana, no fruit, prized for broad green leaves easily torn by the slightest wind) stood where his had been, a statue of him sat. We watched the Sumida River where he had watched. This 17th Century master who lived before the modern word *haiku*, who only in his last decade was called Bashô, could paint the momentary, the timeless, and their meeting, in seventeen syllables.

I did not go to Kyoto, but some of it came timelessly, or timely, to me. “Zen Treasures from the Kyoto Gozan Temples”, an exhibit about to end at the Tokyo National Museum, honored the 600th death anniversary of Yoshimitsu Ashikaga, who while Shôgun (military ruler of the Empire, in an administration that lasted four centuries until Meiji) confirmed the Gozan (“five mountains”) system of top-ranked Zen Buddhist temples. He made a sixth by founding Shôkokuji, Nanzenji remaining highest. Many exhibits were outside their temples for the first time. The monk Dai-e Chikotsu (14th Century) in a painting and a statue was portly and fierce; anecdote says he challenged his master Enni; maybe his expression said “Stop fooling around, get Enlightenment now!” Of calligraphy by Soseki Musô (14th Century), garden designer, advisor to the Shôgun and the Emperor, teacher, poet, monk, our curator said “The vigorous and self-confident brush strokes suggest that this was written in the later years of his life.”

During the typhoon I was safe in my APA Hotel. I didn’t know it then, but my counterpart was wandering in the rain. I had been brought from the U.S., Chris O’Shea from the U.K. by JETS, the Japanese Expeditionary Travel Scholarship. We saw each other in person at the Worldcon for the first time. He will tell his own story.

*As I was going my way west
Farther than ever one day,
I met a traveler going east.
The world is round, they say.*



On the Saturday morning train we saw a Japanese woman wearing a dark top with sequins in English *Beauty Again*. We went in another friend's automobile to Kawago-e. Its fame is purple sweet-potato. We walked through streetsfull. Sweet-potato chips. Sweet-potato ice-cream along with shops dating to the Edo period. *Yokan*, a dense gel good with tea, elsewhere other flavors, here potato. Banners, elsewhere red, here purple. "Hello Kitty" dolls here in purple with slogans *I love potatoes*. Vending machines had run out of potato soft-drink; should we write to the Mayor? There was a baseball team; when its batters connected, had they hit the old potato? When they missed, did they turn purple? After this to the Tokyo Imperial Palace. The cherry trees were beautiful outside. In its museum, modern ceramics from the Emperor Shōwa's collection donated at his death.

I was invited to a *kimono* club, another good deed by Shibano's married daughter Miho Hiramoto. In Tokyo they met on its great street the Ginza. Once a year was a kimono-con and a kimono-zine. I had seen *kimono* everywhere, though prevailing dress was Occidental. Here they were a cloud of glory, some understated, some ablaze with color. It was the second week of autumn by the traditional calendar. *Kimono*, like other Japanese tradition, are very seasonal. The big Matsu-ya department store, named for pine trees at the front, had a crafts exhibit. Two quilted appliqué carp on blue cotton swam up a waterfall to become dragons. Another fabric picture, which I thought a space ship, was the point and ribs of an umbrella. In the men's section of the *kimono* department a *kimono* fan unerringly picked what I'd have bought if I were to get exactly one, in *kon*, a dark grayed blue. On a side street we visited a used-*kimono* shop.

Noriko Maki, wife of translator Shinji Maki, was a *kimono* expert and SF fan. She and I had practically no words in each other's language, but fans' minds meet. She is at my right in the picture on page 49 of *Uchūjin 201*; her report starts on p. 48, mine on p. 45. She steered me to the Akihabara district where a monthly SF club (not, I believe, the one she had been president of) was meeting over dinner. I happen to like fish, of which there was plenty in Japan. Also guidance in *saké*. In

three hours I tried Tengumai, Uragasumi (least dry), Ginban (made of famous Yamada-nishiki rice), Denshu, and Dewazakura (unpasteurized), which I did not think a heroic quantity but perhaps my friends were readily impressed.

On Sunday another SF club met at a coffee shop in Shinjuku, a district celebrated for its congeries of old and new, cheap and costly, neat and garish, large and small. I ate the house special, toast wrapped in seaweed. Before and at the Worldcon had been controversy about John Scalzi's being nominated for the Best Fanwriter Hugo. Now I was asked to explain. No one knew he would win in 2008, or would when accepting fail his shining opportunity to utter only the word "Whatever". He was certainly eligible, I began. When the shop chased us out we adjourned to a *karaoke* bar. Here I had honey toast, six inches thick with ice cream and caramel sauce. We had come as far as letters of comment. "So your fanzines are for communication!" a Japanese fan exclaimed. Afterward four or five stayed to sing. "This next one is from Heinlein's *Door Into Summer*," someone said; "you'll recognize the names Rikki-Tikki and Pete."

It was my last night in Japan. At a *sukiyaki* and *shabu-shabu* house we groped at borders. One fan said, "If you meet a ghost, and investigate, that's science fiction; if you make friends, that's fantasy." I felt I had not had enough *saké* so drank Masumi. From the SF point of view, we agreed, "pseudo-science" was a wholly literary problem; we were in the storytelling business, not the engineering business; if a thing should later prove possible, it was not retroactively science fiction, or if impossible, retroactively fantasy. We spoke of the Masquerade at SF conventions; watching and judging I had seen little that drew upon *nō* or *kabuki*—Masquerades even called stage helpers *ninja* (really strange to a Japanese) instead of *koken*, the established term in *kabuki* where they were invented; perhaps someday some entrant would portray an alien *geisha*. My friends confessed descending on restaurants in gangs, buying little food or drink, talking SF until all hours, and eventually having to find other restaurants. Some things are international.

Farewell to the Master

A month after his death was erroneously reported, Forrest J Ackerman shuffled off this mortal coil. Among fannish circles, Forry should need to introduction. My first encounter with him happened in Louisville, Kentucky at a Rivercon in 1994. I found myself sitting in front of 4E with a copy of his new anthology, *Reel Future* and asked him to autograph it. FSJ scrawled "*Reely Truly Yours*" and his name and then commented that he hadn't seen the book yet. I have no idea what the topic of the panel was, but I do remember that Dr. Acula spent the entire hour flipping through the pages of the book, as giddy as if it were the first time he had seen his name in print.

I didn't get to spend enough time with Forry, then or at my later meetings, but I do have the pleasant memories of meeting him multiple times and having dinner with him. My biggest regret is that Forry never published a full memoir collecting all the stories he's told about knowing the famous and not-so-famous fans, authors, and others who make up the world of science fiction.

My State's Politics

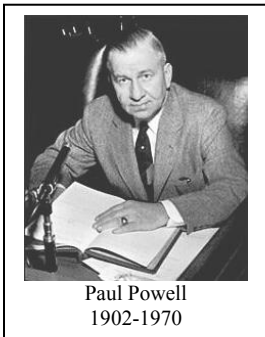
Steven H Silver

Illinois and our somewhat unique political culture has been in the news a little over the last couple months, first as one of our sitting Senators was elected President of the United States and then as our governor, Rod Blagojevich, was arrested for numerous crimes, most prominently attempting to sell Obama's vacant Senate seat.

It is, perhaps, a sad reflection on this history of my state that I read the accounts of Blagojevich's arrest and found myself less upset about the corruption behind the arrest than the stupidity it revealed. And as a note, I voted for Blagojevich for governor in both elections in which he ran, despite the fact that the investigation which eventually brought him down was already in place when he ran for reelection in 2006.

So you'll have a better understanding of my reaction, here are some of the heroes and anti-heroes of Illinois politics, going way back into the mists of Illinois history, which is nothing compared to those of you in England, but, hey, we've only been a state for 190 years.

Paul Powell



Paul Powell
1902-1970

Paul Powell was the Secretary of State from 1965-1970, when he died. His death was ultimately his undoing. When Powell died, his hotel room in Springfield, Illinois was examined by police and they discovered numerous shoeboxes filled with money. When it was all counted, Powell had boxed away \$800,000 in cash in his hotel room and had an estate worth \$3.2

million. Not bad for a public servant who never made more than \$30,000 a year in his life. Part of the problem was that when Powell was Secretary of State, the law stated that any payments made to the Secretary of State should be made to the name of the holder of that office rather than to the office title. That included all fees for recording deeds, buying licenses, etc. Obviously, that made it easy for a corrupt politician to cash the checks and keep whatever he wanted.

Following his death and discovery, Steve Goodman, whom I've mentioned here in the past, wrote a song called..."Paul Powell."

Paul Powell went to Springfield when he was just a boy
He was sworn to serve the people of the state of Illinois
He was sworn to serve 'em young he was sworn to serve 'em old
But he just served up bullshit and he kept all the gold

(chorus)

You're a thief you're a bum
Where's the money and how come

You lied to all the people Mr. Powell

For years there he enchanted us and we gave him the votes
And the ones we didn't give he bought with hundred dollar notes
He told us what we liked to hear and did a two time dance
And kept us in the pocket of his greasy grimey pants
(chorus)

He got elected Secretary of State and that gave him control
Of everything you need a permit for and those he promptly sold
To finance his campaigns and other sundry needs
The rest he shove in a shoebox in the closet with his tweeds
(chorus)

They say you can't take it with you but old Paul Powell he tried
But his secretary fumbled the ball on the night the old man died
The newspaper and radio gave us the awful news
How the old fart had picked us clean of everything we'd let loose
(chorus)

Paul Powell was laid to rest in a casket lined with gold
But his ghost lives on in other thieves or so I've been told
And there's crooks in every walk of life and this I know is true
But the biggest bums are some of the ones we give our power to
(chorus)

In the history of Illinois there's lots of mighty men
Altgeld and Abe Lincoln, Capone and some of them
And I know to slur a dead man's name is a terrible disgrace
So I wish he was alive today so I could tell his to his face
(chorus)

(chorus coda) you betrayed the public trust
And I hope that coffin rusts
And you don't come around to rob us any more

Mike Lawrence, who is the director of the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale, one commented on Powell in a fashion which seems to be the way most Illinoisans regard corruption: "Paul did a lot of good things for southern Illinois, including helping to build the university I work at. People were surprised about the amount of money. But there was sort of a sense if he gave us our share, what's wrong with him getting his share."

And that actually has quite a bit of truth to it. There seems to be the idea that there is good graft and bad graft. Good graft is someone who takes the money, power, whatever, stays bought, and actually works to do good things for the public. Bad graft are those who take from everyone without a sense of ethic (yeah, I know that probably sounds like an oxymoron) and is only out for himself.

Bathhouse John and Hinky Dink

In the early years of the twentieth century, each of Chicago's wards were represented by two aldermen. The first war had the dubious distinction of being represented by "Bathhouse" John Coughlin (from 1893-1938) and Michael "Hinky Dink" Kenna (from 1897-1923).

When Charles Yerkes, the transportation magnate for whom Yerkes Observatory is named, offered the two a bribe, Coughlin refused the bribe and reported it to Chicago Mayor Carter Harrison, Jr. His explanation to Harrison was that the bribe was for too much money. Bathhouse John's philosophy was that you got just a rich in the long run accepting small bribes and since they were small, people wouldn't care, making it less likely that you'd be brought to justice for it.

The two were also known for running the First Ward Ball, an annual fundraiser that raised at least \$50,000 a year for them until it was shut down in 1909 by reforming mayor Fred Busse. The ball brought together not only the power elite of the city, but also prostitutes, yeggs, gamblers, and others in an orgy of gluttony.

When The Chicago Tribune accused Bathhouse John of being corrupt, he wrote a scathing letter to the newspaper demanding a retraction, not of that claim, but of the erroneous statement that he had been born in the city of



Waukegan, Illinois.

When Chicago went to a single alderman per ward in 1923, Hinky Dink gave up his seat, while Bathhouse John stayed in his position until his death. When Hinky Dink died, he had set aside \$33,000 for a massive mausoleum. Instead, his family, proving themselves his descendents, pocketed the money and marked his grave with an \$85 tombstone.

Governors

Illinois went for more than 100 years before we first had a governor indicted. However, since four of our last eight governors have had legal problems, we now seem stuck with this reputation.

Lennington Small served as governor from 1921-1929. While governor, he was indicted for embezzling \$600,000 and money laundering, activities which occurred, not during his administration, but from his time as Illinois State Treasurer (1905-7/1917-9). Small went on trial, but was acquitted. The fact that four of the jurors were given well-paying government jobs following the trial can be chalked up to coincidence by all except the most minutely cynical.

Small also appointed Frank L. Smith to fill out the Senate seat left vacant by the death of Senator William B. McKinley (no relation to the president of the same name). Since Smith had defeated McKinley in the primary earlier in the year, and also won the general election held a month before McKinley's death, Small's appointment of Smith should have been a no brainer. When Smith arrived in Washington and gave his credentials to the Senate, they refused to accept them due to fraud and corruption in his election. Smith waited until the new Senate was scheduled to take its seat in March 1927 and again presented his credentials, this time as a duly elected, rather than appointed, Senator. He was again rejected by the Senate. Smith is the only appointed Senator to be rejected by the Senate since the Senate became a directly elected body. Despite never being allowed to take his seat, Smith didn't resign until February 9, 1928, when he was replaced by Otis Glenn, who beat Anton Cermak in a special election.

Coincidentally, the seat McKinley, Smith, and Glenn had was the same seat that Barack Obama held. Furthermore, in 1912, the Senate declared the election of Illinois Senator William Lorimer invalid for the same seat because one of the Assemblymen who had helped select Lorimer admitted to being paid \$1,000 for his vote.

Pay-to-Play, of course is at the heart of the case against Blagojevich, but it is nothing new. Otto Kerner, Jr., who served as governor from 1961-1968 and later served a partial sentence in the penitentiary, was discovered when Marge Lindheimer Everett admitted to bribing Kerner and Illinois Finance Director Ted Isaacs. Everett didn't role over them out of malice, but more of of a misunderstanding. She deducted the value of the stock she gave them as a business expense on her income tax, explaining later that she thought it was and ordinary and necessary business expense in Illinois.



Illinois Gubernatorial Hall of Shame

Lennington Small
1921-1929

Otto Kerner, Jr.
1961-1968

Daniel Walker
1973-1977

George Ryan
1999-2003

Rod Blagojevich
2003-

Kerner's immediate predecessor, William Stratton was charged with income tax evasion mid-way through Kerner's term, but was acquitted, although he didn't have any offices he could offer to the members of his jury.

Dan Walker served as governor from 1973 to 1977 and managed to make it through his entire term without being indicted. In fact, he took pride in being a reformer. In the wake of the Blagojevich arrest, he wrote in an editorial in the Chicago Tribune, "As the conviction of former Illinois Gov. George Ryan made clear, one of the worst abuses of power in state government is the use of state employees to raise money for the boss. Blagojevich brags about doing just that.

"Thirty-five years ago, I prohibited that rampant practice by executive order. Since then, governor after governor has engaged in it."

Walker's problems actually took place a decade after he left the state house, when he was found guilty of bank fraud revolving around a series of oil change outlets he owned. He was sentenced to seven years and served eighteen months. Outgoing President Bill Clinton refused him a pardon in 2001.

Our most recent former governor, George Ryan, famously halted all executions on death row, but also was a strong proponent of pay-to-play, and selling licenses when he was the Secretary of State. It was the later offense that brought headlines when a semi trailer driven by someone who had illegally obtained his license killed six children in an accident.

Theophilus W. Smith

As I write this, Blagojevich may be facing impeachment. If this happens, it will only be the second impeachment trial in Illinois history. The first happened in 1833 and was directed at Supreme Court Associate Justice Theophilus W. Smith, whose crime, apparently, was not the name his parents saddled him with, but rather oppressive conduct, corruption, and high misdemeanors.

Smith was acquitted, but he also had a tendency to make enemies. One of them, General James Semple, because his enemy when Semple courted one of Smith's daughters and Smith told Semple that he wasn't worthy of marrying the girl. Several years later, that must have caused some awkwardness with Semple served on the Supreme Court with Smith.

Smith also is known to have pulled a gun on Ninian Edwards. Edwards, who served as the last territorial governor of Illinois, as well as the third state governor and the first US Senator to hold what was Barack Obama's (and William

Lorimer's and Frank Smith's) Senate seat, grabbed the gun away from Smith and struck Smith across the face with it, breaking Smith's jaw and leaving a nasty scar.

Should Blagojevich be impeached, it is apparently the same rules that were drawn up for Smith's 1833 impeachment that will be used.

Rod Blagojevich

So Blagojevich is just the latest in a long line of corrupt politicians in Illinois. Unlike Bathhouse John and Hinky Dink Kenna, he wasn't flashy. Unlike others, he didn't do his job with the best interest of the citizens of Illinois, simply skimming off for himself while helping the public good. From the initial reports, Blagojevich was corrupt for his own sake, trying to raise money for his political future and to ensure the well-being of his own family, perhaps a noble cause, but not when one is extorting Children's Memorial Hospital in return for providing state funding.

And, given the Christmas period in which this is being published, I present a new Christmas Carok, sung to the tune of "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen." A friend passed this along, although the original source is unknown:

Get packin', Rod Blagojevich
The state's in disarray
The Tribune wants you unemployed
At least by Christmas Day.
The TV pundits want your head
Could there be pay to play?
Oh, tidings of comfort and joy
Save Illinois!
Oh, tidings of comfort and joy.

Good riddance Rod Blagojevich
Your Elvis look's inane,
The Senate's mad, so's Lisa's dad.
You drive us all insane.
Our transit's broke, the state's a joke,
The Tollway's one big pain.
Oh, tidings of comfort and joy
Save Illinois!
Oh, tidings of comfort and joy.

So fuck you Rod Blagojevich
The feds have quite a place.
Fitzgerald's poked his nose around
And if he has a case,
George Ryan's moving stuff around
Creating extra space.
Oh, tidings of comfort and joy
Save Illinois!
Oh, tidings of comfort and joy.

I could provide a long list of other corrupt Illinois politicians, or a long list of honest, hardworking Illinois politicians. We do have both kinds in Illinois, despite what current stories about the state would imply.



Why Sexy, Studly Vampires Suck

Pat Sayre McCoy

One of the literary trends that is very popular and becoming ever more popular is the vampire as love interest. This I find incomprehensible. I like my vampires as monsters. The haunted mountain passes and ruined castle, inhabited by a fiend, a threat to everyone nearby, that the villagers discuss in whispers while carefully looking over each shoulder, just in case. This is the best monster ever invented--most cultures I've read about have some form of life-draining corpse or ghost. If there is anything beyond or after death, no human knows it and many would rather never find out. Many people think they want to live forever. These monsters have made that possible for themselves. I've tried to read the modern literature, especially Stephanie Meyers, after taking a recent plane flight and discovering every high-school age girl carrying a copy of her latest book. The University of Chicago even bought the series! And the web is full of "Stephanie Meyers, the Next J.K. Rowling" discussions. So there must be something there, right?

Well, what ever it is, I've missed it. I know that in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, sex was part of the story, but *Dracula* was a scary story. No one wanted to become a vampire, and the undead were just that--undead. As in "not alive." Not breathing, not warm, not potent. Humans were never made to love that.

Let's look at this more closely for a minute. The Undead. The cold, not breathing, no heart beat, Undead. Most cultures fear the return of the dead and have elaborate rituals to keep them away and convince them to keep on going to where ever it is they go when they're dead. No one wants the Undead around. They're cannibals, blood-drinkers or soul-stealers. No matter how you spin the modern vampire, the fact remains that they have no life force of their own. They must steal it from somewhere. Yes, steal it. They don't ask--even the modern ones who wouldn't do something like that hunt for animals or eat blood puddings or old, discarded blood donations. But they hide it because they know what it is they are doing--and how most humans would react. Or draw off some living thing's life force. There are no rituals for giving them life or blood or breath. It's not supposed to work that way.

Nor on practical level, can I believe in the hot, sexy vampire. For one thing, they're cold. Really cold. Snuggling up to something as cold as the dead? How does that work, actually? Anything cold will draw heat from the nearest source of warmth--you in bed. And how long does this go on? Anyone ever die of hypothermia while making love to a vampire? Or in the "afterglow?" Cold lips, cold hands--not my idea of the perfect lover. Not to mention that the standard mythological vampire is not only sterile but impotent. There's a reason for that--no life force, no potency, no possibility of creating life. Scary stuff when you think on that.

And kissing--I remember a line from a Michael Longcor song about a werewolf "Do you know what it's like to eat somebody raw and never brush your teeth?" Well, do you?

Your vampire does. Or at least, she knows the taste of blood, and lots of it. Draining humans involves a lot of blood. Do they have extra-strong mouthwash or is there always a taste of something metallic and slightly rotten-sweet when you kiss? Can you smell blood on the vampire's breath--oh, wait, they have no breath. Good thing, because I don't think there is a breath mint strong enough for that kind of bad breath.

Granted, many vampires are supremely attractive (or can make their victims/lovers/companions) think they are. Clouding the mind is a standard vampire trick. But is that really love? If you can't see someone for what he is, can you really love him? And if the lover becomes a vampire too? Possible, yes, desirable? Probably not--what do you do with an immortal lover when you want a new one? Is love undying in that sense? Can the lover forgive the vampire for denying her the sun, warmth, family? How many of us would want to outlive not only our friends and family, but anyone who might ever remember us? When the only thing left is the thing that made you in the first place?

My final thought on vampire lovers is how they really see humans. Standard Undead see them as (take your pick)- 1) lesser life to be used as the vampire sees fit, 2) prey (see number one) or 3) a convenient source of life force (see 1 and 2). Is the relationship between a vampire and mortal ever an equal one? Does immortality and great age give the vampire sense of superiority (if only because they "lived" while others did not?). Can the human spirit adapt to immortality? Does it become so bored, so jaded, that nothing is important anymore? After outliving hundreds of mortals, do they begin to see themselves as more? More entitled, more privileged? Or worse, more desperate? Desperate for the one perfect being that will save them from an eternity of this? And what does that do to the lover who can never satisfy them?

No, I really can't imagine a sexy, studly vampire that I'd ever love--or even want to be close to. Maybe you have to have a secret death wish (or "Undeath" wish) to love a vampire. It's said that women like bad boys and I've never understood that one either. If love leads to death or lifelong loneliness, is it worth it? I don't think so. So I'll pass on the sexy vampires and look for a really great, old fashioned vampire story for those dark nights when I really want to be scared, but also want to wake up in the morning human when the book is finished. My monster vanishes with the sun--just like a vampire.



Notes from Film School

Zachary Charney Cohen

So I haven't been "home" in nigh a year now, and when talking about how I've spent the last twelve or so months of my life I hardly know where it would be appropriate to begin. As for where I am now - regardless of how I got here - I'm sitting comfortably in my sophomore year at USC; a cinematic arts student with six episodes of television and a music video under my belt and I get three calls a week, (if not more) from people who want to work with me. A year ago, I hadn't taken a single step off campus, nor had I even been accepted into the cinema program.

So what happened in between? I suppose the only real factor that ties this ridiculous series of events together is my desire. I don't have absolute faith in my decisions, especially after getting some real-life experience, but *two* years ago, all I fucking wanted to do with my life was make some movies.

During high school I was a wreck. Feeling oppressed by the "Do-what-you're-told-regardless-of-your-interest" educational policy, which went hand in hand with the "You're-a-kid-so-you-can't-be-a-professional" mentality that I encountered with a few of the key teachers of subjects I was interested in, namely theatre, I knew I needed to get out. I had known this since 6th grade of course, and always had seen college as the ultimate place for anyone interested in researching and reaching mastery over a subject of their choice. Unfortunately, I was terrible at communicating this. Thusly, all of my friends born and raised with the mentalities that so bothered me, just saw me as angry, depressed, and a burden to be around. All of my closest personal relationships went to shit. This, and other factors, led to me arriving in L.A. feeling quite miffed, lost, and lonely and somewhere over the course of my first year, for reasons that are unfathomable to me, ultimately led to my beloved girlfriend of three years bailing on me.

So there I was, three-quarters of the way into my first year at a new school, in a new town, on my own for the first time -- and things suck. After a few hard months though, and countless 3:00 AM walks on campus, I finally came to remember that I had come here for a purpose, and that for better or worse, I should try and bury myself in work. Not only to distract myself from the drama, but to improve my position by exercising control over what I *could* control. I found I was very capable of expressing to people my interest in finding a job, and recalled a few people mentioning projects that sounded interesting to me. I shot off a few emails, poking a few folks, and ended up with what was probably more than I had bargained for.

One of my father's best and oldest friends from high school also attended M.I.T. with him, and went on to start his own company, which these days, just so happens to be working on a new solution for the logistical management of a film's production -- a system designed to compete with the current industry standard. Around the end of that school year, the company was taking on several real customers to do a beta

test for development of the software, and one of the more progressive producers decided to fully implement the software on his upcoming project. However, neither party felt comfortable doing a test without representation or the presence of trained assistance, and thusly my position was born. I was to be hired as a Production Assistant by the production company, and also expected to simultaneously act as the "eyes and ears" on the ground for the software company, and provide on-set and in-office technical support for this new program. After a few emails back and forth, and an interview, my first day "on the lot" was in late April, with the show in prep for production. School ended a month later, and after that, when summer finally hit, everything got very complicated and very fuzzy.

When compiling in my head the story of "What I Did Over My Summer Vacation," due to sleep deprivation and the mental blocks I've been working on, it comes out more like a disjointed laundry list of events; highs, lows, oddities, and a bunch of lovable and despicable characters. Mainly, I was working on an independently produced and funded television show, but even in trying to get through my "day-to-day" life, I kept happening into ridiculous situations, resulting in all sorts of silly experiences. Once, I got picked up by the cops on Catalina for looking underage, and ended up taking a three hour ride in the front seat of the Police Cruiser getting a tour of all the island hotspots and nefarious hangouts. On set, I got to wear a Steadicam with a RED. Days later, I picked up seven Irish girls on a ferry ride, and promptly called my best friend so we could go back to their apartment. I got a few other phone numbers too. [winks for effect] I mean hell; my first time driving in L.A. was in one of my bosses "Jags" down Hollywood Blvd.

However, all this is the sort of adventurous, independent, and glorified version of what went on in my life. I have no qualms about the old cliché; it's alive and well -- Everyone and their hairdresser in this town want to be famous -- but reality doesn't play out like an episode of "Entourage." So herein is the inglorious truth; since I didn't have a place in L.A. over the beginning of the summer, I lived in an annex room of my middle-aged boss' house, getting barked at by his two dogs. (Not my dad's friend mind you, but another employee of the software company, whom through the course of events I found out was single and gay. Awkward much?) Every morning I would walk a mile, (usually run, because I woke up late or the bus simply wouldn't come), and then take the metro, and then a second bus, all to get to work. Reverse for the trek home. Then, when we moved to Catalina Island to shoot the show, I was told to completely vacate my bosses house and move the entirety of my college belongings. This would have been completely fine, if he had given me more than a few days notice. From then on, I spent most of my time hauling my shit around on public transportation which, by the way, is pretty good in L.A. if you plan a little in advance. I skipped from couch to couch, not knowing, when I got off the

island for the weekends, where I was going to sleep. And yes, my parents knew all of this, before and during. They just asked me to call in at least every four days, to confirm I was still alive.

Now, at first, a summer that allowed me the chance to avoid going home, and to avoid dealing with social drama, and to ACTUALLY GET PAID, FOR THE FIRST TIME, TO WORK ON A FREAKING “FILM,” NOT TO MENTION TO HAVE AN “ALL EXPENSES PAID” STAY ON A PACIFIC ISLAND, sounded, well, FUCKING AMAZING.

At first.

Until I realized the following:

- Working on movies is difficult.
- I had absolutely no chance at any romance because my only female peer was a lesbian. (Cruel irony.)
- Everyone else I worked with was hardened by the industry, and many were cruelly bent on ~~being a total dick to~~ hardening the young, impressionable newbie.
- There is a 10:00 PM curfew on Catalina Island for kids under the age of eighteen. (P.S. I don't look over eighteen when I shave.)
- There is virtually nothing to do on Catalina Island during weeknights when there are not parties or tourists EXCEPT to go to a local bar and get hammered.
- There is only one movie theatre on the island. It was built in the 30's to show silent films, and hasn't been updated since.
- Kids on Catalina haven't heard of the internet.
- Due to the above four bulleted statements, NO TEENAGER IN THEIR RIGHT MIND *stays* on that godforsaken island for a minute longer than they are absolutely required to, so there was no-one for me to befriend.
- With nothing to do, and no one around that I could hang out with, my only leisure activity was work, and my only escape was the internet. My only internet access was *at* work, so I would *stay* and *work* 'til ungodly hours; every night.
- Work would always last 'til at least nine, and the only restaurant open on weekdays past nine is Antonio's Pizzeria.
- You can only eat so many slices of pizza and orders Buffalo wings, even if you ARE a boy in college.
- Just because someone lives on an island where buffalo *actually* live, doesn't mean they actually know what Buffalo wings are supposed to resemble.

Life on Catalina was pretty crazy. The place is really odd. The entire island is populated with USC and UCLA alum living *side by side*. If the seas are rough, then the one Vons (grocery) on the island doesn't get stocked, and everyone goes without for a few days. Also, a lot of people there can't really give you a receipt for services rendered, because, well, uh, they can't really have a real name written on a traceable receipt. If you catch my drift... *ahem* IRS *ahem* Also, ***everything*** is owned by an “old-boys club”, so we constantly dealt with the same three businessmen over and over again when finding locations. And eating. And sleeping. And *leaving*.

But otherwise, nothing else about the work was really monumental or momentous. We made a TV show. Six episodes. This isn't to say the *show* isn't momentous, or at the very least, good. I'm sure it is. After just recently seeing some final processed and graded footage, (we shot on RED and I spend half of my waking hours trying to figure out how to afford me one of those things), I can say without a doubt that the show *looks* great. That, and everyone seemed to know what they were doing during production, and I'm sure that if I had actually taken the time to read the scripts... that I would have enjoyed them. Alas, I didn't. I was happy to have a job, and was terrified that if I didn't like the story, I would become disheartened, and want to leave the project, so I never bothered to find out. I also learned that next time, and from here on out, I really *should* bother. I can say though, without sarcasm or reservation, that a few good people put a lot of time and effort into the show, and that I will definitely watch it, if only for that reason, when it goes on the air. And at the very least, when it does get picked up, you should all check out the pilot.

At the end of the shoot, I finally got the chance to live it up and enjoy myself a bit. A day after the shoot was over, I started production on a music video for Lifehouse, helping my friend, Tony Bushman, the producer of the video, and a grad student at SC. On *that* set, I flirted with girls my age, but only an *hour* after that shoot wrapped, I was on a plane to San Francisco to debrief with the software company. I got put up in a very nice hotel, and was treated to lunch and some personal chat time with my dad's friend.

Overall I made around nine grand. Not a bad summer by any means. But for those of you inspired to leave your homes, and come down here to try your hand, there are a few things you should remember. You can't love sleep, and you have to be able to breathe chaos. Start times change daily, environments are unpredictable, and everybody has their territory and “artistic” opinion. The career, the lack of security and the environment are especially hard on people and relationships. (They say not to hire a guy unless he's been divorced. At least twice.) Oh, and don't be caught dead without a pen and a good pair of gloves.

Anyway, though, it's not that Hollywood isn't hiring. There's plenty of work for those who want it, and there's a lot to be said for putting one's self in the right environment. It's just that, sans luck, you have to be willing to sleep, every night, on the doorstep of someone who you think can put you to work, and then be ready to deliver when given your opportunity.

I was probably just lucky.

By the way, the show is called “twentysixmiles.” It stars John Schneider (Bo Duke), and guest stars John Billingsley (Dr. Phlox, for you sci-fi fans) And of course, I'm in the show too. If only in the background... in a tracking shot... for three frames... in Episode three... standing in front of a light.

Dusting for Fingerprints: How a Determined Researcher Stumbled Across the Clues that Unlocked the Creative Process of Lewis, Tolkien, and the Inklings

Diana Glycer

It's Thursday night, and it's dark and cold and rainy, as usual. Dinner time is past. Lights are coming on. And one by one, the members of the club are making their way across campus to the New Buildings at Magdalen College, Oxford. They hurry along the stone archways, turn through the doorway, and go up staircase three. They enter a large, open sitting room, stamping wet boots, shaking off raincoats, warming hands by the small coal fire. C. S. Lewis bids them welcome. Tolkien takes a seat and fusses over the large, unwieldy stack of loose pages he has brought with him. Hugo Dyson helps himself to a drink, then turns to share a joke with Humphrey Havard. Charles Williams lights a cigarette and fidgets. Warren Lewis looks around, notes the time, and shuts the door.

It's a meeting of the Inklings, and this is a closed group, strictly members only.

People have often remarked that they would love to be a fly on the wall, listening to these guys read their stories out loud and discuss their work and argue late, late into the night. But where--exactly where--would a person have to look in order to get those kinds of details and find out what they said? That was the challenge I faced when I first began to read and write about this group.

There are plenty of books that mention the Inklings, but for the most part, their accounts are pretty shallow. Even Humphrey Carpenter, who published *Tolkien: A Biography* in 1977 and *The Inklings* in 1979, didn't answer my most basic questions: When they gathered on Thursday night, what did Lewis, Tolkien, and the other Inklings actually say to each other? And what difference did it make to the text of their stories?

I needed detailed information, and, as much as possible, I wanted to avoid the speculations and interpretations of other people and get it straight from the members themselves. At first, it didn't look very promising. They didn't elect a club secretary, there wasn't any kind of paper agenda, and none of the members kept minutes or took notes. In fact, there were no official records of any kind, and none of members wrote or published summaries, reports, or proceedings.

All of this was really daunting. Then I discovered that there is first-hand information; in fact, there's quite a bit of it. It's just scattered all over the place. Warren Lewis kept a diary. Lewis and Tolkien and Williams wrote a lot of letters; some are published, and some are stored in libraries and special collections. And, thank God, many of their hand-

written heavily-annotated manuscripts have also been preserved.

So I started with Warren Lewis's diary. I wanted to verify the basic facts and get the overall shape of club meetings: when, who, what, where. That gave me the big picture, a broad outline to work from.

Then I started reading through all those letters. Day after day I'd read and read and read, picking my way through descriptions of family matters and travel plans and school politics and household chores. Then suddenly I'd stumble across a reference to the Inklings. Maybe I'd see some mention of a member or a description of a meeting, maybe an

account of some writerly advice, or even an irritated retort to some disagreement that had taken place last time the members got together.

I can remember one such moment, something I stumbled across early in my research. At the time, I was working my way step by step through Tolkien's letters.

January 4, 1937: Tolkien has recovered from the flu and is finishing *The Hobbit*.

September 21, 1937: *The Hobbit* is published. The reviews are glowing, the sales are brisk, and, as a result, the readers are restless. The book is selling so well that his publisher, Stanley Unwin, does what publishers always do: he demands a sequel.

October 14, 1937: Tolkien growls, "I cannot think of anything more to say about hobbits."

December 16, 1937: Tolkien promises to try to write something about hobbits.

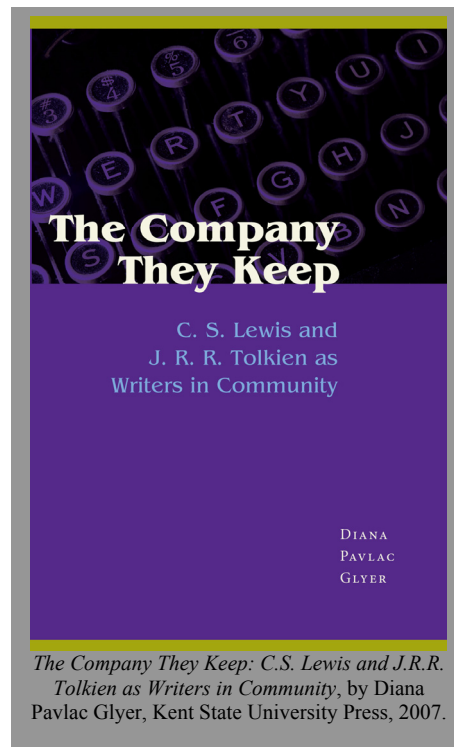
March 4, 1938: Tolkien has drafted three chapters of a new story about

hobbits. He shows it to C. S. Lewis and also to his son Christopher Tolkien, and they both like it "well enough to say that they think it is better than *The Hobbit*."

April and May: Stanley Unwin pesters Tolkien for more chapters. Tolkien ignores him.

June 4, 1938: Tolkien relents and decides to send Unwin a brief progress report. He hems and haws and finally confesses, "I have not had a chance to touch any story-writing since the Christmas vacation."

Christmas vacation. It's been more than five months. If that is bad news for a publisher, the next part is even worse. Tolkien tells Unwin that instead of drafting more material, he has decided to turn back and revise the first three chapters. He has been thinking about the "excellent criticism" he has received from his readers. C. S. Lewis is one of those readers, and Lewis thinks that there is too much dialogue, too much



chatter, too much silly “hobbit talk.” All this dialogue is dragging down the story line.

Tolkien grumbles, “The trouble is that ‘hobbit talk’ amuses me,” he says, “more than adventures; but I must curb this severely.”

Whoa. I have been spending day after day in the library, sitting on a wooden chair, keeping my nose in the book, turning pages, jotting notes. Then out of the blue I run smack into something like this. Here it is in black and white: here it is, primary evidence that Lewis was involved with the very first draft of the very first chapters of *The Lord of the Rings*. Lewis read the chapters, liked the story, and encouraged Tolkien. He also took the time to critique it and make specific suggestions for its improvement. And Tolkien sounds like he is really pleased with all this feedback.

This is terrific. But I’m not done yet. I’m thrilled by these discoveries, but they just lead me on to the Next Big Question: What happened next? What did Tolkien do? Did he actually follow Lewis’s advice?

To find the answer, I turned away from the letters, rolled up my sleeves, and turned my attention to the manuscripts themselves. In this case, the detective work was pretty simple and straightforward: find out exactly when Lewis criticized that text, find a copy of that early draft, and then compare it side-by-side with the revised version.

Here: take a look. Here’s an excerpt, a short section from chapter three of *The Lord of the Rings*. At this point in the story, The Hobbits are dividing up their personal belongings and stuffing them into heavy backpacks as they prepare to leave Hobbiton behind and begin their adventures.

Tolkien’s Early Draft:

“Be kind to a poor ruined Hobbit!” laughed Bingo. “I shall be thin as a willow-wand, I’m sure, before a week is out. But now what about it? Let’s have a council! What shall we do first?”

“I thought that was settled,” said Odo. “Surely we have got to pick up Marmaduke first of all?”

“O yes! I didn’t mean that,” said Bingo. “I meant: what about this evening? Shall we walk a little or a lot? All night or not at all?”

“We’d better find some snug corner in a haystack, or somewhere, and turn in soon,” said Odo. “We shall do more tomorrow, if we start fresh.”

“Let’s put a bit of the road behind us tonight,” said Frodo. “I want to get away from Hobbiton. Besides it’s jolly under the stars, and cool.”

“I vote for Frodo,” said Bingo. And so they started, shouldering

their packs, and swinging their stout sticks. They went very quietly over fields and along hedgerows and the borders of coppices, until night fell. In their dark grey cloaks they were invisible without the help of any magic rings, and since they were all hobbits, they made no noise that even hobbits would hear (or indeed even wild creatures in the woods and fields). (*Return of the Shadow*, pages 49-50)

Tolkien’s Revised Version:

“Be kind to a poor old hobbit!” laughed Frodo. “I shall be as thin as a willow-wand, I’m sure, before I get to Buckland. But I was talking nonsense. I suspect you have taken more than your share, Sam, and I shall look into at our next packing.” He picked up his stick again. “Well, we all like walking in the dark,” he said, “so let’s put some miles behind us before bed.”

For a short way they followed the lane westwards. Then leaving it they turned left and took quietly to the fields again. They went in single file along hedgerows and the borders of coppices, and night fell dark about them. In their dark cloaks they were as invisible as if they all had magic rings. Since they were all hobbits, and were trying to be silent, they made no noise that even hobbits would hear. Even the wild things in the fields and woods hardly noticed their passing. (*The Fellowship of the Ring*, pages 69-70)

It takes Tolkien 211 words to cover this material in the draft, but only 161 words in the revised version. The revision is shorter, tighter, clearer. That’s good, but what’s even more striking is how dramatically the proportions have changed. There are 130 words of dialogue in the draft, 62% percent of the whole. In contrast, there are only 63 words of dialogue in the revision, 39% percent of the whole. When Tolkien rewrote this material, he made significant changes.

Tolkien’s work in this short segment is characteristic of his work on all three chapters. Page after page, he chops out the chatty sections, and picks up the action. Even though he personally prefers a story with much more dialogue, he still bows to his critics and creates a tale with less.

As he revises, he also makes small but elegant refinements

throughout the narrative. The biggest change is in the relative proportions of dialogue and action, and the dramatic way that changes the pace of the story. But I can’t help noticing how much better the style is in the revised version, how the details are not only paint a better picture, but also sound just right.

And, of course, I can’t help noticing other changes, too. Perhaps most obvious is that Tolkien changes the names and relationships of the characters. In the first draft, the story centers on



C.S. Lewis

J.R.R. Tolkien

Bingo (son of Bilbo), who sets out with two companions (Odo Took and Frodo Took). As Tolkien rethinks and revises, Bingo becomes Frodo, the nephew of Bilbo, and Frodo Baggins is joined by his friends Sam Gamgee and Peregrine Took. I wonder--would *The Lord of the Rings* have become such a sensation if the main character had been called Bingo all along?!



There are many other changes in the various versions of the manuscript. Tolkien revised and improved his material constantly, through draft after draft, and many different readers made suggestions and had input along the way. As I did my work, it was really tempting to try to document all of these changes and chase down all of these influencers. But for this project, I wanted to find out what the Inklings said, and I wanted to document the difference they made. So I tried to stay focused. In looking at these three chapters, I wanted to trace the impact of one specific comment. Lewis told Tolkien to cut down the chatter. Did he? Yes, without question, the physical changes in the manuscript show that he most certainly did. And the timing of events shows that Tolkien was responding to Lewis's comments when he did it.

That, in a nutshell, was my process of doing research for *The Company They Keep*. I read through all of the letters of Lewis and Tolkien and Williams, looking for any references to what they read to the Inklings, and what advice they were given. Every time I came across something specific, I'd hunt down the manuscripts. If drafts and revisions were available, I'd compare them to see what changes they made. If only their published work was available, I'd study that to see if there were clues in the writing style or the content, anything that

might bear the mark of influence. After I'd worked out the connections, I'd study further on in their letters and diaries to see if there was any corroborating evidence for suggestions made and advice followed.

What I found, time and again, was that the Inklings made lots of recommendations, and much of what they said got incorporated into their texts. Some changes were big: Lewis suggested that *The Lord of the Rings* would be more interesting if there was more danger; several days later, the Black Riders are added to the story. Tolkien complained that *Out of the Silent Planet* suffered from narrative inconsistencies; Lewis fixed them. All of the Inklings hated Charles Williams's novel *The Noises That Weren't There*; he abandoned the project.

Some were quite small: Owen Barfield, a solicitor, scolded Lewis for having his fictional characters disappear into a wardrobe. He feared that parents all over England would sue the author when their children read the Narnia stories and responded by hiding in closets and locking the door behind them. Lewis took this legal counsel to heart and remedied the situation by adding a warning—it appears five times in the text—that kids should not try this at home.

There are even a few instances where the Inklings actually rewrote sections of each other's stuff. The clearest example is a long poem by Tolkien called *The Lay of Leithian*.

We have Tolkien's rough draft and Lewis's long written critique, and Tolkien's revised version. Compare them side by side, and there it is: a number of lines in Tolkien's final version of the poem were written by C. S. Lewis.

These comparisons were the heart of my study of the Inklings. I wasn't a fly on the wall at their meetings, I didn't get to eavesdrop on their conversations, I never took a seat in that large and cheerful sitting room at the top of staircase three. But in the pages of their letters and diaries and ink-stained manuscripts, I saw firsthand the rhythms of their creative life together: inventing, drafting, reading, talking, advising, correcting, editing, revising, encouraging. It is a story that thrills me every time I tell it. It is an example of creative collaboration that inspires me still.



An Interview with Michael A. Burstein

Steven H Silver

*Since 1995, you've published numerous short stories and you've also published two issues of the fanzine *Burstzine*. Do you consider yourself primarily an author or a fan?*

MAB: I've always been a fan of science fiction, as far back as I can recall, and even at a young age I was writing stories and trying to sell them to the major science fiction magazines. So I guess I'd have to say that the two roles are intertwined for me.

I haven't been as active a fan in recent years as I'd like to be, if by fan you mean someone who regularly participates in fanac. Nomi (my wife) and I used to be much more involved, but after the first two issues of *Burstzine* we found ourselves drifting away. At the very least, though, we still attend conventions and we maintain our membership in NESFA. (I think I'm still a member of the Lunarians as well, but they kept forgetting to send me dues renewal notices, so I kept forgetting to pay my dues.)

What role do you see science fiction conventions as having for beginning and mid-list authors?

MAB: Science fiction conventions are a wonderful place for writers to meet fans and other writers. I don't think attending conventions will get a writer onto a bestseller list, but they do help you make friendships that can be personally rewarding and connections that can pay off down the line. I don't think I can point at a specific event at a convention that I can say led to a business opportunity for me, but I can say that going to conventions, I feel the warm embrace of a welcoming community.

You've said that Isaac Asimov was a major inspiration to you. How did he affect your writing career and which other authors do you feel you owe a debt to?

MAB: I could write a whole article about Isaac Asimov. Come to think of it, I have, for the fanzine *Mimosa*, and it's available on my website. It would be far too long to reproduce here. But the short version is that Asimov, being as prolific and open about his life as he was, gave the rest of us a blueprint to follow if we wanted to do so. I could probably say more about Asimov and his influence on me (such as readability) if you wanted to ask some more specific questions.

You won the John W. Campbell Award in 1995, your first year of eligibility. What type of affect did the award have on your career?

MAB: The award gave me a lot of name recognition that I would not have had otherwise. I suspect that winning it resulted directly in the subsequent award nominations I received.

Do you still read science fiction in your free time? If so, what current authors are you reading?

MAB: I find myself reading a lot more nonfiction than fiction at the moment; I've been especially fascinated by the Dover, Pennsylvania evolution case and I've been reading all the books I can on that case.

In terms of science fiction, I hesitate to list any authors as invariably I will leave some names out. But the names that first come to mind are Robert J. Sawyer, Paul Levinson, Spider Robinson, Mike Resnick, Allen M. Steele, and Jack McDevitt. I recently finished Melinda Snodgrass's new book, *The Edge of Reason*, and enjoyed it a lot. And if Mona Cleo ever publishes another book, I'm there. Someone really ought to reprint her novels *Branch Point* and *Overshoot* in nice hardcover editions.

What science journals form the basis of your reading material?

MAB: Primarily *New Scientist*, *Scientific American*, *Discover*, and the *American Journal of Physics* when I can find it. Also, the *Annals of Irreproducible Results* is quite valuable. And I think I'd place *Analog* among those, since they publish science as well as science fiction.

Your religion plays an enormous role in many of your short stories, however science fiction, as a literature and as a fannish entity, can, at times, be intolerant of established religions. Have you ever received negative responses based on reader intolerance?

MAB: The only negative response I can recall is from a letter to *Analog* that Stan Schmidt shared with me shortly after my story "Reality Check" came out. The reader objected to how much I concentrated on some of the minutiae in the religious observance of the Orthodox Jewish main character. Both Stan and I agreed, however, that it was necessary to explore the character's development throughout the story.

The fact is that most fans are tolerant to read about other cultures; if they weren't, they wouldn't be reading science fiction! Although I had some interesting feedback regarding "Sanctuary." Many Catholic fans were delighted by the story, and how much I got right in their religion. But one critic complained that I was being too easy on the Catholic Church when I had my main character—a priest—speak in a forgiving way about how the Church treated Galileo. I suspect that critic made the classic blunder of mixing up an author's beliefs with those of his characters.

How do you research the religious questions your stories raise?

MAB: For Jewish questions, there's one particular Orthodox rabbi I tend to consult, since he's also a science fiction reader. In the case of "Sanctuary," I went around

asking every single Catholic science fiction reader I knew if they'd look over the story. Providence sent Brother Guy Consolmagno to Boskone as I was working on the story, and he ended up being most helpful in vetting my story for the Catholic ritual and belief. Anything I got right, I have to credit to him.

In your story "The Cold Calculations," you took on one of the most famous stories in science fiction, and provided an alternative to the result written by Tom Godwin and sanctioned by John Campbell. Did doing so make you feel any responsibility to the original story?

MAB: I don't know if I would call the feeling "responsibility." I suspect that many science fiction writers have looked at "The Cold Equations" and tried to figure out another solution to it. That was really all I was trying to do. Perhaps, unconsciously, we're all still uncomfortable with a story that presents a no-win scenario.

Up to now, all of your published work has been short fiction. What path would you like to see your career go in the future?

MAB: It would be nice to publish a novel one of these days, and I would love to write for comics as well. Also, I wouldn't mind being given the opportunity to edit a science fiction novel line or a science fiction magazine or webzine. As it is, besides being a writer, I have a few years of experience as an editor, and I'm about to earn a Certificate in Book Publishing from Boston University. So I'm probably qualified to edit as well as write, especially since I know more about the business side of publishing than I'd expect the average writer would know.

Nearly all of your stories are stand-alones, although you did revisit "TeleAbsence" after ten years. Do you see yourself writing sequels or expansions to any of your other stories?

MAB: It's odd; even though most of my stories are, as you say, stand-alones, the three "Broken Symmetry" stories have been some of my most popular sellers on Fictionwise. I would love to write sequels to some of my other stories; in fact, Bob Greenberger and I are working on a sequel to our collaboration "Things That Aren't." The problem with writing a sequel, though, is that I tend to try to follow the piece of advice that says that a short story should be about the most important incident in a character's life. And once you've written about that incident, it's hard to justify writing about something less important.

You have ten Hugo and three Nebula nominations for your short fiction. When writing a story do you ever have the feeling that there is something about that story that will draw the attention of any of the voters?

MAB: Sometimes, when a story is flowing, or the theme is a significant one, I get the feeling that the story will end up resonating with readers as much as it did with me. I wasn't surprised that "Kaddish for the Last Survivor" ended up on the Hugo and Nebula ballots, nor was I surprised that "Paying It Forward" ended up on the Hugo ballot (although I would have expected the Nebula ballot to be a more likely placement for

that story). In most cases, though, I've been surprised that a story of mine has made it to an award ballot. In any event, whenever a story of mine gets nominated for an award, I am always grateful.

As someone who has taught physics in high school, what responsibility do you feel you have to your students (or readers in general) when writing fiction?

MAB: I'm not quite sure what you mean. If you're asking about my responsibility to get the science right, I feel that I do have some responsibility in that direction. But the fact is that science fiction stories have to entertain first, before they educate.

You've published several collaborations, with Charles Ardai, Robert Greenberger, Joseph Lazzaro, Mike Resnick, Shane Tourtellotte, and Lawrence Weinberg. How did those come about and how did the process differ with each co-author?

MAB: Each one would be a long story. And you're leaving out my collaboration with Stanley Schmidt. But let's see if I can remember...

Charles Ardai is a friend from way back; we've known each other since I was eleven and he was twelve. In that case, I asked Charles if he had any unfinished science fiction stories kicking around. He gave me something that resembled the first half of "Nor Through Inaction." I wrote the second half, he rewrote the whole story, I rewrote it again, and that was it.

I don't recall how Joe and I ended up collaborating on "The Turing Testers," but I think it was because he knew where the story should go.

Mike Resnick enjoys collaborating with his fellow writers, and he asked me to work on "Reflections in Black Granite" with him. I found it a valuable experience, as he brought an understanding to the story that I myself lacked (although the underlying idea had been mine).

The collaboration with Shane was a great experience for both of us. We were both interested in working together, but we needed an idea for a story. At some Lunacon, we shared a hotel room, and Shane brought with him the beginning of the idea for "Bug Out!" As soon as I heard the idea, I started to contribute more ideas to go along with it, Shane did as well, and we realized that this story would work as a collaboration.

The only problem we had was that I'm inherently a nonlinear writer. Shane, on the other hand, likes to start a story from the first word and keep writing until he reaches the end. But since we both work with outlines, we decided to write an outline for the story first, with each scene numbered. Then one of us took the odd-numbered scenes and the other one took the even-numbered scenes. That way, I could bounce around within my scenes and write whatever I wanted on a particular day, while Shane could write all his scenes from beginning to end. Then we figured we would trade scenes and rewrite each other. And that led to an interesting development.

There was a plot point that I knew would be needed in an earlier scene of Shane's for one of my later scenes to

work. So I wrote that scene assuming that the plot point existed, and I figured I'd add it myself when I reviewed that scene.

To my surprise and delight, when I got that scene from Shane I discovered that he had already added the plot point! As he had been writing that scene, he realized the necessity of that point as well, and so he added it and figured he would add the following events when reviewing my later scene. If anything was proof that we had chosen the right story to collaborate on, it was that synchronicity.

I don't recall how Lawrence Weinberg and I ended up collaborating on "Debunking the Faith Healer," but I seem to recall that he had the initial idea for the story.

You finally have a collection of short stories, I Remember the Future, that recently came out from Apex. How did this collection come about?

MAB: Jennifer Pelland, a very good friend, was having her first collection published by Apex, and she mentioned to the publisher, Jason Sizemore, that I had a bunch of stories that might work well as a collection. Jason got in touch, and I sent him a selection of my stories, and bless his heart, he agreed with Jen. We discussed what kind of collection to do, and in the end, Jason felt that a collection of my award nominees would be the most logical, even though it meant a larger book than Apex had yet published.

As part of the promotional aspect, anyone who pre-orders is eligible to be Tuckerized in one of the two original short stories. Who came up with this idea and how did you decide to do it?

MAB: This promotion has already ended, although anyone who pre-orders the hardcover through the Apex website still gets a signed copy. And you haven't describe it quite right; anyone who pre-ordered before June 15 was entered in a raffle, and the two winners would win the Tuckerizations. As to how it came about, Jason Sizemore and I were trying to think of an extra way I could thank my fans for pre-ordering the book, and then it hit me. With two new stories, that was an opportunity for two Tuckerizations. So we went ahead with it, and the winners were Bob Leigh and Solomon Davidoff.

Many of your stories are available on Fictionwise, however, in many cases, I Remember the Future will be their first paper reprinting. Do you think making stories available on Fictionwise limits their resale/reprint value?

MAB: Not at all! In fact, *I Remember the Future* is being released as an e-book through Fictionwise as well. If anything, I think having the stories available electronically has made more people eager for the collection.

You obviously had to re-read your stories to prepare them for I Remember the Future. How often, otherwise, do you re-read your stories?

MAB: Honestly, very rarely. I'm too busy reading other people's stories and figuring out my next story.

If you have re-read your stories, are you embarrassed by any of your published work, either by your writing ability at the time the story was written or by the views you espoused?

MAB: I wouldn't say I was embarrassed by any of my earlier work, but I will say that I can see definite improvement over the years. I think I'd be more embarrassed if my later work paled in comparison to my earlier work.

In addition to writing and teaching, you are also involved in local politics. How does your interest in science fiction influence your stands on the town council and the library board?

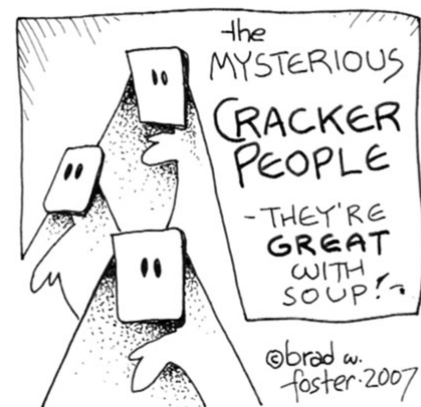
MAB: I probably see a little further ahead than many of the other politicians. For example, a few years ago Town Meeting was debating whether or not to fund a project to move all the utility wires underground as opposed to having them hanging on poles. I pointed out that we might pay all this money to have the wires moved underground only to have our current form of electric power transmission rendered obsolete by new technology, and I expressed my concern that the Town of Brookline would find itself paying a lot of money in 2050 to dig out all those useless wires. My fellow Town Meeting Members were amused by my perspective, but we did end up voting against the project. As for being on the library board, I do periodically check to make sure that our library system is stocking the latest science fiction and fantasy, but to be honest, they didn't need my help. They've got some good people on staff who were already taking care of it.

What do you have planned for your next writing projects?

MAB: "Steven H Silver: The Musical." But seriously, I have a few stories I owe to Analog, and a few collaborations I've fallen behind on.

If I had just begun reading science fiction, or come back to reading it after a long hiatus, and found that I liked your stories, what other contemporary authors would you recommend who have a similar feel?

MAB: If you like my work, the best recommendation I have would be for you to pick up *Analog* magazine and read the stories you find there.



How Steven H Silver Helped Save the Archives of at Least 15 Authors for Posterity

Lynne Thomas

I first met Steven H Silver at WizardWorld Chicago in 2004, where he was working the Del Rey booth. I was in my first 6 months as the Head of Rare Books and Special Collections at Northern Illinois University, making my first foray into building our SF and comic books collections. I stopped at the Del Rey booth for a moment (Hey! Free Books!), and chatted with Steven. I mentioned how nice it was to get even more free books, since we were part of the SFWA Circulating Book Plan. To help Nebula voters get access to possible candidates, publishers donate copies of books that they would like to promote for consideration. The books are forwarded from reader to reader in regional groups. The last reader in the group forwards the books to one of eleven libraries—including NIU—where they are kept for posterity.

Steven said “Circulating Book Plan? I didn’t know that was still going on! You should do a panel at Windycon!. Would you like to give a talk at the Nebula Awards? They are in Chicago next year...” Stunned, I mumbled something that sounded vaguely like agreement. He took my shiny new business card, and I walked away from the booth, thinking that he’d never actually contact me, considering that I was so new to the SF community.

New, indeed. You see, before I accepted the position at NIU, I was not yet a member of the SF literature community, either as a fan or a professional. Despite loving *A Wrinkle In Time* when I read it, I grew up reading mostly romance novels and historical fiction in a “mundane” household. I was not exposed to the wide and wonderful world of SF until I met the man who eventually became my husband. I literally married into fandom. I attended my first media convention on my honeymoon. When I interviewed for the position at NIU, my spouse coached me through a crash course in SF literature and comics. Little did I know the path that I was walking down, when I appeared on the “Secret Librarians of Fandom” panel and talked about our SF collection at Steven’s behest.

Several months later, I received an email from Steven with the subject line: Nebula Awards. Inside was an invitation to give a session during the weekend about our collections and archiving. I gratefully accepted the invitation, and prepared my talk. Despite being scheduled immediately preceding the cocktail party, I had a full room, and it went smoothly.

I expressed to the gathered crowd my deep belief in the importance of the SF genre to our culture. I explained that I had a lovely collection of SF books and magazines, but what made a real research collection was *archives*. What researchers need to draw a clear picture of the genre, and writers and movements within it, is access to the documents that show the process of creation, from great idea on cocktail napkin, to worldbuilding maps, to ARCs, to published books. I expressed my fears that a large number of writers within this genre, so hugely influential in our culture, would end up *not* getting archived because they were not household-name best-

selling, or were not founding members of the genre. I know that those writers, who make up about 15% of the field, will be archived. My concern was about losing the other 85% of writers—the majority of the field—who did not fall into those categories and the great loss this would be to scholarship, fandom, and history if they were not documented as well. I proposed to do something about my fears, by collecting SF archives.

I laid out my collecting criteria, which were as follows: 1) authors need to be SFWA-eligible to be archived. 2) authors need to say *yes* to being archived at NIU. I also explained what happens when papers are donated: they are organized, placed in archival containers in a secure, environmentally controlled setting, and made available to researchers upon request. I explained that this is how posterity happens: primary materials are made available for study. I closed the talk saying “I am *your* librarian.” I answered questions as well as I could. This was the first time that I had truly presented myself as an SF archivist. It would not be the last.

At the cocktail party, I began talking to authors. One of them was Jack McDevitt. We had a pleasant conversation, but we each remember it slightly differently. I swear that he walked up to me and asked if he needed to be dead to archive his papers. I told him that we preferred him to archive while he was still alive, unless he could answer email from beyond the grave. He claims that he never mentioned being dead, and that I brought up his untimely demise. That question may never be resolved, but we did come to an agreement after the weekend, and he ended up being the first author to deposit his papers at NIU. He took a giant leap of faith, and I will always be grateful for that. His papers, by the way, are now fully processed and available to researchers. Later that evening, I got to see Anne McCaffrey covered in silly string as she got her Grand Master award. So began my journey into fandom as a professional SF archivist.

I never thought that my crazy plan of trying to introduce myself to authors at conventions and asking for their papers might work. However, because of Steven’s kind invitation, the first time that I tried it, it actually worked. And it has kept working, at different conventions all over the Midwest. The next author to donate, E.E. Knight, is a NIU alum, who ended up treating my library panel at OdysseyCon as an interview session to get a feel for my archival work. When I asked Kelly McCullough for his papers at CONvergence, he took me up on the offer, and then offered access to his writers’ group and a listserv full of SF writers. I think I startled Jim Hines by actually recognizing him at the last Windycon and approaching him. Sarah Monette handed me her initial gift saying “I just couldn’t think of a good reason *not* to donate.” Tobias Buckell was grateful for the opportunity to clean out his office space.

So I kept doing it. I kept just walking up to authors, and asking them if their papers had yet been placed. If they

haven't, I offer my card, and ask them to consider placing their papers with me.

The earliest authors to donate have also spread the word, it seems. At my first WisCon, I resembled a rag doll as several different NIU authors took me back and forth across the same party, from person to person, introducing me to as many of their friends as they could.

Some authors end up meeting me after initial email contact at conventions, bringing papers along for me to take back. Some make use of my library's offer to pay for shipping boxes to us. Archives have come into our department in garbage bags, crockpot boxes, and big black binders. Boxes sometimes arrive unexpectedly when authors clean out offices and closets. All are joyfully accepted.

Some of the NIU authors began to win awards after donating their papers. Jack McDevitt won his first Nebula, and Elizabeth Bear won her first Hugo after their initial gifts to the collection. NIU authors have also been nominated for Hugos, Nebulas, Romantic Times Awards, Compton Crook Awards and Sidewise Awards after their initial donation. I jokingly refer to this as the "NIU bump," just as Stephen Colbert on the Colbert Report jokingly claims a poll "bump" for politicians that appear on his show.

Over the course of the past few years, fourteen other

authors have followed Jack into the NIU archives: E.E. Knight, Kage Baker, Tamora Pierce, David Weber, Tobias Buckell, Caroline Stevermer, Kelly McCullough, Sarah Monette, Elizabeth Bear, Don Bingle, Sarah Prineas, Catherine Lundoff, Jim Hines, and Robert Asprin. A few dozen more have agreed to join us, but have not yet given materials. Northern Illinois University now has the potential to become a major repository for SF literature.

I blame Steven.

After all, he's the one that *believed* me when I told him about my plans to add archives of SF authors to the SF book collection that I am responsible for, to turn it into a real research collection. I hadn't done it yet. I hadn't even *begun*. He believed in me, and believed in the mission, and offered me a chance to begin fulfilling it. He's one of the main reasons that these fifteen authors, and the others that will eventually join them, will have their work saved for posterity, to be studied by future scholars and fans.

Now, thanks to Steven, and his belief in the mission of the NIU SF archives, I have a reputation of sorts. At my *third* Windycon, a member of the crowd between panels said "I know you, you're Archivist Lynne!" The name stuck.

I think I'm okay with that.

Where to Go For Your Author Goodness: A not complete listing based on work by Hal Hall

This is a very incomplete list, Hal's list can be found at <http://www.aboutsf.com/researchresources/authorlibraries.php> (and is also incomplete). Many authors have their papers split between repositories.

Boston University: Isaac Asimov, Marion Zimmer Bradley, Arthur C. Clarke, L. Sprague de Camp, Samuel R. Delany, Alan Nourse, Edgar Pangborn, Curt Siodmak, Jack Vance

Eastern New Mexico University: Forrest J. Ackerman, Piers Anthony, James Blish, Leigh Brackett, Edmond Hamilton, SFOHA, Jack Williamson

Merril Collection/Toronto Public Library: John W. Campbell, Jr., Terry Carr, Philip K. Dick, David Drake, Phyllis Gotlieb, Guy Gavriel Kay, Kim Stanley Robinson, Joanna Russ, S.M. Stirling, A.E. van Vogt, Walt Willis-Desmond Emery Correspondence 1954-57), Susan Wood

Northern Illinois University: Robert Asprin, Kage Baker, Elizabeth Bear, Donald J. Bingle, Tobias Buckell, Eric Flint, Jim C. Hines, E.E. Knight, Catherine Lundoff, Kelly McCullough, Jack McDevitt, Sarah Monette, Jody Lynn Nye, Tamora Pierce, Tim Pratt, Sarah Prineas, Cat Rambo, Heather Shaw, Caroline Stevermer, Catherynne Valente, David Weber

Oxford University/Bodleian: Brian W. Aldiss, James Blish, Michael Moorcock, Alexei Panshin, J.R.R. Tolkien

Temple University: Camille Bacon-Smith, Eric Temple Bell, Ben Bova, John W. Campbell, Jr., Theodore Cogswell, Davis Publications, L. Sprague de Camp, Miriam DeFord, Gardner Dozois, Lloyd Eshbach, Fantasy Press, Fanzines (1937-1983), Prime Press, Tom Purdom, E.E. "Doc" Smith, John Varley, Donald Wandrei, Stanley Weinbaum

University of California-Riverside: Robert Adams, Gregory Benford, David Brin, F.M. Busby, Philip K. Dick, J. Lloyd Eaton, G.C. Edmondson, Robert Forward, Horace L. Gold, Aldous Huxley, Anne McCaffrey, Fred Patten, Bruce Pelz, Jerry Pournelle, William Rotsler, George Slusser, James White

University of Kansas: Brian W. Aldiss, Eric Bell Temple, Lloyd Biggle, Algis Budrys, Thomas Easton, James Gunn, Lee Killough, P. Schuyler Miller, SFRA, T.L. Sherred, Cordwainer Smith, A.E. van Vogt

University of Liverpool: Brian W. Aldiss, Stephen Baxter, Barrington J. Bayley, John Brunner, Kenneth Bulmer, Ramsey Campbell, Ellen Datlow, Neil Gaiman, Colin Greenland, Interzone Magazine, Rachel Pollack, Christopher Priest, Eric Frank Russell, SF Foundation, Olaf Stapledon, Ian Watson, John Wyndham

My Must See List

Daniel M. Kimmel

When the AFI came out with their list of the 100 most important American films a number of years ago I went over it to see what I had missed. As it turned out, I had seen 99 of them, lacking only “To Kill a Mockingbird,” which I got around to seeing in the years since.

Thus when asked to come up with a list of classic movies I had not seen, I was taken aback. While I can’t see everything, I have been viewing an average of 300 movies a year for some 25 years now and that, as they say, is a lot of movies. Back then I was excited to finally have the opportunity to see “I Am a Fugitive From a Chain Gang.” In the ‘90s I finally caught up with Satyajit’s Ray legendary “Apu Trilogy.” Just recently I finally got to see John Wayne’s Oscar-winning turn in “True Grit.”

These days my checklist of older films I want to see is decidedly on the obscure side. These are simply movies I hope to catch eventually, as I did “Smart Money, a 1931 film notable as the only movie to co-star Edward G. Robinson and James Cagney or “The Return of Dr. X,” a perfectly dreadful 1939 movie worth seeing – once – because it features Humphrey Bogart in his only SF/horror role, as a vampire.

Here’s five movies I’ve yet to see, but would very much like to:

“Holiday” – Not the 1938 romantic comedy classic with Cary Grant and Katharine Hepburn, which is one of my favorite movies. That’s a remake. I want to see the 1930 original. The cast includes Mary Astor, Hedda Hopper and Edward Everett Horton, playing the exact same role he did in the ‘38 version. I’ve been able to see all three versions of “The Maltese Falcon,” including the truly awful 1936 “Satan Met a Lady,” so why won’t someone show this?

“Waltzes From Vienna” – If you like Johann Strauss then a feature about the Waltz King ought to be pleasant. This 1934 British film may be, as Leonard Maltin describes it, “ponderous,” but it’s on my list because of who directed it. The man behind the camera was none other than Alfred Hitchcock, who had already made such classic thrillers as “The Lodger,” “Blackmail” and “Murder” but had not yet become the “Master of Suspense.” It’s a costume biopic. Where *could* Hitchcock have arranged his walk on?

“The Iron Petticoat” – Hollywood has a long history of putting together two people who have never been paired before and seeing what happens. Sometimes it’s magic, as with Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers in “Flying Down to Rio,” and sometimes it’s downright bizarre as with Julia Roberts and Nick Nolte in “I Love Trouble.” (Let’s not even talk about Sean Penn and Madonna in “Shanghai Surprise.”) This 1956 Cold War comedy features Katharine Hepburn as a visiting Russian and Bob Hope as a member of the American military. Who cares how bad it is? Aren’t you curious to see the only team up of this cinematic odd couple?

“The Cowboys” – One of the things I learned about champagne, after thinking I didn’t care for it, was that it was

bad champagne I didn’t like. When I drank the good stuff, I loved it. It’s much the same with westerns. Never a big fan of the genre, I discovered that when they were made with top stars and directors and writers, they could be very good. “High Noon” and “The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance” became personal favorites. It took a while to learn my way around John Wayne films. He made a lot of forgettable stuff, particularly early in his career, but when you see his movies with directors John Ford or Howard Hawks, you’re seeing some first class filmmaking. This 1972 film is not supposed to be among Wayne’s best, but it is on the short list of a very unusual subgenre: movies where Wayne’s character dies. Since he is avenged by the pack of 11 year olds he’s taken on a cattle drive, this seems like something that needed to be seen at least once.

“Silver Dust” – I knew I ought to include at least one science fiction film on the list but since 1979 I’ve been attending the annual 24 hour Science Fiction Film Marathon (currently held President’s Day Weekend at the Somerville Theater in Somerville, Massachusetts) and I’m hard-pressed to think of a major SF film I haven’t seen at some point. I came across a reference to this 1953 film when I was researching an essay on the Retro-Hugos for Noreascon 4. It’s about an evil American scientist performing unspeakable radioactive experiments on human guinea pigs with the help of the military and an evil ex-Nazi scientist. What makes it unusual is that it is a *Russian* film, doing the same thing to us as we were doing to them in movies like “The 27th Day” and “Invasion, U.S.A.”

While I hope to see them all someday, and replace them with other films as I do, I know that they may not live up to the anticipation. I recently saw a movie I’d been after for over thirty years. I was interested in it because it was Groucho Marx’s last film. “Skidoo” (1968) turned out to be jaw-droppingly bad, with Jackie Gleason as a gangster who takes LSD, Carol Channing as his wife who does a strip tease...for Frankie Avalon, Groucho as a crime boss named “God,” and the leaden touch of director Otto Preminger, a man not known for his comedies.

Such is the life of a film critic. It still beats digging ditches.



Errors and Omissions

Fred Lerner

Shortly after my graduation from high school I received a letter welcoming me to the Columbia College class of 1966. It offered a useful piece of advice: read the first ten books of Richmond Lattimore's translation of the *Iliad*. There would be a quiz on the first day of class. Ever since Columbia College instituted a "War Issues" course during the First World War, a core curriculum based on the essential texts of Western civilisation has been the defining experience of a Columbia education.

In those days most Columbia students took both "Introduction to Contemporary Civilization in the West" and "Masterpieces of Western Literature and Philosophy" during their freshman year. That meant that half of one's time that year was spent reading and discussing a group of books that were being read and discussed at the same time by nearly all one's classmates, and that had been read and discussed by everyone else in the College.

The "world literature" I was spoon-fed in high school had been carefully selected to avoid any trace of the bawdiness that surprised and delighted me when I first encountered Aristophanes and Lucian, Rabelais and Voltaire. I could recognise in the depths of Augustine and Dante and Montaigne wisdom that at sixteen and seventeen I was unequipped to explore. But the knowledge that that wisdom was there for the taking forms a substantial part of my intellectual capital.

I must confess that there are some writers whose wisdom I have not yet matured sufficiently to appreciate. Michel de Montaigne was a wordy bore given overmuch to quoting from his Greek and Latin forbears. Cervantes, who wrote *Don Quixote* in prison, clearly had fewer claims upon his time than I've ever felt. When I delve into Spinoza's *Ethics* it will be more a matter of perceived duty than of expected pleasure.

It has taken me a long while to understand that there are entire classes of literature that I expected to enjoy, but which simply do not hold my interest. I have not been able to bring myself to open most of the classics of mediæval literature that I purchased in college; and when I have done I've seldom made it to the end. The Icelandic sagas are an exception. Their spare prose, and the (comparatively) realistic motivations of their characters, holds an appeal for me that Arthurian literature does not. I read *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* many years ago, and that's all the Arthuriana I expect to need.

There are some books that, I like to tell myself, I haven't read out of sheer self-preservation.

Long ago I fell back on books as the only permanent consolers. They are the one stainless and unimpeachable achievement of the human race. It saddens me to think that I shall have to die with thousands of books unread that would have given me noble and unblemished happiness. I will tell you a secret. I have never read King Lear, and have purposely refrained from doing so. If I were ever very ill I would only

need to say to myself "You can't die yet, you haven't read Lear." That would bring me round, I know it would.

Roger Mifflin (in Christopher Morley's novel *The Haunted Bookshop*) hit upon a splendid justification for keeping a few of the greatest books in reserve. Perhaps I shall follow that same logic, and refrain from reading the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius and John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Or perhaps I should save that card to use when someone berates me for my ignorance of the great Russian novelists and my utter lack of interest in the great German philosophers.

An excellent source of suggestions for important books to read is provided by our more literate newspapers each year around the time that the Nobel prize for literature is awarded. They always name important writers who were passed over in favor of people who are little remembered and less read in our time. Any reading list that includes Marcel Proust, James Joyce, and Vladimir Nabokov has to be worth considering.

I came to Joyce late in life, reading him for the first time when I was well into my fifties. *Dubliners* didn't much impress me; I suppose that I had expected something more like Armistead Maupin's *Tales of the City*. But *Ulysses* certainly surpassed my expectations: it is a book I expect to reread with profit and enjoyment every few years for the rest of my life. I suspect that I will someday pick up *Finnegans Wake*, only to put it down after a few pages. Tracking down the allusions and references in *Silverlock* (which I did with Anne Braude in the "Reader's Guide to the Commonwealth" that appears in the NESFA Press edition of John Myers Myers's masterpiece) provided me with all the challenges I require in decoding a novel.

My acquaintance with Nabokov is so far limited to *Lolita*, *Ada*, *Pale Fire*, and his *Lectures on Cervantes*. These books provide ample reason to read more; and the enthusiasm of John Hertz, who is certainly one of the most literate people in Fandom, provides further incentive. One of the promises I have made to myself is that when I complete my revision of *The Story of Libraries* (the second edition is scheduled to appear next summer) I shall embark upon a campaign of reading Nabokov.

And Proust... There I'm a total innocent (or nearly so; I once listened to an audiotape of excerpts from *Swann's Way*). When I proclaimed that I hoped someday to learn enough French to read Marcel Proust and Esther Rochon in the original, Esther (who is one of Quebec's leading science fiction writers) replied, "Now I shall have to read Proust." I gather that *In Search of Lost Time* is difficult enough in English, so I'd best not wait until I've mastered French. And now that I've seen the famous cork-lined bedroom in which Proust wrote the thing—it's on display at the Musée Carnavalet in Paris—I feel a connection to the man and the book.

Another source of Books I Mean to Read may be found in *Silverlock*. Though the fantastic island on which John Myers Myers sets his picaresque romance is a realisation of Moliere's Commonwealth of Letters, Myers's erudition strays well beyond the usual lists of Great Books. I've been led to some splendid reading through following up an allusion that I found there; how else would I have found my way to the *Tain Bo Cuailinge* or *Western Star*? And I am inclined to take very seriously the literary suggestions of a man who can retell the *Epic of Gilgamesh* as a rousing six-stanza drinking song.

Still, some corners of the Commonwealth inspire more dread than anticipation. Myers was fond of obscure southern writers, and while John Pendleton Kennedy's *Swallow Barn* was an enjoyable account of plantation life in Virginia, I found both the dialect and the content of *Sut Luvingood's Yarns* (by George Washington Harris) utterly impenetrable. The *Nibelungenlied* and the *Bhagavad-Gita* are not on my must-read list.

But I do look forward to spending some quality time with *The Compleat Angler* and *Life on the Mississippi*. I want someday to see how Po Chui's "The Everlasting Wrong" compares with Arthur Waley's *Translations from the Chinese*. And if anyone can persuade me to take up Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* it is John Myers Myers.

Myers once named his own favorite book: G.K. Chesterton's comic novel, *The Flying Inn*. Despite several tries, I must confess that I never could see the appeal of the thing. But perhaps someday I shall. I've got a few decades of reading time left to me, and I haven't finished turning to *Silverlock* for inspiration.

And then there's *The Lifetime Reading Plan*, Clifton Fadiman's guide to "those works of Western thought and imagination generally considered of prime importance and excellence". It is his recommendations of early modern literature that will be most useful to me. He and I both read the ancient and mediæval classics at Columbia. (Fadiman graduated in 1925. The Core Curriculum unites us across the decades, and his ideas of essential reading have been shaped by some of the same influences that have shaped mine.) But

my classroom studies of Western literature stopped in the sixteenth century, save for a course in modern drama. So Fadiman's suggestions will help me choose where to start exploring Brontë (*Wuthering Heights*), Eliot (*The Mill on the Floss*), Hardy (*The Mayor of Casterbridge*), and other writers whom I know only by reputation (or by courtesy of "Masterpiece Theater").

There are some egregious omissions in his book. "I have not listed the Old and New Testaments," he admits. "But I have assumed that anyone who would read this book is already familiar with the Bible." Fair enough—though I must confess that my own reading through Scripture is stalled somewhere among the Prophets.

"I have tried Lady Murasaki and the Koran and the *Arabian Nights* and the *Bhagavad-Gita* and the Upanishads and *All Men Are Brothers* and perhaps a dozen other Eastern classics," Fadiman reports, but he found himself "unable to read them with much enjoyment". My work on *The Story of Libraries* has reminded me of the historical importance of the Koran, and of my consequent need to read it. I don't feel a similar urge to explore the literary heritage of the Eastern religions beyond the excerpts I encountered in Columbia's "Oriental Civilizations" course. A recent re-reading of *Sources of Japanese Tradition* reminded me that a little bit of Buddhist scripture goes a long way. But I've heard enough about the *Tale of Genji* to whet my appetite, and I would someday like to sample enough of Burton's *Arabian Nights* to see if it contains any of his reputed salacity.

(I've got no idea what *All Men Are Brothers* might be. Perhaps it's some sort of oriental *Kristin Lavransdatter*—or perhaps it's just another temporary classic. "Literature is news that stays news," as Ezra Pound said in one of his lucid moments. Fadiman admitted that "the proper perspective is denied even the best critics." How many of the eternal classics of science fiction that we remember from our adolescence stand up to re-reading today?)

Joyce and Proust are included in Fadiman's Plan; Nabokov is not mentioned. But Fadiman, explaining his inclusion of only eight living writers—Robert Frost, William Faulkner, Ernest Hemingway, W. Somerset Maugham, E.M. Forster, T.S. Eliot, Aldous Huxley, and André Malraux—admits that "perhaps they are not the right ones". It may be that Nabokov's genius was not so apparent in 1960 as it is today. Or it may be that Clifton Fadiman has his blind spots. After all, *Kim* is not on his list, while *Kristin Lavransdatter* is. Then again, I haven't read Sigrid Undset's tale of mediæval Norway, so I must allow the possibility that Undset is a more important writer than Kipling. For what it's worth, both won the Nobel Prize for Literature.

The Lifetime Reading Plan and *Silverlock* and the more egregious failures of the Nobel Prize committee together form a highly unsystematic guide to shape my future reading. And that's just the sort of guide I want in my search for "joy and grief, neat or mixed together"—which is the best seven-word summary I know of the pleasures of reading.



LaunchPad 2008: And the sky was full of stars...

Alma Alexander

When I was a young post-grad, I remember travelling with a bunch of my colleagues, on the way to some conference somewhere, across the empty expanses known as the Karoo in the hinterlands of the Cape Province, South Africa. We had a barbecue there one night, at a lonely house lost in the middle of nowhere. Aside from the headlights of the occasional (VERY occasional) passing car on the distant road, this was the only artificial light in the place. I remember leaving the side of the barbecue fire and rounding the corner of the building to its dark side and being plunged into the darkness of primeval night, like early man might have known it on a planet which he had yet to conquer. The sky was huge, and close, and the stars were very bright and seemed solid enough to reach out and touch, and sharp enough to slice into your hand should you dare to try. And over it all, arching like a dream, was the spilled light of the Milky Way.

That was the last time I saw our galaxy in the sky for over two decades... until I found myself standing in a suburban street in Laramie, Wyoming, in the summer of 2008.

I cried.

What brought me to Laramie, together with a dozen of my friends and colleagues from the world of writers working in the sphere of what is broadly known as speculative fiction, was a week-long NASA-sponsored astronomy workshop for writers, LaunchPad.

LaunchPad was the brainchild of Professor Michael S. Brotherton from the Astronomy Department of the University of Wyoming, a.k.a SF writer Mike Brotherton (“Spider Star”, “Star Dragon”). Mike strongly believes that people learn far more easily through story than in a classroom – and, as a scientist and a writer, he wanted to see more stories informed by real science.

While the workshop might well be subtitled “Astronomy 101 in a week”, the goal of LaunchPad was not to cram a semester’s worth of college-level astronomy into five or six days of instruction. It was to give a good decent grounding in the subject, to stretch minds and imaginations, to provide the inspiration for those stories in which the science was solid and the reader was not driven away by fear of science but swept away by its beauty and its grandeur.

One of the first things that we, the class of 2008, were told was that everything we (thought that we) knew might be wrong. And that we were far from alone in harboring a myriad of misconceptions about our Universe – graduates and even professors at Harvard University, no less, were revealed to believe some jaw-dropping fundamental errors about not so much the Universe but our own planet.

We then started out on our own exploration of the cosmos.

Baby steps. We first had to learn how immensely large the known Universe was – distances between friendly neighbourhood stars, never mind distant galaxies, are almost impossible to grasp on a coherent level – we need a whole new kind of unit of measurement in order to begin to make

sense of it all. It isn’t our fault – put too many zeros behind a number and the human mind simply fails to assign a value to it. So we needed to re-set our mental gauges to things that did make sense to us in an empirical kind of way, reducing the vastness of space to terms which might actually be of some use in a mathematical equation.

One of the first things that can re-cast our mental picture of the Solar System is to simply quit thinking in familiar terrestrial units of distance like kilometers and think of spatial relationships instead. For instance, the distance from the Earth to the Sun is 150 million kilometers; instead of trying to cope with that kind of numerology, that distance – a fundamental and basic unit of distance to those of us living on planet Earth – becomes known as one Astronomical Unit, or AU. This works beautifully while we are still within our own system, and measuring distances of the other planets from the Sun in terms of AUs gives us a good, clear picture of our own neighbourhood planetary real-estate.

But once we pass beyond the orbit of the outermost planet of the Solar System, there is... a whole lot of Astronomical Units of nothing. We need another unit to deal with these distances – the all-too-familiar, and so often misrepresented, concept of a light year, or the distance travelled by light in one Earth year, which works out to something like 63,000 AUs, or just under 10 000 000 kilometers. And just in order to give you an idea about the true vastness out there, if you started from Earth and travelled 1000 light years in any direction... you’d still be in the galaxy of the Milky Way, and not even remotely close to the center of the galaxy itself which is something like 75,000 light years across. And beyond that... the distance to the handful of galaxies which are our nearest neighbours begins to be counted in MILLIONS of light years.

Space is big.

Before we took off to explore all its mysteries, we lingered briefly in our own back yard – and there’s plenty to fascinate and amaze right here. I knew of sunspots, but I never realised that they could be larger than planet Earth. I knew it rained sulfuric acid on Venus – but I knew only vague details about the Asteroid Belt (of which we have traces right here on Earth, after pieces of one of its biggest asteroids, remnants of a cataclysmic collision, fetched up on our planet) or the comets of the Oort Cloud. We looked at Saturn’s moon Titan, and discussed the possibility of methane- or ammonia-based life on it; we visited the poor demoted planet (now “plutoid”) Pluto, and its sad dark companion, the moon Charon. At another session, a little later, we tried figuring out how to make a scale model of the Solar System which would fit within the room we were in – and discovered that it was physically impossible to do unless we took the Sun, proportionally speaking, to be the size of a mustard seed – in which case even Pluto fit into our long seminar room, and Alpha Centauri would have been located in Cheyenne (another mustard seed). If the sphere used as a model for the sun was any larger, even a ball bearing or a piece of buckshot, the

outermost planets would have to be placed miles away, sometimes MANY miles away.

There is so much out there that you only think you know, so much to learn... but this was only day one. And after this, all bets were off.

Over the next few days we covered – and then quickly transcended – all of my high-school and university undergraduate knowledge of physics and mathematics. We could not discuss the nature of the universe without looking at the physics that allows us to look at space at all, and we covered the radiation spectrum and how our senses are able to perceive the cosmos and how much more we were able to see and understand when we graduated to using telescopes that “saw” in the infrared or the ultraviolet parts of the spectrum, or with X-ray eyes.

And once they got us used to seeing the things that we never knew were there, they produced a Universe that was built on things that sounded as though they had already stepped from the pages of a science fiction novel without any assistance at all by any of the writers in that room. They got us looking at what seemed to be familiar galaxies, as seen by our “natural” senses – and then they showed us what those galaxies would look like in an infra-red spectrum, streaming huge billows of tattered veils of brightness a long way into the dark universe – and told us we were looking at dust.

And that dust was everywhere. Tiny, minuscule, often literally molecular in nature, constantly being created, shaken off by stars, by asteroids, by comets. In fact there was a mission out there called the Stardust probe, sent out to gather dust (and other information) from a comet called Wild 2 – and the things it brought back, both physical evidence and the new insights into how comets are born, and live, and die. (There’s a whole **website**, with news and pictures and video...)

That was the night we broke the official part of the workshop with a party at Professor Brotherton’s house, in suburban Laramie, and the night that I looked up at the clear sky and saw the Milky Way again for the first time in twenty years, and a bright star that someone said might have been Jupiter. After spending most of my life in the Southern Hemisphere, I could easily and quickly point out the Southern Cross – but finding and putting in place my childhood constellations like the Big Dipper proved to be harder than I thought.

Especially now, when I was starting to get a real inkling about the true nature of the night sky.

Day three was devoted to stars – star spectra and classifications, star surveys, how stars were born and how they died. It was a full day, and it was crowned by the highlight of the workshop – a visit to the Wyoming Infra Red Observatory (WIRO) at Jelm, at an altitude of some 9500 feet. Things looked iffy when we arrived, because of course the observatory dome could not be opened at all in inclement weather, and all we could see – both around us, and on computer screens of three separate computers tracking three separate weather forecast sites – were clouds. But there was the telescope itself – certainly the biggest and the most imposing that I had ever set eyes on – and we did get to see the dome opened, however briefly, still in daylight, just to show us how it all worked. I did take pictures, but it is

impossible to capture that extra dimension on photographs, the sense of wonder, the stab of pure unadulterated awe that fills you as you watch that narrow opening edge slowly wider, a bridge between you and the deep stars. But the weather didn’t look promising for an actual observation session. We hung around for a couple of hours just in case things should change – but I was starting to lose hope when, suddenly, one of the telescope’s grad-student attendants popped his head around into the living room where we all waited and said, “We have a hole.”

We crowded back into the observatory.

The dome irised open, and my God, the sky was full of stars.

We were not allowed to be in there while actual observations were being made – everything needed to be kept as cold as possible to reduce vibration to a minimum, even the camera box was pumped full of liquid nitrogen, and all of us were shooed out into the main control room to watch the telescope’s attendants point it at the Ring Nebula.

Outside, at this altitude and in the cold mountain air, the Milky Way was breathtaking – sharp, glowing in the night sky.

I could not stop smiling.

The next day it was back to the classroom, for more star-talk – binary stars and their possible solar systems, stellar evolution, pulsars, black holes, hypernovae (a spectacular collapse of a supermassive giant star to a black hole in a matter of seconds, emitting a burst of gamma rays).

And then we pulled back from individual stars, and began to look at galaxies. We learned that every massive galaxy has a supermassive black hole at its center; galaxies generally exist in clusters rather than in isolation; galaxies with Active Galactic Nuclei (or AGN) and particular subclasses of those, such as Seyfert Galaxies; radio galaxies; touched on the nature and properties of quasars.

And once we got into all this, they introduced the concept of dark matter – and the math proves beyond any doubt that not only is there dark matter out there, but it’s the majority of the matter that’s out there. It quite simply does not emit radiation that it is possible for us to observe directly. First postulated back in the early 1930s, more and more evidence is piling up in support of its existence, and of its manner of interacting with both itself and other matter in the Universe.

From there it was a sideways step into cosmology and its ideas of the nature of the Universe itself, the beginning and the end of everything. We started with the Big Bang, but that turns out to be just the foundation.

Knowing the current rate of expansion, we can estimate – and it is only an approximation – the time it took for the most distant galaxies we can see to move as far apart as they are today. Using these parameters – and taking into account that the rates of expansion in the Universe are not in fact constant, as we have to assume for this calculation – it turns out that the age of the known Universe works out to be about 14 billion years. But that is just the limit of our observation, and all it really tells us is that this is all based on what we are able to observe. Looking at those distant galaxies is literally looking into the past – and 14 billion years is all that we are able to

observe using our current theories and instruments. There may in fact be a lot of Universe which we will never be able to see.

If things can become more complicated in matters of cosmology, they tend to do so – and in recent years the view of the Universe has been changing radically. Paramount in this paradigm shift was the discovery that far from decelerating, as it was supposed to, the Universe’s expansion is actually ACCELERATING – which, in modern cosmological terms, brought up the concept of the theory of inflation, or the idea of the Universe actually expanding faster than the speed of light as we currently understand it – which, in turn, required some fast dancing to keep up with the big picture.

Cosmic acceleration can be explained with a cosmological constant, Λ . Energy corresponding to Λ can account for the missing mass/energy needed to produce a flat space-time = “dark energy” Dark energy appears to account for some 70% of the known universe.

The Universe began by decelerating after the Big Bang but at some point dark energy overcame gravity, and acceleration began about 6 billion years ago. This new information leads to new and different models of the universe, known as the Big Empty (everything moves away at $>c$ (critical density) and eventually we can’t see anything any more except the local cluster - galactic-scale astronomy *goes away*) and the Big Rip (acceleration eventually is so great that it tears apart the atoms themselves and all is destroyed).

All of this was enough to leave our minds spinning, and it was both a joy and a considerable relief to return for a while to something less boggling – we retired to a computer lab in order to have a hands-on session with the images that the WIRO telescope had taken for us on our outing to the observatory... using a piece of software known as DS9. Astronomers apparently have a Trekkie sense of humor. I became completely fascinated by this process – small tweaks in color values would produce subtly different images; it was almost addictive to have absolute power over what a distant galaxy would look like, would be seen as and recognised as by strangers’ eyes. It gives you a whole new perspective on the Hubble images, and leaves you wondering what those jewels of the Universe REALLY look like free from the bias of the

eye of the beholder.

We spent that evening up on the roof of the astronomy building, battling light pollution from all around but managing to see beautiful things through the pair of amateur telescopes set up for us – the transition of one of Jupiter’s moons across the face of the planet, Antares, the Wild Duck cluster, the Andromeda galaxy, the overhead transit of the space station.

On the final day of the workshop, we started out by discussing the role of computing in astronomy (and I was boggled to learn that the original Mars Rovers, which had to be launched during a critical launch window, went to Mars without their software... which was uploaded afterwards, remotely, all the way from Earth to another world). Computers make things easier and faster – but they have yet to progress to the intuitive leaps of the human mind, and are still only a tool.

Segueing from computers to humanity in space, we gave some thought to what it would truly be like out there – a hostile environment where we would have to take absolutely everything with us, starting with the very air we breathe. Problems with human anatomy and physiology after long-term exposure to space environments and weightlessness have yet to be fully explored – although things might be very different for any children who are potentially born out there.

Our workshop was crowned by a presentation by University of Wyoming post-doc Ranjib Ganguly, entitled “Quasar absorption lines – studying gas that you can’t see using (UV) light that isn’t there”. It was a puzzle, presented to us with few hints, just a slide with information on it and a demand that we figure out what it all meant – and we did. We worked it out. On the strength of a week of lectures and discussions and observations, our little group of writers – with backgrounds that covered theatre, anthropology, linguistics, poetry, biology, chemistry, physics – worked it out, and got it right. It was a proud moment.

Applications for LaunchPad 2009 are due to open soon. For anyone who’s ever lifted their face to the sky and gazed with love and awe at the stars... this is the ultimate elixir. I recommend the experience unreservedly.

Some useful websites:

The LaunchPad website:

<http://www.launchpadworkshop.org/index.html>

The WIRO website :

<http://physics.uwyo.edu/~amonson/wiro/wiro.html>

“LaunchPad Debriefing” (my own workshop summary of a week of intensive blogging):

<http://anghara.livejournal.com/328012.html>

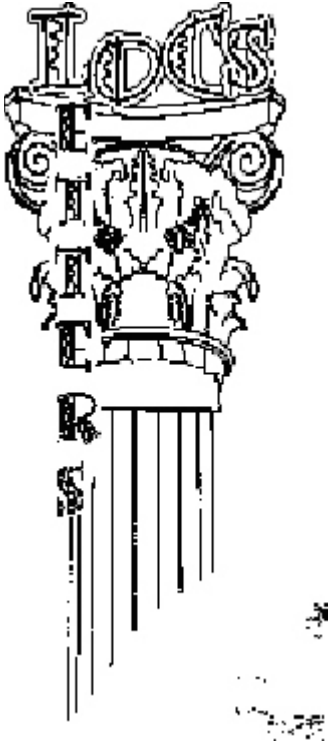
Mary Robinette Kowal’s summary:

<http://www.maryrobinettekowal.com/journal/launchpad-final-post-online-astronomy-resources-for-writers/>



Launchpad, Class of '08

Letters of Comment



Dear *Argentus-ites*,

You certainly are a quick learner—each ish looks better than the previous one. Interesting cover—nice clean simple lines and effective.

Good luck with the new job. It is always tough, making the compromises and crossing your fingers that the new job lives up to both the description and the hopes. I am sure that working from home is a nice perk—with pitfalls and bonuses.

So far the job situation has worked out very nicely, especially this winter (07-08) when we were clobbered by more than five feet of snow. Of course, it also works out well with the kids' schedules.

I really appreciate the *Out-of-Print* pieces. Some years ago, I wrote a recurring column (and for the life of me, I can't remember where—obviously my work was not too memorable) about the art on books—primarily paperbacks—it would have been great to be able to include the image of the cover to show what I was discussing. The information about each book is both informative and entertaining—thank you for getting and running them... and *Neglected Works*.

Ten Forgotten Tales makes me take time and look back over books I have on my shelf that simply aren't out there any more. When I've been asked what list I would give of SF books to read, I realize you have to remember that books I liked and saved, probably just aren't on the same shelves. My list might make a trip to local secondhand bookstores better places to look, but still no guarantee of finding what I would suggest. At the top of my list would be *Groff Conklin's* anthologies—really loved his stuff and ought to do some re-reading.

Dr. Who...hmmm. People have different tastes, but it never ceases to amaze me that, otherwise rational fen, cannot understand why I am not a *Whovian* (I think I have that right). About 10 years ago I watched some of the *Baker* episodes and never got hooked. I watch the show when it is around... and have even put the recent *Dr. Whos* on my *Netflix* list so I can see what has been happening in the recent incarnations. I do say that the few single episodes I have seen on regular TV (I don't have cable, so I have to hunt if I want to locate episodes) have not engaged me. I will still continue to look at episodes, but it does not (at least not yet) look as if I will ever be an actual "fan". We'll see what I think after I get a chance to see the newer *Doctors* at work.

Back in the 1980s, I had a friend who kept trying to get me interested in Doctor Who. I found at the time that I liked the concept behind the show much more than the show itself. It was during the Tom Baker era and he and the show were too campy for my tastes. With the advent of the new series, I gave it a try and discovered that they had kept the general concept (more or less) and removed the camp. I've gone back and re-watched many of the original shows and find I like Patrick Troughton and William Hartnell's portrayals much more than the lisping effete dandy of Jon Pertwee or the campiness of Tom Baker.

I need to hunt for that postcard with my *Denvention* PIN—I know I didn't throw it out, but heaven only knows where it is. I've contacted the *Hugo* administrator to see if they can get it to

me again...so I can nominate. A supporting membership gives me three things—PRs, nominating, and voting. I'd hate to lose one of those three (potentially two if I just don't get the PIN) just because I can't find a postcard.

When I changed over to another phone carrier (at 50% the cost at *Verizon*) I had no idea several things had happened. Their service came with a package that included caller ID and call waiting. I kept hearing this annoying beep and thought something was wrong with the new service. About two weeks into this, I got a call from a friend who is also a client—asking if I knew that my business line says it had been disconnected. Long story short—to placate me, the company tossed in the caller ID free (and stopped the call waiting at my request) and got the business number functional again (I have identa-ring—or something like that—two numbers using the same line, but the ringing is distinctive, but I only pay for one line). I rarely answer the phone unless I know who it is, now. I also do not try to break my neck getting to a ringing phone—I figure that if it is important enough to really need to speak with me, then they'll leave a message or call back. It makes life a lot easier and less stressful!

Congratulations to both the *TAFF* and *DUFF* winners. I am guessing that at least one of them may have some comments about the trip on a future loc. I know that *Chris Garcia* will have a wonder-full trip! I'll look forward to his "real" report.

As I said—I was relying on memory about *Hostigos*—so the memory is faulty. I do remember that the idea was to have the clubzine set in the science fictional location and beyond that I plead the Fifth. I was just guessing that, since *Professor Klass* was the club's advisor, that someone had selected his world. I bet that if I could resurrect a copy of it, I'd find some mention as to the history and choice of the name. Suffice it to say I am just as happy that the zine probably will never see any more light of day, this way I do not have to plead ignorance or apologize for my writings therein!

I have used *Netflix* and seen episodes of TV shows that did not appear on “regular” networks—*Eureka* and *Lost Room* to name two—hope I have the name of that second one correct—especially since I found the premise totally engaging and enjoyed the miniseries (hoping it would have turned into a series...sigh).

Thank you for sending me a copy of this. I can see that it is “also” available online, which I suspect is the more common source for your readers. I repeat, thank you for sending me a copy and keeping me able to read your zine. Nice job.

Sheryl Birkhead

Dear Steven:

You’re out early this year. I remember last year when we both released zines that hit the web on Christmas Eve. Ah, there was a jolly time.

Now, let us to the material.

I will say this: once a book is out of print, it should be free for all. Yeah, we should probably product stuff that’s still in-print, but out of print material should get out via all possible means, including downloading. It’s just my thing. I’ve never read *Lord of Light*. I should, and I’m putting it on my list of books to buy at BookBuyers this weekend when I buy my *Book For Hiding Behind during Family Holiday Gathering* book. I’m not a big Dan Simmons fan, though I did enjoy *Carrion Comfort* when I read it during college.

I’m rather shocked that *Stand on Zanzibar* is out of print. I’ve read it two or three times and I’m not entirely sure that it’s not my favourite Brunner novel. I’m not a Simak fan and while I do get that whole sawawonda thing people always talk about, it does take more and more to get me to feel that way. I will admit that I loved a couple of his books when I was a

younger kid stealing books from his Dad’s stash.

The Poems of Ossian are fun, I admit, but I’m much more interested in the potential hoax portion of things there than the actual works (which are available on Scribd or at least were a while back when I went looking for them). *The Last American*, however, is so much fun that it must be read by all humans wishing to call themselves humans. I loved it when I read it in 1997 after reading about it in *The SF Book of Lists*. It’s just about the most fun novel I’ve ever read in SF.

I haven’t thought about *Detour to Otherness* for years.

Leiber’s two best books are both out of print. That’s a shame. I love his shorter works and *The Sinful Ones* was probably my fave. Another Brunner on the list and it’s the one I haven’t read, or at least not consciously. You see, I sometimes pick up novels when I’ve got nothing going on and half-mindedly read them for a while. I know I own every Brunner novel so it’s likely that I’ve read at least part of it, but I’m not sure I remember anything about it.

Not at all a fan of Galouye. *The Thirteenth Floor* is what brought him to my attention and from there, I started



digging and never found much that I liked. Just not my style, unlike Joanna Russ who has become one of those authors I did not expect to enjoy nearly as much as I have over the last year or

so. I’ve never read any Christopher Priest, but I should at some point.

Little Known actors is a fun one. While I will always love Mr. Charlie Rocket, and Mr. Toblosky made his living being ‘Oh, it’s that guy!’, there are a couple of folks who have had long careers never being the big star. Bree Turner is a young one, best known for her work in such wonderful pieces as “Deuce Bigelow” and Judy Greer who was in everything from “The Wedding Planner” to “Arrested Development” to “The Village.” Let me also add the late, great Rockets Redglare who was wonderful in such films as “Trees Lounge,” “Basquiat” (where he played himself), “Talk Radio,” “Big” and various Jim Jarmusch movies. Speaking of Jarmusch, one would also have to add Richard Edson who was in “Stranger Than Paradise” and films like “Ferris Bueller’s Day Off,” “Platoon,” “Do The Right Thing,” and most recently “The Astronaut Farmer.” He’s a good one.

“Dr. Who” is the most American of all British TV shows. That sounds weird, but stick with me. They took a concept and rode into every possible marketing niche they could. What’s more American than that? It was on the air for almost three decades and then came back at the time when the teens who loved the last Doctor had grown up and wanted something to come back and get better. It was the return of other great stuff from the 1980s that brought The Doctor back, though he never really went all the way gone. The need for continuity is one of the greatest symptoms of being a fan. It strikes us all. I love the newest Doctor. David Tennant is a great talent and before Who you probably could have had him in the ‘Oh Yeah, it’s that guy!’ category...at least here in the States.

For some reason, I don’t really care about the politics of a writer when I’m reading their books. I love Michael Moore’s stuff though I think he’s a manipulator of material and a good but far from great filmmaker. I think his stuff is funny, “TV Nation” being one of the greatest TV Doc programmes ever, and I completely disagree with his political ideals. I had no idea about Hogan’s beliefs. I’ve never read any of his stuff but had a lovely chat with him at BayCon this year.

Have I got stories about Anton LaVey. I've heard hundreds of them from folks who knew him at just about every stage of his life. He was a big figure in the BArea. So is Carol Doda. She was one of the first celebrities I ever met who really felt like she had star power when she was just walking around. I met LaVey at least once and probably more like three or four times. He was always selling off various things and it became a popular trend for kids in High School around the Bay to buy them, usually for stupidly low prices. I bought a few pulp=y things from him and at least one candy=thing. A friend of mine has hundreds of artefacts from the man in his place, including two full altars. I find it strange that my Dad, who didn't know LaVey at all but was friendly with a number of people who were friendly with Anton, was at the WorldCon Masq at the same time that LaVey was. It's weird.

I have to say that the panel on paper concept is a good one. I'm also surprised to see "Bladerunner" mentioned as an influence on "12 Monkeys." The two were written by the same guy! Good to see Matt talking about "Jennifer Government." I thought it was a wonderful book and the way they marketed it using the net and the game was brilliant.

By the way, I love the cover. It's one of those wonderful covers that just stands out for me. It's got a retro-meets-jetz thing going on.

Chris Garcia

Steven,

Fine, fine piece of work. I dropped by to have a quick look, and ended up spending nearly an hour. Especially enjoyed the TOP TEN OUT-OF-PRINT BOOKS lists from Howard, Rich Horton, and Georges Dodds, as well as the look at Doctor Who continuity (we're watching Pertwee episodes of Dr. Who at lunch at work, and this will help!), and the great letters column.

Plus, there's a lot more I haven't gotten to yet that looks fascinating - like Mike Resnick's "Me and the High Priest" piece, on the founder of the Church of Satan. Man, *Black Gate* is positively tame compared to this. [Note to Howard - we need more features with

sex and debauchery. Hire Rich to do the research, as usual.]

The layout is splendid, and I really liked the obvious effort you made to sprinkle covers through the book articles. The end result is really eye-catching.

I'm at a hotel tonight, and looking forward to reading the whole thing. Very impressive.

John O'Neill

Dear Steven:

It's been here for a while, but when you produce an annual fanzine, it gives me a very liberal deadline. Anyway, some comments on *Argentus 7* follow.

John O'Neill and Howard Andrew Jones offer two excellent lists of books that should never have gone out of print. Of course, I could take the opposite tack and ask if these good books are saleable? How many of us have these great books on our shelves, and what kind of market is there for those who haven't read them yet? More modern readers would be more likely to buy new books. As for older books, I don't know what's happening to them...so many used book stores are disappearing. Would we campaign to have these books return to print, or would we succumb to apathy?

Georges Dodds goes the other way...most people have probably not heard of the books he lists. They should be available, but there's the question of salability again. They should see print again, but probably won't.

I haven't seen the new Doctor Who, as much as I'd like to. This past weekend, Yvonne and I went to the British Isles Show downtown, and one of the vendors there had all three seasons of the new DW. I am still working at the Globe and Mail in the evenings, and I've been there just over three years, so that's how long I haven't seen evening television. There's weekends, but I have so much to do on the weekend, who's got time for TV? I feel that if a programme wants to cater to the people who watch it, there has to be someone in charge of series continuity. Remember the Nitpicker's Guides that came out some years ago?

More discussion about male-female proportions in fanzines. I wish there was more participation from everyone. I have kept all my convention badges, and have pinned them all in order on a large drape.

Yvonne's done the same. In a few short years, we will have completely filled the drape with badges. Is that when we stop attending them?

I've never had a fannish nickname, although I was tagged with The Chairbear when I chaired conventions. When I attended a major Tolkien convention held in Toronto some years ago, I was one of the few people who registered under his or her own name. Everyone else was using their online pseudonym. I must wonder if online friends ever ran into each other.

Not the kind of letter I wanted to write, but here it is nonetheless. Thanking of going to Las Vegas for Corflu? If you are, we'll see you there. Take care, and wish there were more *Argenti* in a year.

Yours, Lloyd Penney.

Hi Steven,

Argentus 7 was another good issue of an always interesting zine. I particularly enjoyed the *Out-of-Print Books* section. There were indeed some classics on that list which should never have been allowed to disappear. Hopefully, as specialty presses become more and more ubiquitous in the SF publishing world, some of those backlist books will return to print.

Like most of your readers presumably do, I have several favorite books which deserve republication.

Damon Knight's sadly-underappreciated *The Other Foot* (originally the novella "The Visitor At The Zoo");

Michael Bishop's *Brittle Innings* (perhaps my favorite all-time SF book, and a Hugo-nominee as well); Greg Benford's Nebula-winner *Timescape*; *A Treasury of Great Science Fiction*, edited by Anthony Boucher, which I, like so many other fans, first got as an introductory offer from the SFBC, and which remains one of my favorite collections of "Golden Age" SF;

Robert Silverberg's *Dying Inside*, is currently available in the UK as part of Gollancz' *SF Masterworks* series, but not in this country;

and I echo loudly John O'Neill's complaint that *anything* by Clifford D. Simak deserves republication. Except for *City* and *Way Station*, admittedly his

finest works, nothing else is available by one of the all-time finest SF writers.

Take care,
Bob Sabella

Dear Steven,

Argentus #7 was a meaty issue. It had everything but cholesterol. At least, I hope it didn't have cholesterol. If it really had cholesterol, I shouldn't have read it.

I hadn't been aware that many of the out of print books which were discussed were out of print books. Of course, I have copies of many of these books, so I have no reason to go looking for them. One book which wasn't discussed but is out of print is *The Martian Chronicles*. I thought that book would be in print for at least the rest of my lifetime if just to supply college SF classes. Of course, you can walk into any used bookstore in the English speaking world and find one or more copies of *The Martian Chronicles*, so there isn't any great need for keeping it in print. Used book stores are great things. They keep all the printed clutter we don't have room for in our own homes.

As to the books that are mentioned, *Lord of Light* is one I would recommend to absolutely anyone. Definitely essential SF. I suspect *Stand on Zanzibar* would seem very out of date by now. The disadvantage of writing a very "now" book is that it will become very "then" in a brief period. A number of retrospective anthologies are mentioned. They're always good thing to have read and have around. Reprinting all of the Groff Conklin anthologies would be a good thing, but I suspect the stories were only paid for as a one time publication.

The politics in science fiction seldom bothers me. If you are going to lecture, remember that brevity is the soul of wit. Future Trotskyites impress me as having a certain steam punk sort of strangeness, but they don't bother me. I like alternate worlds with dirigibles, and other people like future Trotskyites. Different Strokes.

Norman Spinrad is something of an exception to my previous comment. I find Spinrad an intensely irritating writer. I have never managed to finish one of his novels. In *Bug Jack Barron*, I was almost sure he was saying things he didn't and shouldn't have wanted to say. It was like watching a man kick himself in the ass. It was a very disturbing spectacle.

The political and philosophical disagreement between H. G. Wells and C. S. Lewis interests me because I don't exactly agree with either side. I am more inclined to side with Wells because of his belief in technology. However, I'm not a socialist or an atheist. It is possible that Wells' ideas appeal to me because I saw *Things To Come* when I was six years old, and it influenced my thinking ever after.

Like Mike Resnick, I recall meeting Anton LaVey. I met him only once, and I never wanted to repeat the experience. Our meeting was at a cocktail party for E. Hoffman Price in honor of the publication of *Strange Gateways* by Arkham House. It does seem reasonable that someone like LaVey would have been a fan of Weird Tales type fiction. While I can't be sure of it, this particular party may have made LaVey aware of Bay Area fandom. I think he made a mistake that many other people have made over the years that fans would make good converts. Casual observation, may have led them to believe we are soft in the head. Of course, we make terrible converts. We love to argue. If we say "yes", we will automatically say "no." If you get mad at us for doing that, you aren't the sort of person we wanted to know anyway.

So LaVey started moving into the edges of Bay Area fandom. I heard that he was offering to teach people how to pray others to death for a price. We had to consider the possibility that devil worshipers might really not be nice people. As with

many problems in fandom, we never really figured out what to do about Anton LaVey. Maybe he realized that just because we were willing to read about devil worshipping cults didn't mean we wanted to join one. In any case, he went away after awhile, and there was rejoicing throughout the land.

Yours truly,

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

Steven:

Thanks for the latest *Argentus*.

The various top ten out of print SF lists are somewhat interesting. Even though I'm not certain how I'd go about determining what is no longer in print I am not surprised by the common inclusion of Zelazny and Brunner on the lists even though the same novel isn't on each list. Given the prolific nature and important role of these authors to the genre their inclusion is important..

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

We Also Heard From
Julie Czerneda, Amy Farmer, Charles Coleman Finlay, Brad Foster, Steven Pitluk, Robert Rede, and Alan Third



Mock Section: Reviews by Blurbs

The challenge this year was for my authors to review books based solely on the contents of their back cover blurbs. As long as the nothing in the review contradicted the contents of the blurb, the author of the review could write anything he wanted. For me, the challenge, as always, was to find enough insane people to agree to write something for this section. One potential author even went so far as to hospitalize himself (twice) in order to avoid having to meet the deadline.

How to Good-Bye Depression: If You Constrict Anus 100 Times Everyday. Malarkey? or Effective Way?

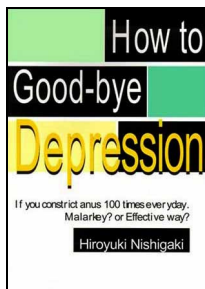
Hiroiyuki Nishigaki; 2000, Writers Club Press, Lincoln, NE
Reviewed by Jay Lake

Book Cover Blurb:

I think constricting anus 100 times and denting navel 100 times in succession everyday is effective to good-bye depression and take back youth. You can do so at a boring meeting or in a subway. I have known 70-year-old man who has practiced it for 20 years. As a result, he has good complexion and has grown 20 years younger. His eyes sparkle. He is full of vigor, happiness and joy. He has neither complained nor born a grudge under any circumstance. Furthermore, he can make love three times in succession without drawing out.

In addition, he also can have burned a strong beautiful fire within his abdomen. It can burn out the dirty stickiness of his body, release his immaterial fiber or third attention which has been confined to his stickiness. Then, he can shoot out his immaterial fiber or third attention to an object, concentrate on it and attain happy lucky feeling through the success of concentration.

If you don't know concentration which gives you peculiar pleasure, your life looks like a hell.



How to Good-bye Depression is a self-help book for the thoroughly modern, self-actualized individual. So many writers and fans live in a complex world of information, obligation and technology which they can only escape through a good book. When a good book is not to hand, this one may serve, as it offers personal improvement techniques suitable for even couch-based lifestyles and hard-drinking authors chained to their typewriters. Most importantly, it will open doors for readers of all walks of life, showing them to new vistas of fundamental pleasures and hidden powers which may have previously escaped their notice simply for being found in such mundane bodily locales as described in this epic work.

Nishigaki offers such simple, accessible prescriptions such as “constricting anus 100 times and denting navel 100 times in succession everyday.” Who among us does not already pursue such activities recreationally as time and occasion permit? Now we can set our sights on low-impact self-improvement techniques which may well serve to help improve our spirits. Even better, such efforts can be conducted even out in public,

for example, on a crowded bus where aerobics is impractical and synchronized armpit farting may result in a ridership ban. Such innovative thinking is precisely the panacea for which these difficult economic and social times cry out.

The book provides inspirational tales of the accomplishments of Nishigaki’s followers. A 70-year-old man who has practiced it for 20 years has “neither complained nor born a grudge under any circumstance.” Even better, he can “make a * * threetimes in succession without drawing out.” Surely that skill is the envy of every fan in America today. Many would offer up the very fabric of their soul in exchange for an opportunity to perform such feats, yet until publication of this ground-breaking book, so very few have found the opportunity to master this esoteric Oriental secrets.

You will learn other useful, hidden powers. For example, the reader can “shoot out his immaterial fiber or third attention to an object.” Many a boring staff meeting or tedious convention panel would be considerably enlivened by some outshooting of immaterial fiber. One imagines the spiritual equivalent of silly string, perhaps, or the sheer mindpower of concentration emitting from the flexed anus and the dented navel as invisible threads to bind the babbling mouths of those ignorant morons all around you.

Nishigaki’s valedictory offering to us all is the warning that “If you don’t know that concentration can give you peculiar pleasure, your life looks like a hell.” It is precisely this unsuccessful, unfocused search for peculiar pleasure which has driven so many of us mad. The same needs which drive us to libraries and bookstores and convention dealers’ rooms and the seedy backalleys of cities and towns across America. The lives of most look like a hell, and all for the want of the right kind of anal/navel concentration.

It is not just the depression which will be good-byed with such careful effort, nor the shooting out of immaterial fiber, nor indeed the widely envied ability to make a * * three times in succession without drawing out -- it is the escape from a living hell which is the true hope of this timeless classic of self-improvement and alternative physiology.



Back Cover Book Review: *The New AToms' Bombshell*

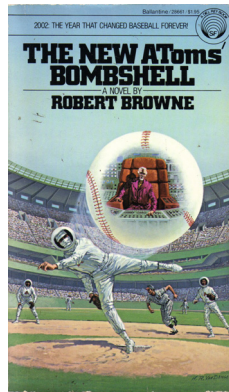
Robert Browne

Reviewed by Matthew Appleton

Book Cover Blurb:

The Chicago AToms ended the 2001 season in last place—as usual. And it looked as if they would maintain their hold on the league cellar through 2002, what with a mysterious new owner acting as his own starting pitcher in the most important games—a man who had never ever pitcher in a professional ballgame!

But somehow the AToms began to win—and went on winning until, incredibly, their first pennant was in sight. It made no sense to anyone... except to the blind genius, backed by the world's most sophisticated computer, who was masterminding every play!



When Robert Browne's *The New AToms' Bombshell* came out in 1980, it was quickly forgotten by all but a few SF readers—predominantly long-suffering Chicago baseball fans who were so eager for a winning team that they were willing to embrace any winning professional baseball team, even if it was fictional. However, a modern rereading of the novel shows that despite his pedestrian fiction writing skills, Browne was in fact a baseball visionary. SF as a genre may not be very good at predicting the future—hell, Browne was a few years off in his prediction of win a Chicago team would win a World Series—but knowledgeable baseball fans might recognize in *The New AToms' Bombshell* a large part of the dialog that now graces stat-geek blogs all across the Internet today.

Buried in the overall plot of the novel is a plethora of ideas concerning in-game strategy, player evaluation and how to run a team. Indeed, readers of Michael Lewis's *Moneyball* might recognize many of the concepts and ideas championed by Oakland Athletics General Manager Billy Beane, as well as the stat-geek denizens of blogs such as *Baseball Prospectus*. For example, the owner of the AToms, a man who insists everyone calls him The General, uses the world's most sophisticated computer to figure out the statistical value of a sacrifice bunt (he figures out that outs are the offense's most precious commodity and that you should never willingly take one) and that you need to be successful on 78% of your stolen base attempts in order to justify them. This statistically driven approach leads to (among many other things) placing high value on slugging percentage, on base percentage and the deemphasizing of good-glove, no-hit fielders. Indeed, as if anticipating the argument that would ensue in the late '90s between stat-geeks and long-time baseball men, Browne shows how The General is dismissed as an incredibly lucky crackpot by longtime baseball beat reporters even as the team

rips apart the American League while running away from the East Division—save the Yankees, but more on that anon.

However, even visionaries aren't right all of the time. In his effort to give the AToms a real villain to provide the catalyst the team needs to truly coalesce as a team, Browne makes the captain of the Yankees one Darin Keator. The starting shortstop, he is ironically a prototypical Atom—great at getting on base, good power, but with defensive skills that at their very best rate as average. He led the Yankees to a string of early World Series titles in the early-to-mid '90s (again, Browne was only slightly off in his timing here), and that combined with stunning good looks and sheer athleticism that adequately disguises his defensive deficiencies has made him a hero among the New York fans. In this novel, it's been six years since the Yankees won a title, but he still can't do any wrong in the eyes of the Yankees faithful, who believe he is the greatest shortstop of all-time. It just goes beyond all reason—we all know that in reality Yankees fans are some of the most jaded and hardest to please on the planet. If a player such a Keator really existed, then after such a prolonged period of championship futility, the fans would actually be turning viciously on him and wondering when the Yankee leadership would finally move him to a position more suited to his actual defensive skill level.

However, a proper book review requires looking at the story itself. Aside from the Keator character—who, despite the completely unrealistic adoration he receives from the Yankee fans, is actually quite likable in a bland sort of way—the novel is full of characters the longtime baseball fans will recognize. Many of the bullpen staff are a little eccentric and constantly playing jokes on each other. There's an aging former superstar who is at the end of his career and just trying to stay in the big leagues as long as he can, and the AToms are also graced by a couple rookies who wildly exceed expectations... the expectations of the traditionalists who scoff at The General's methods. In other words, a group of stock characters that would probably fit right into teams featured in movies such as *Major League*. Sadly, because the novel seems to be more an exploration of Browne's ideas, we never get much in the way of character development or plot intrigue. This is not meant as a slight against Browne—after all, SF is a literature of ideas—but it is worth noting that this is not a story for someone who is looking for deeply moving exploration about how baseball is a metaphor for life and how even just one season in the major leagues can change anyone for the better, no matter how long they've played the game.

Unfortunately, *The New AToms' Bombshell* has been out of print for some time now. Given how some of Browne's ideas have worked their way into the fabric of the national pastime, it may be time to bring it back to print. Until that happens, though, any baseball fan—and not just SF fans who happen to like baseball—should try to find a copy of this book at their favorite used book store. Though not a classic, *The New AToms' Bombshell* is an example of what SF does best: explore ideas in a scientifically rigorous fashion. The fact that Browne was such a visionary only makes the novel that much more intriguing.

The Host, by Stephanie Meyer
Reviewed by Michael D. Thomas

Book Cover Blurb:

Science fiction for people who don't like science fiction
The author of the Twilight series of #1 bestsellers delivers her brilliant first novel for adults: a gripping story of love and betrayal in a future with the fate of humanity at stake.

Melanie Stryder refuses to fade away. The earth has been invaded by a species that take over the minds of their human hosts while leaving their bodies intact, and most of humanity has succumbed.

Wanderer, the invading "soul" who has been given Melanie's body, knew about the challenges of living inside a human: the overwhelming emotions, the too vivid memories. But there was one difficulty Wanderer didn't expect: the former tenant of her body refusing to relinquish possession of her mind.

Melanie fills Wanderer's thoughts with visions of the man Melanie loves—Jared, a human who still lives in hiding. Unable to separate herself from her body's desires, Wanderer yearns for a man she's never met. As outside forces make Wanderer and Melanie unwilling allies, they set off to search for the man they both love.

Featuring what may be the first love triangle involving only two bodies, THE HOST is a riveting and unforgettable novel that will bring a vast new readership to one of the most compelling writers of our time.

"Stephanie Meyer is an amazing phenomenon—out of the brightness of her mind and spirit comes the illuminated darkness of her stories. For no matter how much pain her characters suffer, Meyer infuses the tales with light and hope."
—Orson Scott Card, author of the Ender Saga

"A fantastic, inventive, thoughtful, and powerful novel. The Host will keep you reading well into the wee hours of night, and keep you thinking, deeply, hauntingly, well after the final word." —Ridley Pearson, author of Killer Weekend

After I recently left a sold-out showing of *Wall•E*, I walked past my local Border's. In the window, they had a display for Stephanie Meyer's new novel, *The Host*. The tagline for the book was "Science fiction for people who don't like science fiction." I thought to myself, "Finally, the book that America has been waiting for." I ran inside the store and nearly tripped over a pile of about a thousand copies of Meyer's new novel. Obviously, this book must be special. That kind of large inventory order is usually only reserved for the finest new tomes, such as *The Secret or Natural Cures "They" Don't Want You to Know About*.



I compared it to the number of copies that they had in stock of the new books by last year's Hugo-nominated authors John Scalzi and Charlie Stross. Based purely on the numbers, Meyer's novel had to be at least a ten thousand times better than *Zoe's Tale* and *Saturn's Children*. Not to mention, there was a cover blurb by award-winning SF author Orson Scott Card on *The Host* calling Meyer "an amazing phenomenon." Who could question his opinion or judgment?

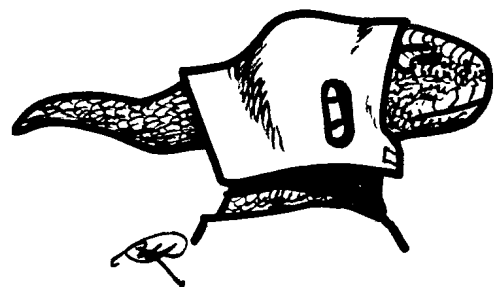
Apparently, Stephanie Meyer is already modestly known for a series of young adult vampire novels. Unfortunately, her publisher has not managed to give this series enough publicity. I only found out about them by overhearing a conversation between two young ladies in front of the Auntie Anne's pretzel shop next to the Hot Topic at my local mall. They were sharing a Glazin Raisin pretzel and reviewing the novel *Twilight* for each other. Apparently, they didn't like Bella, but they thought Edward was sexy and sparkly. I would guess that since this is a vampire book, it's probably a lot like *Salem's Lot* or *I Am Legend*. It seems, though, that there might be some romance in the novel between a human girl and a vampire (if I am to believe the girls). What a fascinating new angle on vampires! Clearly, Stephanie Meyer is an idea machine.

The Host certainly lived up to my lofty expectations. Like other classics of the science fiction genre such as L. Ron Hubbard's *Battlefield Earth*, *The Host* is a compelling exploration of the idea of aliens invading our planet. In Meyer's novel, the twist is that the aliens are invading our very brains! She follows a brave young woman named Melanie Stryder whose mind has been invaded by an alien entity known as Wanderer (how does she come up with these amazing names?).

Only the Wanderer hasn't anticipated the most powerful weapon that humanity possesses-- the power of love. Melanie's strong love for her rebellion-leading boyfriend Jared overwhelms Wanderer with its vividness. Jared is in fact so dreamy, Wanderer can't help but also fall in love with him. This is of course the greatest threat to any alien invasion-- hot rebel leaders.

Soon, Wanderer and Melanie set off to find the hunky, amazing Jared. Now allies in their shared love, they enter what the back of the book calls "the first love triangle involving only two bodies." This is what makes the book so special. Any science fiction hack can write a book about alien invasion or mind control. It takes a special author to tap into what American readers are really interested in-- non-traditional threesomes.

So if you are a big fan of rippled resistance leaders named Jared and the steamy women/alien hybrids who must share him, this is the book for you.



It Was a Dark and Stormy Night

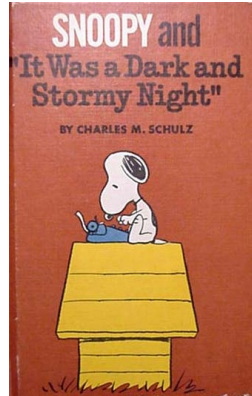
A Novel by Snoopy

Reviewed by Jim C. Hines

Book Cover Blurb:

"A LIGHT SNOW WAS FALLING..."

A malevolent, self-centered monarch, a midwestern farm boy, a young, street-corner florist in a tattered shawl--these and many more keenly etched characters come together in this deeply moving and strangely compelling novel of growth, change, and recognition. Drawn with sparse clarity and measured cadence, It Was a Dark and Stormy Night is remindful of many works. Relevant to readers of all ages, here is a remarkable first novel by an inventive young author from whom more will undoubtedly be heard in years to come.



I'll admit there are some cliché elements to "It Was a Dark and Stormy Night" that made me nervous, particularly in a first novel by a celebrity author. From the title to the cover art (which almost appears to have been drawn by a child), to the characters of the farm boy and the evil king, the story appears at first glance to have little to recommend it. But in the paws of such a talented writer, these characters are far more than two-dimensional sketches. In a single snowy evening, they will come together to face the true darkness: the stormy night within us all.

While the cast of characters may be vast, each one is introduced with a potent minimalist style, resulting in a short but densely layered novel of discovery. If Hemingway and Tolstoy had a love child, this is the book that child would write.

The author draws on his service as a pilot in World War I to add depth and conflict to the story. When the farm boy is captured by pirates, it evokes the author's own daring escape after being shot down behind enemy lines. The young street-corner florist in the tattered shawl could have come straight from the war-torn streets of Paris. The king's alcoholism is a clear reflection of the author's post-war struggle with root beer addiction. These elements give the story a tense, realistic feel few authors can match.

Perhaps most interesting is the author's refusal to be bound by traditional genre boundaries. "It Was a Dark and Stormy Night" was published almost forty years ago, long before modern-day authors began experimenting with slipstream. Yet here is an author who combines the best of fantasy, magic realism, noir, suspense, and romance. While it can be disconcerting to have one's assumptions about traditional narrative so effectively undermined, the result is a highly satisfying collage of storytelling.

Sadly, this is a book which was never recognized in its time. The advance paid to the author was little more than peanuts, and the author's refusal to conform to genre boundaries meant booksellers struggled with where to shelve it. In my case, I found the book literally sandwiched in a hardcover collection of old comics! The author's famous temper didn't help matters. In one famous story, he was said to have bitten a reviewer in the leg for criticizing his novel!

Thankfully, the age of the Internet has given readers new tools to find such old classics. Still relevant after almost four decades, "It Was a Dark and Stormy Night" is a book that can and should be appreciated by readers of all ages. The fact that this was a first novel only makes the author's accomplishment that much more impressive. Highly recommended.

No Need For Loose Ends, a review of Galactic Cluster

James Blish

Reviewed by John "General Cluster" Teehan

Book Cover Blurb:

The Unforeseen

Two men alone on a space station—an overzealous colonel and the civilian who tries to talk him out of dropping three hydrogen bombs over Washington, D.C.

A seductive actress signs up for the maiden flight of a space ship so that she can track down the husband who jilted her.

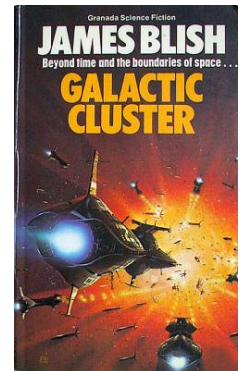
A fiendishly clever agent infiltrates a top-secret government project and threatens the very existence of Earth

James Blish's starkly realistic stories mirror the perils of the world of the future—a world where scientists can master the intricacies of space travel but cannot yet control the mind...of man.

One of the growing number of science fiction authors educated in the field of science. James Blish graduated from Rutgers as a science major and also studied at Columbia. He is a member of the American Rocket Society, the Association of Lunar and Planetary Observers, and the History of Science Society. His book The Seedling Stars is also available in a Signet edition.

Published by the New American Library

On an orbital space station, high above Earth, a mad general threatens to rain hydrogen bombs over Washington. The only one who can stop him is a husband who had sought refuge aboard the space station to escape from his insane, attention-starved wife. Instead of peace and quiet, he finds himself in the stressful position of having to keep Armageddon at bay. Meanwhile, the man's wife, the "scandal of Hollywood," has hijacked a billion-dollar spaceship and threatens to queer the whole deal.



Back on Earth, a covert agent infiltrates a top-secret government facility. For what reason? And how does it tie in to the general, the husband, and the wife? The fate of the entire Earth has never been held in such uncertain, untrustworthy hands.

Then along comes Blish—James Blish—author and, perhaps, yet another secret agent. In a fit of semi-autobiographical storytelling not seen since the days of Edgar Rice Burroughs, Blish comes strolling into the middle of this disaster—the man with the plan. Like many of the “able heroes” so popular in science fiction of the 50s and 60s, the fictional Blish is much like the real one with his degrees from Rutgers and Columbia, but adds memberships in a “cluster” (if you will) of ominous “galactic”-sounding organizations. (Most likely the source of the title, although I must say it’s a stretch. I suspect the title was some editor’s decision and not author-Blish’s.)

How this fictional-Blish resolves these multiple threats is the *real* story. Or it seems like it *should* be. Overall, the book seems a too episodic. The various subplots don’t mesh as well as they could. There is a lot of story going on here, but the connection into one singular strong plot fails. Regular readers of James Blish (the author) will be surprised.

Still, it’s not a total loss. The characters are rich. They feel they have a real stake in their own fates, and you feel you have a stake in them as well. If you can read a story and not require a nice, neat, clear ending, you can easily enjoy this novel. If you don’t like loose ends, perhaps you’d prefer Blish’s other book to come out this year, *A Case of Conscience*.

[And finally, Rich Horton looks at the 2008 Hugo Nominees:](#)

A Look at the nominees for the Hugo Award

By Eght Brickbats

Herewith I take an unfortunately truncated look at the five nominations for an award unfamiliar to me, the Hugo Award. I have seen mentions of Science Fiction in connection with this medal, but I cannot credit it, for the association of such an award, surely in honor of the great French naturalist writer Victor Hugo, with that debased genre, which all will admit will never be literature, is quite impossible.

And indeed I see that one of the books on the shortlist is *Rollback*, by Robert J. Sawyer. From his Canadian perspective, Mr. Sawyer examines issues of identity, surely motivated by the concerns about national identity that bedevil

his country in the shadow of its huge neighbor. He uses the metaphor of communication with creatures from another star – what could be a clearer indictment of the United States distancing itself from even its nearest neighbors! His further metaphorical view of his protagonist suddenly feeling young again, while his wife continues to age, is a timeless reexamination of the central theme of fiction – the relationship between men and women.

Colonialism remains a cancer on international relations, and John Scalzi’s *The Last Colony* is a scathing indictment of that practice. Such brilliant metaphorical details as green-colored soldiers serve to highlight the lack of engagement of colonializing forces with the locals, as does the apparently inability of the colonists to see the “aliens” opposing them as human – they go so far as to assign these aliens insectoid characteristics in some cases.

By contrast I feel that Charles Stross’s *Halting State* loses its way. A potentially involving character – a policewoman in a Lesbian relationship – is given short-shrift and instead we are invited to follow the interests of a variety of gamers. Undeniably gamers are part of the population these days, but I could not summon any interest in tedious reenactments of Dungeons and Dragons. I might almost have rather read a novel set in the future! Indeed, the depictions of swordplay in this novel reminded me of Hugo’s debased contemporary Alexandre Dumas.

Ian McDonald’s *Brasyl* represents exactly what English-language writers need to do to fully engage with world literature as admonished by Horace Engdahl. McDonald ventures into the favelas of Sao Paulo, and to the colonialist past of the Brazil, and ties all this in with contemporary concerns like reality TV and soccer. I had no idea that Brazilian scientists were at the forefront of something called “quantum computing,” but McDonald’s naturalistic narrative plausibly describes this as well, showing us that the so-called “Third World” has drawn equal with the First.

But my favorite of these Victor Hugo award contenders is surely Michael Chabon’s *The Yiddish Policemen’s Union*. Chabon’s standing as a writer of realist literature is well-established as readers of *The Mysteries of Pittsburgh* and *The Wonder Boys* will acknowledge. Here he takes on the subject of labor organizing among Jewish policemen. This is the kind of gritty real life subject matter that is the life blood of true literature. Chabon’s decision to set his story in Alaska is a stroke of genius – the cold weather and non-traditional setting serve to emphasize the universality of the central concerns: union rights, the Holocaust, Jewish identity, etcetera. I am

glad to report that this fine exploration of a Jewish cop’s struggle to form a collective bargaining unit has won an award celebrating the work of Victor Hugo.



Local History

Steven H Silver

On September 7, we attended the Historical Days celebration in Deerfield, our town of the past seven years. The event is held at the Deerfield Historic Village, located in front of Kipling School and the School District 109 offices.

This past year, Robin's fourth grade class did a lengthy section on local history. This included spending a day at the little red school house at the historic village (pictured far left). Unlike the other four buildings, the school house is a reproduction rather than a restoration of the original building. The kids dressed in costume and for lunch had to bring a lunch that could have been brought to school in the nineteenth century, which meant all fruits needed to be something that could be grown locally (apples, yes, grapes, no).. They couldn't bring anything plastic or disposable. We sent Robin with some cheese, homemade bread, an hard boiled egg (with some salt wrapped in a handkerchief which doubles as a napkin), an apple, and water, although I don't recall what we put the water in.

currently houses Robin's school, Wilmot Elementary School, which is the oldest school in town.

During the 1850s, the Wilmot farm was a stop of the Underground Railroad. A local history written in 1928, describes the flight of an escaped slave, Andrew Jackson, who spent the winter in Deerfield on his way to Canada.

Deerfield has also been visited by at least one sitting President (Ronald Reagan) and at least two future presidents: Abraham Lincoln slept at the Deerfield Inn before he ran for President, and Warren G. Harding campaigned here when he ran for President in 1920.

The day of the historical festival, which is separate from the school project, we also got an invitation to go to Ravinia, the local music festival. Elaine and Melanie decided to go to Ravinia while Robin and I attended the historical festival, although once we got there, Robin decided it wasn't to her taste.

When we got there, Robin made a beeline for the little red schoolhouse (foreground in the picture), where one of her friends was teaching a class. I wandered around the other buildings and discovered that two pictures in the Ott Cabin



Other aspects of the project included chasing around town with Robin on essentially a scavenger hunt. Doing this, we discovered that Deerfield has a Trail Tree, which is a tree that was bent by native Americans when it was a sapling. This allowed the tree to grow with an odd bend that could be used as a trail mark, often pointing to an important trading site or village. We also spent time in the Old Deerfield Cemetery, locating specific gravesites and answering questions.

We learned that the land we live on was once part of the farm of Lyman Wilmot (1806-1896), whose house still stands a couple blocks away. Unfortunately, with the economy the way it is, the bank has foreclosed on the house and it will shortly be going up for auction. Wilmot donated the land that

(far right in picture), which is the oldest building in Lake County, dating to 1837. Both purported to show Caspar Ott's wife, and both were clearly the same woman, but her name was different in each of the pictures. I mentioned the discrepancy to a very spry 93 year old docent, who said she would take up the matter with the historical society.

I also saw one of Robin's friends wearing a period costume. She was helping out with some games they were running. I went back to the red schoolhouse and grabbed Robin. She wound up helping her friend, while I explored the interiors of the other buildings.

Eventually, when I exhausted everything there was to do, I went to get Robin, who, of course, wasn't ready to leave yet.

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